

Timber Study Reinforces Nixon Policy

Since the U.S. Forest Service opened national forests to private logging operations in 1950, annual wood production from national forests has risen to more than 11 billion board feet a year, or a quarter of the country's annual wood production.

Now a presidential advisory panel on timber and the environment has come out with a report saying that consideration of the nation's total timber supply will have to play an important role in national forest planning and administration. The report points out that heavy demands are being made on timber suppliers for construction of the 26 million new housing units mandated by the Housing Act of 1968, and that Japan is not helping matters any by "disruptive" log-buying activities in the Northwest.

The report particularly applies to softwood forests, of which more than half are federally owned, mostly in the far West. The panel says that the harvesting of old-growth stands of softwoods can safely be increased by 50 to 100 percent, provided that intensive management practices are adopted. It also recommends that foresters be permitted to take the "full allowable cut" in national forests, which stands at 13.6 billion board feet a year. Expected sales by the Forest Service to loggers will amount to 11.8 billion board feet in fiscal 1974. The figure could be upped to 17 or 20 billion board feet by the end of the decade "as stagnant stands are replaced by thrifty, young timber," says the report.

The report was enthusiastically endorsed by President Nixon, who, since 1968, has supported the idea of increasing old-growth harvesting by 60 percent. The President's policy has been thwarted by Congress. In 1970, the proposed Timber Supply Act, which would have raised cutting quotas in national forests, was rejected as a result of vigorous lobbying by conservation groups. Nixon then tried to accomplish the same thing through an Executive order, but Congress wouldn't appropriate the funds needed for the Forest Service to supervise additional sales.

No Middle Ground Revealed

The report seems better designed to confirm the Administration in its past policy than to reveal a middle ground where environmentalists and people in the lumber industry might resolve some of their differences. President Nixon stated in 1970 that the report panel should be made up of individuals "with no ties or commitments that might prejudice objective judgment," but, in appointing it, he seems to have tilted toward the industry viewpoint. The five members of the panel, which was headed by former Secretary of the Interior Fred A. Seaton, included Ralph Hodges, Jr., executive vice president of the National Forest Products Association.* The appointment of Hodges was not balanced by the ap-

pointment of an environmentalist noted for efforts to preserve national forest lands for wilderness uses.

The report is vague on some critically important points, as in its discussion of the size of "clear-cuts" where all trees over a given tract are felled rather than logged selectively. In the past, lumber companies have in some places leveled stands covering hundreds of acres, whereas in others, as on the Gifford Pinchot National Forest in Washington, their individual clear-cuts have been held to 40 acres or less. The report says only that "large-scale clearcutting is generally undesirable." At a press conference announcing the report, no one was able to pin down panel members on how they defined "large" or "small" clear-cuts. Thomas J. Barlow, staff member at the Natural Resources Defense Council, observes that the report's vagueness in discussing how to preserve environmental values in the national forests must be compared with its wealth of detail in discussing how to maximize timber production. "They tip their hat to the environment on the way to the lumber truck," Barlow says.

Forest Service Studies "Ignored"

A larger issue than clear-cutting, says Richard Lahn of the Sierra Club, is the matter of overcutting. He says the panel chose to ignore numerous studies, including one by the Forest Service, that say national forests are already being overcut. He points out that annual lumber production has been pretty much constant since the turn of the century, and lumber companies want to increase cutting on federal lands because they have depleted their own resources through short-sighted mismanagement.

A prime concern of environmentalists is that the panel's recommendations appear to them to be inconsistent with the Multiple Use-Sustained Yield Act passed in 1960 to guide federal forest management. The principle of multiple use calls for balanced support of four major purposes: recreation, watershed maintenance, wildlife habitat, and timbering. The report recommends that those vast areas within the national forests that have never been withdrawn for "wilderness or other specific uses" be designated for commercial timber production. While the report endorses the multiple-use concept, it actually seems to call for the subordination of uses other than wood production in large forest areas, including millions of acres of "de facto" wilderness that are now being considered for formal wilderness designation.

The report will receive a tough going-over by environmentalists. In their view, intensive management—clear-cutting, shortening the cycle between planting and harvesting, frequent thinning, using fertilizers and pesticides, and so on—will inevitably conflict with other forest uses. A major test of the report's influence will lie in whether the Congress goes along with its recommendation that an extra \$200 million per annum be appropriated for improved forest management. This is a large sum for a program so caught up in controversy, and, unless the timber industry convinces the public that the nation faces a "lumber crisis," Congress may not be responsive.—C.H. and L.J.C.

* The other panelists were Marion Clawson of Resources for the Future, Inc.; Stephen Spurr, president of the University of Texas at Austin; and Donald Zinn, zoology professor at the University of Rhode Island and former president of the National Wildlife Federation. The "Report of the President's Advisory Panel on Timber and the Environment" is available for \$4.50 from the Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 20402.