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THE SCIENTIFIC BACKGROUND OF THE FOREST POLICY OF THE UNITED STATES¹

THE National Academy of Sciences has played an important part in the annals of American forestry. On February 15, 1896, the secretary of the interior requested this body to investigate and report upon "a national forest policy for the forested lands of the United States." After an extended field investigation in the western states, a report was submitted to the secretary by the academy on May 1, 1897. It bore the names of Charles S. Sargent, Henry L. Abbott, Alexander Agassiz, William H. Brewer, Arnold Hague, Gifford Pinchot and Walcott Gibbs. This report constituted probably the most illuminating summary of the forestry situation in the United States which had been made up to that time, with reference particularly to the conditions on the public domain. It set forth the public value of forest conservation for the flow of streams, the protection of soil and a sustained supply of timber. It summarized the forest administration of leading foreign countries. It described vividly the cumulative depletion of our public forest resources from fire, uncontrolled grazing and timber depredations, with its disastrous local and national effects. It recommended the creation of 13 additional forest reserves, aggregating 21,000,000 acres, together with the Mt. Rainier and Grand Canyon National Parks. And it outlined a complete system of administration for the forest lands in public ownership.

The major recommendations of the academy were almost immediately put into effect. The forest reserves indicated were created by presidential proclamation in 1897. In the same year an act of Congress embodied many of the administrative recommendations of the academy, constituting the first forest code of the United States.

While the investigation conducted by the academy in 1896 dealt particularly with forested portions of the public domain, it is noteworthy that the report visualized clearly the broad outlines of the forestry problem of the entire country. It emphasized the essential relationship between forest cover and regularity of stream flow. It brought out the need for "systematic and intelligent forest reproduction" to supply the demand for lumber and other forest products which is "continuous in civilized nations."

¹ Address before National Academy of Sciences, April 30, 1924.

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