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SOURCE Chung-kuo Lin-yeh, No 10, 1952.

REPORT ON FORESTRY OPERATIONS IN CHINA, 1949 - 1952

Summary: This report presents information on forestry operations from an article by Liang Hsi, Minister of Forestry, in the Chung-kuo Lin-yeh.

When the Ministry of Forestry of the Central People's Government took over from the KMT, forests occupied 5 percent of the total land area and there were 300 million barren hills. The policy of the government is to conserve water for agriculture and to provide a supply of lumber for industrial construction.

The Ministry of Forestry is concerned with forest preservation, reforestation, and the lumbering industry. Forest preservation data show a decrease in losses from fires. Reforestation data show that considerable progress has been made in the establishment of windbreaks and protection against drifting sand.

Progress in the lumbering industry includes unified government control, operations on an estimated cost basis, the organization of a labor union, the rational felling of timber, and increased mechanization.

The report by the minister follows.

The Ministry of Forestry was created on the first day that the People's Republic of China secured national sovereignty, and forestry became one part of the whole sphere of national reconstruction. Between 1931 and 1946, under the reactionary KMT government, the number of students graduating from the forestry courses in all the colleges of the land averaged only 51 each year. When the Ministry of Forestry took over from the KMT, forests covered only 5 percent of the total area of the land. On the other hand, there were almost 300 million hectares of barren hills.



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In 1950, the Central People's Government settled on a nationwide policy for forestry involving three main phases, namely, forest preservation, afforestation and reforestation, and fostering the lumbering industry.

A. Forest Preservation

1. Fires

Fire is the forests' greatest enemy. Of forest losses during the past 3 years fire accounted for 97.69 percent of the total.

Forestry resources are greatest in the Northeast and in Inner Mongolia. Here, too, losses from fire have been very severe. For the 3 years in question 91.54 percent of the nation's fire loss occurred in this section. People are the cause of fire and for fire prevention, reliance must be placed upon people. All levels of the party and of the government must first take measures to arouse, organize, and instruct the people. In the spring of 1952 in Sungkiang Province, 150,000 people received instructions regarding forest protection and fire prevention. In Heilungkiang Province one week of propaganda was devoted to arousing an enthusiastic movement for the patriotic preservation of the forests.

Especially worthy of mention is the fact that forest protection and forest production are placed together. There is not merely a negative warning against fire hazards when going to the mountains to get supplementary income from cutting down trees, but rather active promotion among the workers of an organization of forest guards who volunteer to prevent fires.

Airplanes have helped in forestry conservation. Deep in the mountains in places not easily reached by men, planes have been especially active from April through June in patrolling the greater and lesser Hsing-an Shan forests and the Mu-tan Chiang Forest. It is estimated that these planes made 122 flights, spent 440 hours in the air, and patrolled daily an area of 300,000-400,000 square kilometers. Not only were they able to spot the sources of fires and give the alarm but also to direct the fire fighters and to drop food supplies to them.

Because of the increased fire protection on land and the use of the airplane this spring, Inner Mongolia suffered no losses from fire and in the whole Northeast the loss was noticeably lessened. If the timber loss by fire in the Northeast in 1950 is considered as 100, timber loss in 1952 is only about one percent. In the matter of area burned the figure has decreased to 4.46 percent. The number of fire-fighting organizations to protect the forests of the whole nation has increased to 95,540 and the number of men engaged in this work increased to 1,140,830.

As to the total fire loss, if the loss of 1950 is considered as 100, in 1951 it dropped to 70 percent, and in the spring of 1952 further decreased to 5.09 percent.

2. Reckless Lumbering

However, two periods of reckless lumbering have been experienced in all large districts of China proper. In 1950, reckless lumbering was the result of: (1) landlords cutting down forests to thwart the scheme of land distribution and (2) official organizations, mistakenly considering that production saves from disaster, let hundreds and thousands of men go to the forests in organized groups to cut trees. Later, laws were promulgated forbidding such practises.

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A second period was experienced in 1951 when, under the expansion of construction, the need for lumber was especially urgent and public and private firms purchased large quantities of lumber. In this period, also, some local organizations met their own financial needs by cutting down and selling the trees. This led to many abuses that threatened to disturb market conditions until, in August 1951, laws were made calling for economy in the use of lumber and a uniform policy was established including tight control and the power to investigate any abuses. At the same time, newspapers started a propaganda drive on a national scale so that reckless lumbering and competitive buying up of lumber were stopped.

B. Afforestation and Reforestation

In western Shantung 42 percent of the 34,000 hectares of wasteland has been afforested. In eastern Honan, by next year, 312,000 hectares of trees will have been planted to hold drifting sand. In 1953, four hsien in the lower reaches of the Yung Ting Ho, will complete a belt of trees to protect the banks and form a windbreak. It is possible in the great territory south of the Yangtze River to use the considerable experience and skill of the farmers to develop a forest of economic value that will furnish timber essential for both mines and mills. The people have faith to plan for a coastal belt of trees extending without break from the Northeast through Hopeh, Shantung, and North Kiangsu.

In the Northeast, the people will plant a forest extending (including the coastal belt) for a length of 1,700 kilometers and a western protective forest belt with an area of 20 million hectares.

Each year, afforestation activity has completed or exceeded its goal everywhere. In 1950, the afforested area was 119,000 hectares, in 1951, 404,000 hectares, and it is estimated that in 1952 it will reach 832,000 hectares. This does not include incidental afforestation. The national total for the 3 years is 1,350,000 hectares afforested and 3,610,000 hectares of forests protected.

In comparison with about 300 million hectares of barren hills this is only a beginning; but there has already been discovered a source of strength in the organization of all the people as they realize that their own gain is united with the national gain. Experience teaches us that the most effective way to make forest parks is not by official orders but by having the masses of people realize how forests benefit the farmers' lands so that they will actively undertake their preservation.

C. Lumber Industry

The lumber industry includes felling the trees, sawing them into boards, or making plywood, and all kinds of chemical industries concerned with wood products. Only Northeast China is discussed here, with emphasis on lumbering and transportation. With the help of Soviet experts, the Northeast has reformed production as follows:

1. It has progressed from diffused control to unified governmental control.
2. It has progressed from the old-style management to one with an estimated cost basis. Formerly, imperialists, militarists, officials, big landlords and business monopolists felled trees as if they were robbers. Now lumbering is a government enterprise with a long-range estimate, with machines added to the equipment and with improved labor organization.

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3. It has progressed from the contract system to that of the organized labor union with social welfare features, such as dormitories for single men and for families, barber shops, bathhouses, restaurants, cooperatives, hospitals, schools, and sanitariums. In localities where the work is on a large scale, old people's homes, middle schools, and theaters seating up to 3,000 people are also provided.

4. It has progressed from the plundering method to a rational style of lumbering. With the help of Soviet specialists a reasonable method of felling the trees with less waste has been established. Formerly, lumbermen cut only the parts of trees they wanted and left the rest to rot, with no regard for the future. Now branches and waste material are removed, leaving the forest clean and in good order.

5. It has progressed from all manual labor toward mechanization. The first stage in lumbering involved the use of manual labor exclusively, the next stage was to use animals, but the third stage is that of using machinery. Tree felling is still done by manual labor, but the piling of the logs and their transportation to the railway or river bank is done by tractors, derricks, and other machines.

During the last 3 years, the expansion of the lumber industry in the Northeast has truly been a model for the nation. But reforestation of cut-over land is still a great problem. In the case of red pines it is unwise to trust to the cones dropped from the parent trees. Furthermore, the tree growth that springs up is apt to be of a kind not welcomed for use as lumber.

The economic and cultural construction in the new China has been very rapid. How can the lumbering industry meet the high tide of this construction? Up to 1952, there has been merely an absorbing of experience in the stage of preparation. After 1953 progress will really be made.

Many questions remain. How shall important places be selected for developing forests to protect the water supply of the four great rivers and the smaller rivers? How can we afforest the vast area of barren hills? How can we fight against the terrible sandstorms of the Northwest?

How can we in positive fashion secure an economically valuable forest south of the Yangtze River Basin? How can we, on the one hand, with a rational felling of trees assure industry that its lumber needs will be met and on the other hand guarantee an unceasing reforestation? How can we manage to have more wood products, lumbering, plywood construction, use of wood preservatives, and chemical processing of wood?

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