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A Notable Anniversary

One hundred years ago this week—on 22 August 1873, to be exact—the American Association for the Advancement of Science took an historic action that led to the establishment of forestry policy as a function of the federal government.

At the 22nd AAAS annual meeting, held that year in Portland, Maine, Franklin Benjamin Hough of Lowville, New York, delivered an address titled "On the duty of governments in the preservation of forests."* A doctor of medicine, Hough was also an historian, a naturalist, and a statistician. While director of the United States census of 1870, he was impressed and concerned by widespread forest devastation caused by logging and fires throughout the East, the Great Lake states, and then starting in the South.

After the Civil War, a few observant citizens, alarmed at the rapid destruction of the virgin timber and fearing an eventual wood shortage, warned state legislatures and Congress of the need for forest protection, but without effect. Most government officials ignored the threat of timber scarcity and discounted the possible depletion of this valuable natural resource, which, indeed, many people believed to be inexhaustible. Thus, when Hough submitted the problem of forest preservation to the AAAS meeting, he was appealing to the scientists as the only organized citizens' group having sufficient influence to inspire public attention. Hough decided that the scientific community would have to initiate action for forest conservation, if it was to be done at all. In his paper, he emphasized the relationship of woodland to soil stabilization, to maintenance of streamflow, and, of course, to wood production for domestic and industrial use. He urged the AAAS to alert federal and state governments to the need for forest protection.

At his suggestion, the AAAS appointed a committee "to memorialize Congress and the several State Legislatures upon the importance of promoting the cultivation of timber and the preservation of forests, and to recommend proper legislation for securing these objects."† Nine scientists served on this committee; Hough was chairman. The others were William Henry Brewer of Yale; George B. Emerson of Boston, educator and author of a book on trees; Asa Gray, the nation's leading botanist; Eugene W. Hilgard, soil scientist, of the University of Michigan; Lewis Henry Morgan, anthropologist, of New York, later to become president of the AAAS; John Strong Newberry, botanist and geologist, and Charles Whittlesly, a horticulturist, both of Ohio; and Josiah Dwight Whitney, a geologist of California.

The committee's memorial was delivered to President U. S. Grant, who, on 19 February 1874, transmitted it to Congress with a special message of approval. There the proposition languished for 2 years. Finally, on 15 August 1876, Congress enacted legislation appropriating \$2000 for the appointment to the Department of Agriculture of a man to investigate forest conditions. Hough was selected on 30 August and thus became the federal government's first forestry agent. From his appointment evolved the present Forest Service, with its nationwide network of forest and range experiment stations and forestry and wood science laboratories, its thousands of professional and scientific personnel, and its 187 million acres of national forests managed in the public interest.

On this centennial anniversary, it is appropriate to recall the extraordinary influence of Hough's paper, presented as a private citizen before a small assemblage of scientists. Historically, it is appropriate also to acknowledge the energizing role of the AAAS in starting forestry work on a national scale in the United States government.—HENRY CLEPPER, *American Forestry Association, 1319 18th Street, NW, Washington, D.C. 20036.*

* *Proceedings of the AAAS Twenty-Second Meeting, held at Portland, Maine, August 1873* (AAAS, Salem, Mass., 1874), part II, section B, "Natural History," p. 1. † *Ibid.*, p. 429.