

Forest Policy in Europe: The Past, the Present, and its Legacy for the 21st Century

Abstracts of papers presented in the **European forest history session** at the joint meeting of the American Society for Environmental History and the Forest History Society, Durham, North Carolina, USA, March 31, 2001.

Panel members:

Chair: Dr. Fiona Watson **Affiliation:** Centre for Environmental History and Policy, University of Stirling.

Paper 1: *Dutch Forest Policy: From Negligence to Governmental Interference.*

Presenter: Joep Dirx **Affiliation:** Research Centre Alterra, University of Wageningen.

Paper 2: *French and German Forestry in the 19th Century.* **Presenter:** Dr. Bernd Grewe **Affiliation:** University of Trier.

paper 3: *Forest Policy in Scotland During the 20th Century and its Legacy.*

Presenter: Kornelis J. Oosthoek **Affiliation:** University of Stirling.

Paper 4: *The Decline of Log Driving: A Story of Natural Processes.*

Presenter: Erik Törnlund **Affiliation:** Umeå University.

Commenter: Professor J. Donald Hughes **Affiliation:** University of Denver

Session Description

Forest policy in Europe: the past, the present and its legacy for the 21st century

In most European countries a formal forest policy was not adopted until the late 19th or early 20th century. The reasons for the creation of state forestry programmes are diverse and include, among others, the fear of a timber shortage, strategic reasons, to stop the threat of drift sands and reclamation of so called 'wastelands'. Although the reasons for the adaptation of afforestation programmes in different European were different, the problems encountered by foresters countries were similar. During the past 150 years European forestry saw increasing demand for access to the forests for recreational purposes, the rise of concerns about nature conservation, forestry as a means to create rural employment etc. We wish to present a variety of papers from different European countries to compare different attitudes to similar problems encountered in forest policy. We also aim, where possible, to make some comparison to the

North American experience. To present a coherent session and make comparisons between the different countries possible, we aim to include papers addressing the three following themes:

- An overview of the development of national forest policy in the past to illustrate the origins of the present forest policy and problems related to it.
- An analysis of the present problems in forestry such as the questions of access, nature conservation, carbon storage management, and timber as a sustainable resource.
- brief glance at possible future developments in forest policy based on the present situation.

Joep Dirkx

Dutch forest policy: from negligence to governmental interference

By the end of the 19th century, the Dutch government started to interfere in forestry in the Netherlands. They had become convinced that only the government could stop the threat posed by drift sands and develop the extensive heath lands - regarded as useless - into productive forests. It was a period of great change in forest policy. In fact these extensive heath lands were the result of centuries of negligence. Overexploitation of forests had already resulted in large-scale deforestation by the end of the Middle Ages. Forests gradually turned into treeless heaths. But sod cutting and pasturing still went on, continuing the overexploitation so that in places even the heather vegetation disappeared. Vast areas of drift sands developed. These drift sands convinced the Dutch government by the end of the 19th century to interfere. Afforestation was thought to be an effective way to fix the sands that were threatening several villages. But individual investors were not keen to get involved in these projects since they were not thought to be very profitable. The afforestation begun by the Forest Commission turned out to be a very difficult and costly enterprise. The foresters had to deal with soils that were completely worn out due to the long-term overexploitation. In some cases they managed to afforest them only after several attempts. But the desire to create forests with a variety tree species could not be fulfilled. Only *Pinus sylvestris* survived and productivity turned out to be disappointing. These forests form the bulk of Dutch woodland but centuries of neglect still restrict their potential. Now that productivity is no longer the most important target in Dutch forest policy, objectives in nature management and recreation also turn out to be restricted by the history of these forests.

Bernd Grewe

19th Century Forestry in France and Germany

For centuries, forests had been used by men for many different purposes: wood was used for cooking and heating, to built houses and ships; charcoal for iron melting; potash for glass production and washing; and the farmers used woodlands for agriculture, pasture and litter collecting, too. In the 19th century, forestry was marked by a big change. Due to an increase in state power, France and the different German states were now powerful enough to carry out their own ideas of well-managed forests. In general, there were four groups of forest owners: the state, communities (cities and villages), individuals and groups who shared the common use of their forests while living in different communities (sometimes belonging to different states). The size of their woodlands varied to a great extent. From region to region the percentage of ownership of these four groups was divided differently. And the situation was further complicated by the fact, that nearly all forests were subject to using rights by a fifth group. This group possessed different rights, for example for burning wood, litter collecting, wood pasture etc. That was the main reason for the big differences in appearance of the Central European forests. The paper will illustrate how and why the French and German forest administrations transformed the former multi-functional used woodlands into high forests for timber production.

Jan Oosthoek

Forest Policy in Scotland During the 20th Century and its Legacy

In recent years British forest policy has invested in the wider benefits of forestry for society, such as amenity, conservation, the value of semi-natural woodland, and biodiversity as well as commercial forestry. This resulted from public criticism of the Forestry Commission, which had been portrayed as a single-minded organisation, interested only in monotonous conifer plantations for commercial purposes. The reality is more complex. The aim of this paper is to highlight the Forestry Commission's policies throughout the 20th century, and consider what these augur for the future. When the Forestry Commission was established in 1919, its priority was to prevent future timber shortages. Subsequently, forest policy was influenced by internal and external factors. These included a desire for rural employment, discussion among foresters about good practice, the establishment of national parks, public concern about plantations, and pressures from the Treasury to make forestry more profitable. The present preoccupation with planting native broadleaves in Scotland is a response to the negative public reaction to conifer plantations

and Scottish forestry will soon probably include both native broadleaves and commercial conifers. Recently the Scottish parliament accepted the concept of sustainability as the overarching principle of Scottish forest policy. However, it is also concerned to make Scottish forestry more internationally competitive. This could undermine the development of a more diverse and natural forest resource in Scotland because it would push forestry back on the single-minded track of timber production.

Erik Törnlund

**The Decline of Log Driving: A Story of Historical and Natural Processes.
A comparison of some perspectives between state of Michigan USA and
Northern Sweden**

The decline of log driving as a viable means of log transportation occurred as a direct result of certain historical and natural processes. Therefore, the decline of log driving in favour of land based transport was dependant on a variety of factors including location, climate, period in time, economics and market requirements, accessibility of timber, the quality of existing waterways and structures and forest yield. These factors are best illustrated in a comparative study between two different locations, in this case being the State of Michigan USA and Northern Sweden. A difference of seventy years between the United States and Sweden in regards to the shift from log driving to land transport may be attributed to 4 main factors. Firstly, the export and domestic market in each country. Secondly, the standard of the existing floatway systems and structures. Thirdly, the availability and accessibility of forest supply, and finally, the market price of timber. In the United States, the railways were used to transport logs domestically, whereas, Sweden, enjoying a profitable export market, had a need to transport logs mostly along the coastline regions in preparation for the overseas market. Log driving served this purpose at the time, but after seventy years certain environmental factors contributed to the need to shift to land transport. Factors including weather conditions, accessibility and the market for smaller diameter timber were taken into consideration. It should also be considered that log driving and land transportation were both deemed to be viable means of log transportation during different periods of time, and that the latter gave way to land transport as a direct result of various historical and environmental factors. In due course, it should be noted that attention was given to forest policy and management in both countries, emphasising a greater shift in environmental awareness than was previously given in the past. It was recognised that forest management, especially in northern Sweden, paved the way to secure future in the timber industry in the long term.

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