# An America that did not happen

Greg Lebman

Camp Grisdale

In 1946, the Forest Service and a large Washington timber company signed an idealistic agreement. Its goal was to keep logging towns economically stable by keeping their forests healthy and stable. The decline of the plan, the forests and the communities tells a great deal about how the Forest Service managed the nation's forests during the post-World War II decades.

*by* George Sibley

Last year, the Simpson Timber Company, operating in the rainforest region of Washington's Olympic Peninsula, announced the closing of "the last residential logging camp in America." It's called Camp Grisdale, on the southern edge of the Olympic National Forest.

This announcement was noted in the Seattle *Times* as "the end of an era," and the "loggers' last stand," conjuring up images of burly men in red flannel shirts filing axes and polishing up Paul Bunyan stories around a bunkhouse stove in the evening, or shovelling down griddle-cakes at the cookshack table to stoke their personal boilers against a day of work in primeval forests.

Camp Grisdale, however, was not part of that early era in the history of the American timber industry. The events that precipitated the construction of Camp Grisdale occurred just 40 years ago, in 1946, and were hailed at that time as the beginning of a new era "at the opposite pole from the stag camps and blanket stiffs of pioneer logging." Instead of the jerrybuilt camp with its cramped bunkhouse, built for a transient workforce engaged in the cut-out-and-get-out timber mining of old-growth forests, Camp Grisdale was built as a planned community for a permanent workforce of loggers who would be cutting a sustained-yield rotation for at least a century. Simpson built houses for lease to married loggers -- $27.50 a month for a three-bedroom house. Through the 1950s and 1960s, Camp Grisdale had a store, a church and a school for the loggers' kids.

Camp Grisdale was built to harvest timber from the Olympic National Forest for processing in Simpson's mills in Shelton and McCleary, two Puget Sound communities dominated by Simpson Timber mills and plants. That marked the first large-scale entry by a major timber company into the national forests of the Northwest.

But it was hardly no-strings-attached access. To get that public timber, Simpson signed an agreement in 1946 to cut not only the national forest lands, but also its own private timberland according to sustained yield forestry practices approved by the Forest Service -- an agreement to be "binding upon the parties hereto, their successors and assigns, until Dec. 31, 2046." Simpson had committed itself for a century to a joint land-management agreement whose goal was the long-term social and economic stability of the communities involved.

This 100-year agreement was drawn up in accord with what might be regarded as the first "National Forest Management Act:" Public Law 273, the Cooperative Sustained Yield Forest Management Act of 1944. This was Congress' first major legislative effort to determine how, and for what purposes, the "national forest reserves" should be moved from "reserve" status to "resource" status.

It was as different from the National Forest Management Act of 1976 as the 1930s were different from the 1980s. Focusing primarily on reforming the timber industry and strengthening local and regional communities, the 1944 forest management act was idealistic and cultural where the 1976 act is pragmatic and economic. In the context of the original and on-going American cultural dichotomy, it was Jeffersonian while the 1976 act is Hamiltonian.

Although Public Law 273 is still on the books, its end was written in the events that made an end to Camp Grisdale; it was a law whose vision was out of phase with the emerging post-war world. But ironically, even as Public Law 273 is dying from disuse, the same idealistic ecological vision that inspired it is now inspiring the increasingly widespread and effective grass-roots rebellion against the National Forest Management Act of 1976 -- or at least against the Forest Service planning process mandated by that act. If the agency continues to try to impose the computerized FORPLAN process on the national forests, it is possible the 1976 Forest Management Act will join the 1944 act in the limbo of lost laws -- and for basically the same reason -- because each law might have been too naive and extreme in its commitment to one vision or the other.

This being the situation, it seems important not to dismiss Camp Grisdale as the passing of another bit of Americana, but to look at the story behind that story, which is about an America that did not happen.

World War II was a watershed in the history of both the national forest system and the timber industry -- by which I mean the large timber-converting companies that serve regional or national markets. Before World War II, virtually all timber management on the national forests was small-scale and local. The Forest Service is credited with keeping the "timber interests" out of national forests before World War II; it is closer to the truth to say that the Forest Service cooperated with industry by not making national forest timber available on a large scale. The big timber companies were already flooding the market with lumber from their own lands; the last thing they wanted was new entrepreneurs using federal timber to further depress the industry.

But everyone knew the situation could not continue. By the 1930s, most of the major companies had begun to grow out of the worst cut-out-and-get-out practices of the timber mining era. They had begun to hang onto their cutover lands rather than abandon them to the tax collector. Some were even hiring foresters to plan for transitions to the newfangled "sustained yield management" Gifford Pinchot and his disciples had been preaching.

But it was also clear that their conversion was too little and too late. Most companies were going to be logging off the last of their old growth well before their second growth was merchantable. At that point, it was conceded, the national industry would need access to the "forest reserves."

World War II hastened that day. The overriding priorities of wartime production made it as much a war on nature as on fascism. When the timber companies looked up in the early 1940s from the fervor of patriotic and profitable cutting, many saw they were within a decade or so of being logged out. It was necessary then for the Forest Service and Congress to delay no longer in determining the policies and priorities that would govern the more active and intensive management of national forests.

The timber interests had reason to be uneasy about that. From the beginning of the setting aside of forest lands, Pinchot had set the tone for an aggressive conservation approach for which there was a great deal of public support. By the early 1930s, the social and political climate in America was such that a strong faction even within the Forest Service could talk openly about putting all the nation's forest land under integrated (Forest Service) mangement with the timber industry reduced to carrying out timber management activities decreed by the Forest Service.

That was too radical for America, but there were still indications that the Forest Service would try to make national forest access a tool for levering the timber industry toward conservation practices. An interesting precedent had been set in 1920, when a California orange-growers' cooperative which produced its own orange crates in northern California ran out of timber on its own land between Shasta and Mt. Lassen national forests. It asked for a contract to log national forest timber adjacent to their land. Forest Service Chief William Greeley saw opportunity not just knocking but standing on his doorstep with hat in hand. He personally oversaw the contract negotiations with the cooperative: "Striking while the iron was hot, I proposed selective logging and slash disposal on company lands exactly as the government required on the national forest. (The orange growers) finally agreed..."

That was a modest but important precedent, and the idea of using national forest cutting privileges as a means for "converting" the forest-products industries to state-of-the-art forestry was the philosophical foundation for much of the important forest-related legislation passed between the two world wars.

The man who played the most important role in converting that idea into legislation was a senator from Oregon, Charles McNary -- "the Forest Senator" to his colleagues and constituents. McNary, a progressive conservationist who lived all his life on a family homestead in the Willamette Valley, worked hard and effectively both to help the timber industries so important to his home state and to increase the federal presence in the forest regions -- two tracks not always regarded as convergent or harmonious.

Most forest landowners and managers are familiar with his best-known effort, the Clarke-McNary Act of 1924, which established cooperative programs for fire prevention and control on public and private forest lands. The Clarke-McNary Act also expanded the guidelines under which land could be purchased for the national forest system. In 1928, the McSweeney-McNary Act established the Forest Service's research program in forestry and forest utilization. Taken together, those forest laws of the 1920s sketched a vision of the Forest Service and national forest system as a kind of supraeconomic entity for reforming and rationalizing the way we used our forests, as much through education as through edict.

That vision emerged more fully in what proved to be McNary's last effort, his proposed cooperative sustained yield forest management bill, which became -- a few weeks after his death in 1944 -- Public Law 273. It was basically the "orange-crate forest" gambit expanded. In order for a land-owning timber company to get access to national forest timber until its own second growth matured, the company would have to put up its own land as part of a joint private-and-public "working circle" of forest land, to be managed in rotation according to the best available sustained yield forestry practices. In exchange, the company could buy the federal timber at an appraised price without going through the usual bidding process.

Chief Greeley's primary motive was to advance the cause of forestry in industrial practice. Sen. McNary had an even larger mission in mind for the national forests. He wanted them to stabilize the whole forest-based economy. He was basically a "Jeffersonian ecologist," if that isn't redundant, and believed that the well-being of the forests and of the human community dependent on the forests were inseparable. He believed that good sustained yield management would bring stability and security to the forest-dependent communities.

To this end, three purposes were listed in the act: 1) to stabilize communities, forest industries, employment, and taxable forest wealth; 2) to assure continuous and ample supplies of forest products; and 3) to secure the benefits of forest influence on streamflow, erosion, and climatic and wildlife conditions.

The act was controversial. From one point of view, it appeared to give a single company a monopoly on a large body of public forest land. From another, it looked like the government was telling private industry how to run its business. Small-mill owners and contract loggers -- Pinchot's "little man," whom the Forest Service had been nurturing with small local contracts -- feared they would be squeezed out. The forestry profession, however, endorsed the act enthusiastically. An article in the *Journal of Forestry* called the act "a sustained yield magna carta" and "an important milestone in the history of federal forest management."

On a deeper level, the act tapped into a debate as old in America as the Constitutional Convention. This was best summarized by a timber-industry journalist named James Stevens. He saw the question as whether "American national policy on management of natural resources under federal ownership should put community rights, community stabilization and home benefits ahead of traditional business rights and freedoms."

McNary literally had to die for his ideas. The sustained yield bill did not pass Congress until shortly after his death early in 1944, when sentimentality was probably a factor. From another perspective his death may have been merciful; it spared him the pain of seeing Public Law 273 die from disuse.

In the waning years of World War II and immediately after the war, the possibility of a cooperative sustained-yield agreement with the Forest Service under McNary's law was kicked around in many company-town communities of the West. But gradually the Forest Service began to make timber available with less binding commitments from companies and communities. So, out of all the debate and controversy, only one signed agreement emerged: between the Secretary of Agriculture and the Simpson Timber Company for the "Shelton Cooperative Sustained Yield Unit" made up of 159,000 acres of Simpson's second-growth timber and 111,000 acres of old-growth on the Olympic National Forest in Washington.

Public Law 273 might have been written with Simpson in mind. One of the biggest companies operating in the rainforest of the Olympic Penninsula, Simpson in 1944 had big sawmills, two plywood plants, a pulp mill, a door plant, and assorted other facilities in the towns of Shelton, on Puget Sound, and McCleary, inland from Shelton. Altogether, Simpson employed around 1,400 people -- far and away the largest employer in the area.

Simpson was also progressive. Under the leadership of Mark Reed, Sol Simpson's successor, the company had begun to hang onto its logged-over land even before World War I, they had invested in their own fire-control measures, and had many thousands of acres of second-growth coming on.

But not fast enough. At the time of the passage of Public Law 273 in 1944, Simpson had only about five years' worth of old growth left. So the commitment to sustained yield forestry was there -- and so was the need for a cooperative venture with the Forest Service for harvestable timber from the Olympic National Forest to the north of Simpson lands. It took two years to work out the details, but in 1946 the 100-year agreement was signed. "Jobs and trees for 100 years," proclaimed

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*After a day at the schoolhouse last year, Brian Endsley, left, Mike Walker and Jimmy Jones slide on a winter pond.*

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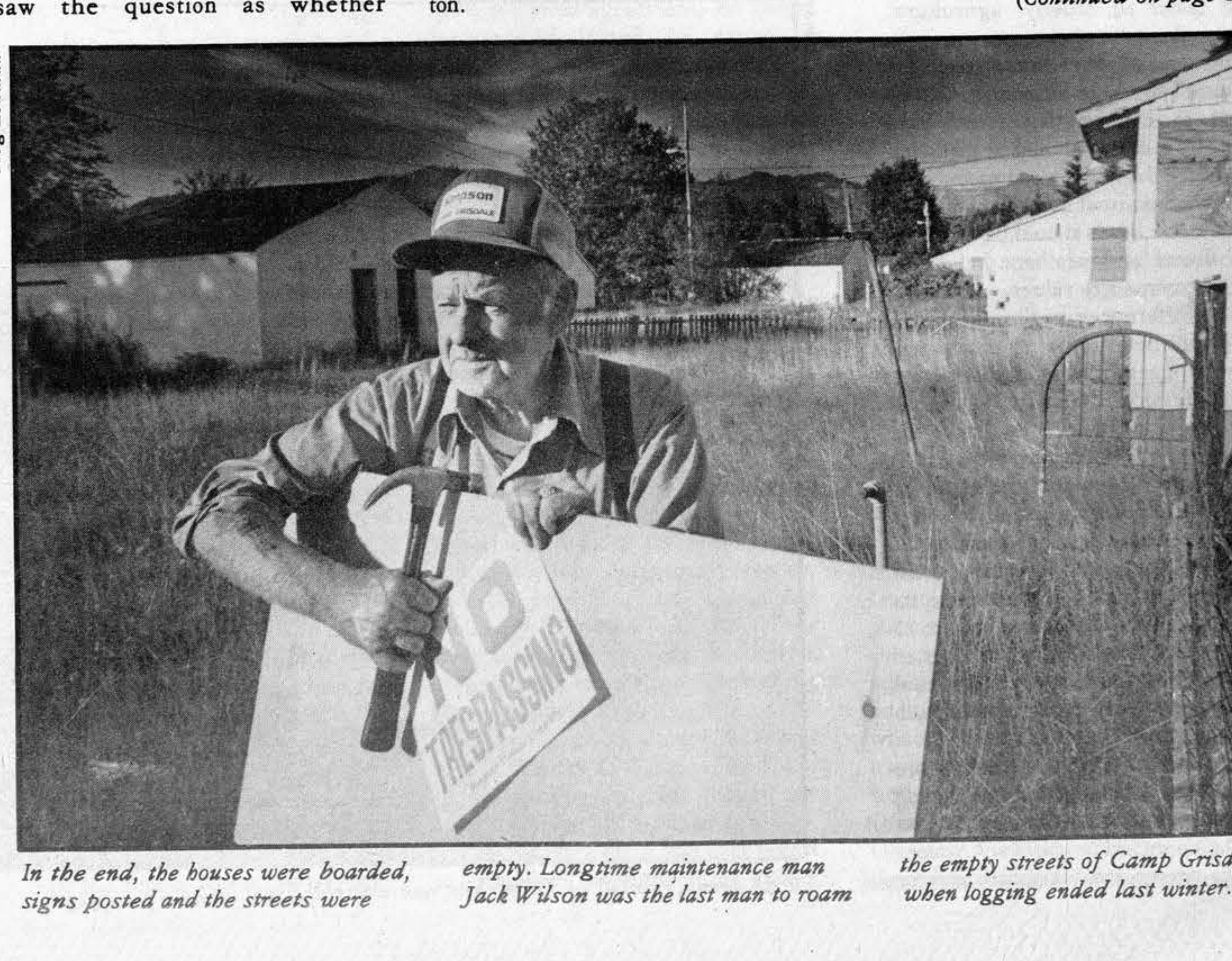



*In the end, the houses were boarded, signs posted and the streets were empty. Longtime maintenance man Jack Wilson was the last man to roam the empty streets of Camp Grisdale when logging ended last winter.*

# An America...

(*Continued from page 9*)

William Greeley in an article for *American Forests* in 1947.

The first physical evidence of Simpson's commitment to McNary's program for community stabilization was the construction of Camp Grisdale, even as the final details of the agreement were being worked out: a permanent camp for loggers who would be cutting first the old growth in the Olympic National Forest, then the northern and western sites in the long-term sustained yield rotation.

Now, only 40 years into the 100, Simpson has closed Camp Grisdale. At about the same time as the Camp Grisdale announcement, the company said it plans to cut no more timber in the Olympic National Forest at all. Instead, it will harvest only its own lands, through a considerably more intensive cutting plan than the Forest Service could ever permit for public lands. So, while Simpson spokesmen still speak of the agreement in the reverent tones reserved for Bibles and Magna Cartas, the firm does not plan to use its privileged access to the public forest land, and it does not plan to cut its own lands according to national forest management criteria. It is hard to see how they are even paying good lip service to the agreement.

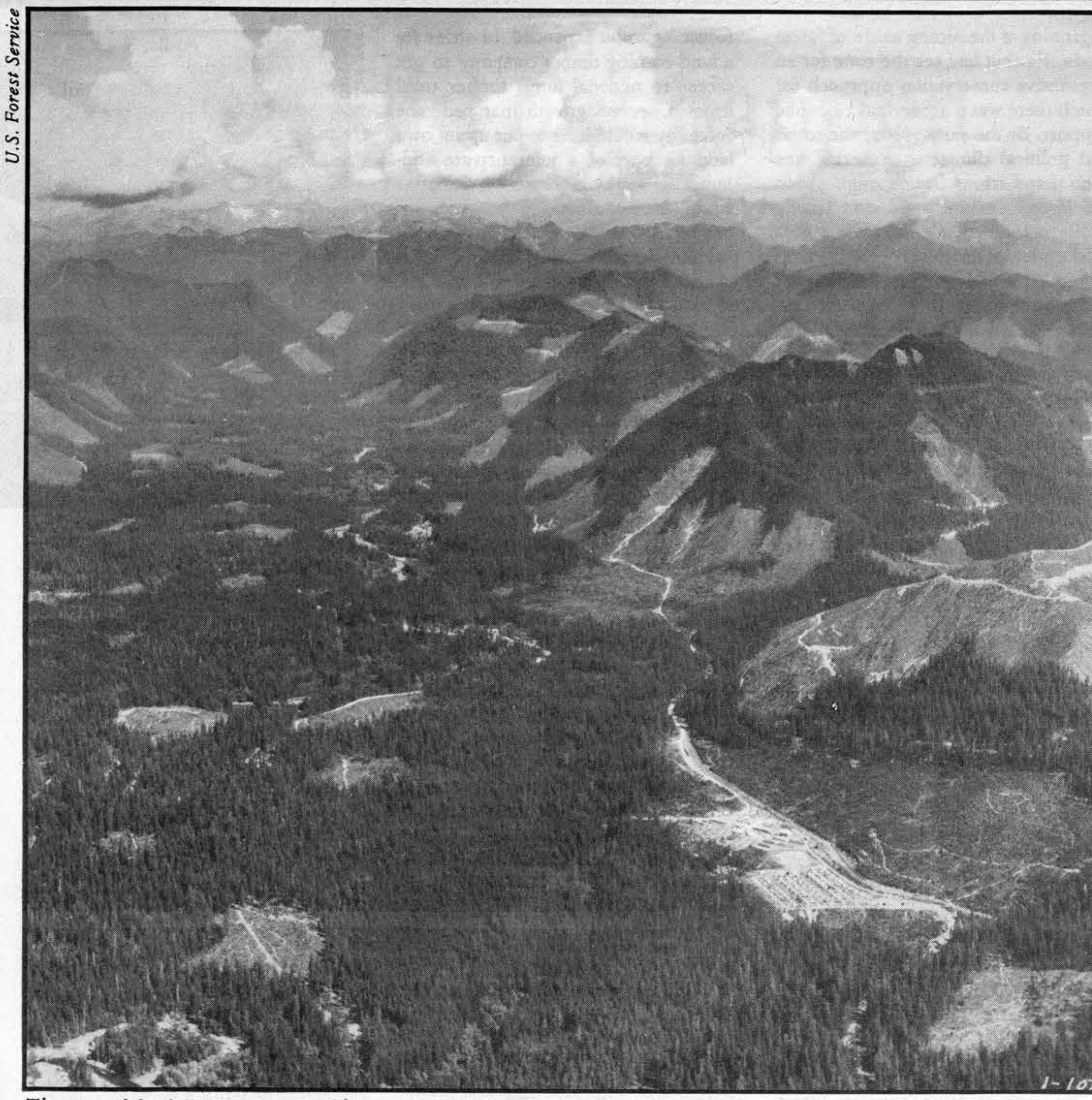
This should not be automatically construed as bad faith. Over the past 40 years, there have been major changes within the forest industry and in the relationship between American society and the American forests that should have resulted in major reworkings of the cooperative agreement. Some changes have been scientific and technological shifts in forest management methods; others have been changes in the way people value forests.

Together they have taken the management of private and public forest lands in opposite directions. While forest scientists and foresters have been making tremendous progress since World War II in their ability to goose nature to grow more wood faster in orderly, agricultural forests, there has been a countervailing demand from society at large for "natural" forests. Common sense seems to decree that forest land owned by industry should be managed more intensively for wood production, while the national forests and other public forest lands should be managed for cultural and aesthetic values as well as commodity values.

The differences in these management priorities are not so minimal as some managers -- many of them in the Forest Service hierarchy -- like to pretend. The rotation on industrial forests in the northwest today is 40 to 50 years, a rotation age based as much on accounting as on forestry. The forest Service, on the other hand, is bound by the National Forest Management Act of 1976 to base its rotation on a biological maturity of 75 to 90 years. Even this does little to appease the demand for real old-growth maturity in stands with trees 200 to 300 years old.

This widening gap makes it more difficult to put together a working circle of public and private lands, but it is by no means impossible. A more cogent reason for Simpson's present *de facto* disaffiliation from the 100-year-long agreement is probably that the agreement did not do what it was intended to do: It did not stabilize "Communities, forest industries, employment, and taxable forest wealth."

U.S. Forest Service



*The rugged foothills of the South Olympics near Camp Grisdale are scored by logging roads and years of harvesting.*

Like virtually every other timber company in the Northwest, Simpson has been heavily affected by the tectonic upheaval in the Northwest's forest-products industries these past five or six years. The company has seen a large part of its market disappear, captured by the burgeoning industry in the southeastern states (where the rotation to "financial maturity" is now down to about 25 years) and by imports from Canada.

Simpson officials say the company has not been so hard-hit as others in the Northwest. Nevertheless, Simpson has shut down some mills, and about 20 percent of the workforce has been laid off since the early 1980s. The presence in Shelton and McCleary of the Northwest's ubiquitous centers for the retraining and relocation of loggers and mill-workers testifies to the long-range prospects for the industry there.

Simpson's story today, in short, is not enough different from the general sad story of the industry in the Northwest to be able to say that 40 years of life under Public Law 273 created any unique "stabilization." But when we take a closer look at events, it becomes obvious that "stabilization" is another

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*With annual rainfall of 150 inches, rain was the usual weather for work.*


one of those tricky words -- a word that, like Humpty-Dumpty said to Alice, "means just what I choose it to mean -- neither more nor less." Any effort to derive an operational definition of "stabilization" out of the agreement leads one to the conclusion that the word didn't mean very much at all to either Simpson, the Forest Service or the people of the region.

In an ecological sense, the third priority of Public Law 273, "stability," has to do with the steadiness and resilience of a system, its ability to recover from disruptions, and to keep changes in the system incremental, checked or balanced by other changes initiated by the system. But to a materialistic human community, whose communicants believe with religious fervor that "if you aren't growin', you're dyin'," it is difficult to distinguish ecological stability from economic stagnation. Difficult enough so that mostly we have not even bothered to try.

What the sustained-yield agreement seemed to mean for the company and the people of Shelton and McCleary in 1946 was summarized 25 years later by a Shelton businessman interviewed for an article in *American Forests*:

"The town's whole attitude changed. New businesses came to Shelton. Instead of a pessimistic glumness, a positive attitude was promoted. We began to march ahead. The company, with its own confidence renewed, made large investments in its own expansion. The signal was 'go.' "

Simpson's large investments in its own expansion included, over the 40 years of the agreement, a complete rebuilding of most of its existing facilities -- two big-log mills, two plywood plants, and the McCleary door factory -- plus the addition of three new mills designed for the second-growth timber as it became usable. Simpson's employment increased from around 1,400 employees during World War II to almost 2,500 before the disastrous 1980s. Payroll went from $5.7 million at the end of the war to a high of more than $60 million a year. There was a corresponding multiplier effect in the Simpson communities as the assessed valuation in Shelton went from less than $4 million in 1947 to more than $224 million.

From the conventional American perspective, that is a pretty picture of growth -- at least through the late 1970s -- but it would be wrong to credit the agreement with causing that growth. All the agreement did was provide the company with wood; the rest was due to the greatest period of economic expansion in human history. Rather than trying to look at how McNary's ideas about stabilization contributed to the prosperity of Simpson and its communities, it is more to the point to look at what that prosperity did to the idea of stabilization.

The growth Simpson and its communities experienced was not nurtured by a "stabilized" supply of timber from the Unit lands. In the 1946 agreement, the allowable annual cut for the 280,000-acre Shelton Unit was set at 100 million board-feet per year for the first decade. According to figures obtained from Simpson, the cut averaged just about that, with only a little over half of the timber coming from the Forest Service's old-growth on the Olympic National Forest, since Simpson was also finishing off its own old-growth. During that first decade, Simpson obtained, and added to the Unit, another 77,000 acres of cutover land -- about a 28 percent increase in the Unit area.

For the second decade timber contract, they asked for, and were granted by the Forest Service, a 35 percent increase in the allowable annual cut, to 135 million board-feet a year. Considering the progress the forestry profession was making in forest management, this was probably not a "destabilizing" request -- at least not for land with a timber-management priority. And so far as the national forests in the Northwest were concerned, the "multiple-use" can of worms was barely beginning to be opened. No additional increase was requested for the third decade of the agreement, 1967-1976. Simpson's figures indicate that through those two decades, the harvest averaged about 92 percent of the allowable cut, with more than three-fourths of the timber coming off the national forest, while Simpson's young trees stayed in the bank.

For the fourth decade, however -- the contract negotiated in the early 1970s for the 1977-1986 period -- there was what can only be regarded as a radical jump: from 135 million board-feet a year to 207 million board-feet.

This kind of jump was common throughout the national forest system for the 10-year timber plans initiated from the mid-1960s to the late 1970s. For those who believe the national forests are a big national treefarm, the heavy cutting is at least justifiable on paper, although such intensive practices have hardly proven themselves even over a single forest generation. For those who believe the national forests exist first for the fulfilling of non-commodity cultural needs and demands, the heavy cutting has been out of balance and destructive.

What the particular instance of the sustained-yield agreement offers, however, is another more clear-cut perspective for evaluating the 50 to 75 percent jumps in allowable annual cuts. The Forest Service was committed by Public Law 273 to see that the Unit was managed in a way that would -- first priority -- "stabilize communities, forest industries, and employment." The agency's failure to do so, by permitting a 66 percent increase in the Unit allowable annual cut, is hardly just a matter of opinion. Instead, it is documented by the over-expansion of the company, which resulted on the rebound in the loss of 500 jobs, the closing of facilities, and a negative multiplier effect rippling through the local economy.

It can be argued that, even if the Forest Service had stuck with the spirit of Public Law 273 and made the stability of the Unit a firm priority, keeping all changes incremental, Simpson would still have been "destabilized" by this decade's chaotic decline in the industry.

That is true. But the fundamental problem is that the Forest Service never tried to implement Public Law 273 in a general way. In the rotten depths of World War II, when the law was passed, a stable situation in which everyone lived happily ever after sounded pretty good. But by 1946, before the ink was even dry on the sustained yield agreement, the Forest Service had joined the nation in abandoning the idea of economic and cultural stability to embrace a full-tilt growth and expansion for "peace through prosperity." Had the Olympic National Forest managers enforced the spirit of the law in administering the Shelton Unit, it would have been grossly unfair to Simpson. It would have held them to ecological sanity while the agency was allowing the rest of the industry to run hog-wild in the other national forests.

The question now is what to do with, or about, the Shelton Cooperative Sustained Yield Agreement. Perhaps all three participants, the Forest Service, Simpson, and the people of the Shelton and McCleary communities, should sit down together and take a second look at the ideas and intentions underlying the sustained-yield agreement.

Today Simpson, along with the rest of the industry in the Northwest, has been "stabilized" -- not through any rational efforts like Public Law 273, but by the only thing that ever seems to "stabilize" anything in the market economy: old Adam Smith's invisible hand turning into a fist and beating everything back down to fitting size. In 1986, the problem is not how to achieve stabilization, but to learn how to live with it, in an economic environment where it is necessary to find some alternative to economic "growin' " other than "dyin'."

Like most of America's more idealistic efforts at governance, Public Law 273 was conceived out of an intuitive appreciation of a need that was naively and incompletely expressed. Healthy living environments require a healthy measure of stability. But it can be legitimately argued that a situation in which people know that they and their children and children's children will be able to count on the same old jobs in the same old mills in the same old towns is probably not the healthiest of living environments for humans. More is needed -- a lot more. The more one thinks about "stability," the more one sees what a dynamic, complex and diversified state is implied.

How do we keep or make our lives interesting and rewarding in a "steady-state" environment that is imposed by nature whether we vote for it or not? How can we grow when our traditional economic outlets for growth are limited by the consequences of our excesses, if not by our good sense?

It is increasingly obvious that such questions are the essence of the challenge to manage and govern for "the greatest good of the greatest number over the longest period of time" -- not just for the national forests but for any aspect of a free and democratic society. In that respect, Public Law 273 -- our first real national forest management act -- tried to articulate and come to terms with the issues that today's "grass-roots rebels" are insisting be incorporated into the planning process.

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## The draft is out

The Forest Service recently released the draft 50-year plan for the Olympic National Forest. One alternative examines the effect of terminating the agreement with Simpson, but the agency's preferred alternative assumes the agreement will continue, whether or not Simpson chooses to harvest Olympic National Forest timber. The plan can be obtained from Olympic National Forest, Box 2288, Olympia, WA 98507 (206/753-9534).