Letters

Congressional Invitation

In discussing the activities of ecologists in public policy the distinguished Connecticut ecologist, Paul B. Sears of Yale said (Letters, 8 Mar.):

> It should be noted that professional groups, such as ESA, enjoy a tax-free status which inhibits political activity. They must, instead, rely largely on the informed action of their individual members as citizens.

Sears is correct in saying that the tax laws do provide certain restrictions, but the general tenor of his letter indicates a common misconception as to the extent of these restrictions.

My subcommittee has made a detailed study of the role which professional societies may play in providing scientific advice and information to Congress. We found that the Internal Revenue Code does not limit communications to Congress when the initiative has been taken by Congress; that is, when Congress has requested the information. In addition, I have issued a standing invitation to professional societies to give us their views on scientific and technical issues on which Congress must deal.

Even without such an invitation, however, an organization may communicate with Congress provided such communications do not constitute a substantial part of the organization's activities. I would point out also that the "no substantial part" limitation found in section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code applies to "carrying on propaganda or otherwise attempting to influence legislation." Therefore, the limitation would not apply to the investigative, as opposed to the legislative, activities of Congress.

I believe we should have a diversity of opinions in formulating science policy, and urge the participation of scientists everywhere. I can appreciate the hesitancy of organizations committing actions which would endanger their tax exempt status, but I believe that needless caution is a luxury we cannot afford in view of the issues facing society today. If an organization has any question regarding its tax exempt status, I urge it to contact the Exempt Organization Branch of the Internal Revenue Service in Washington, and if it wants a specific invitation, I will be happy to provide it.

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Forestry Expedition in the Andes

Heltne, Fletcher, Buchinger, and Portig (Letters, 14 July, 1 Sept., 10 Nov., and 26 Jan.) have described conservation problems in Latin America. In particular, Heltne emphasizes the danger in overlooking the protection of species in the Amazon forests. He criticizes the opinion that the activity of man sacrifices only very isolated specimens. I should like to add personal observations about similar environments in the North Patagonian Andes and to draw attention to some conservation problems in those more southern latitudes.

During a search with other scientists of millenary year ring samples for the carbon-14 assay in the Southern Hemisphere, we examined *Fitzroya cupressoides* and *Araucaria araucana* growing in the rain forests on both slopes of the Cordillera de los Andes near latitude 40°. On the Argentine side, these are found mainly in two national parks created for their protection: Parque Nacional Los Alerces and Parque Nacional Lanín. But few trees were suitable for our investigation. Local woodsmen, we observed, were capable of destroying a species by selecting the most healthy trees and leaving the uneconomical, sickly specimens.

We sought trees with a long succession of year rings and with the wood in good condition for radiocarbon analyses. "Good" *Fitzroya* and *Araucaria* specimens were not to be found where man had been or was still active. The pith of these species readily becomes rotten and useless both for our work and as lumber. While it appeared to the park rangers that "good" trees could be found in accessible places near rivers and lakes, we verified by boring that the unexploited trees were in all cases "bad" specimens.

At Parque Nacional Los Alerces, the continuous use of a machete is essential for progressing through the thick rain forest. Although *Fitzroya* have not been exploited for 20 years and the forest is now covering the marks of man's past activities, hardly any seedlings are to be found which can, in time, replace 1000 years' growth. A few men working every summer with very simple tools and selecting the species and the specimens most suitable for their interests have threatened the *Fitzroya.* When conservation was enforced and the region converted into a national park with prohibited areas, the lower parts of the valleys were already irreversibly injured. Upstream of the rivers we eventually found "good" trees almost 2 millenniums old and took our samples.

I agree with Heltne that not only is it difficult to detect by aerial inspection selective exploitation within thick rain forests, but it is impossible to evaluate the state of the remaining trees of the species and the damage done to its seedlings if they exist at all. In the air this *Fitzroya* probably appears as a "green virgin forest," as it does to the machete explorer until he begins to find stump after stump hidden by other replacing species.

Araucaria grows in more populated areas of the North Patagonian Andes in less thick forests. Here the situation is more critical. In Parque Nacional Lanín there are three areas: a prohibited one, the most isolated; an exploited one, the most accessible; and a burned-out area, the most extensive and tragic. In the lumbering area, one could see how a determinate tree could be decimated even in difficult locations. Felled *Araucaria* are dragged down steep slopes, destroying their own seedlings and saplings. No bulldozers are used, but oxen and human beings are as destructively exploited as the trees themselves. Such depredation is evidently more intensive than that of the