

## Section I: Dynamics of the Past

### Introductory Remarks

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In my generation, the forest was understood as a place that produced wood. Professional foresters came to produce the largest volume of wood they could from the forest. In more recent times we have realized that forests are a source of many other things, from recreation, to wildlife habitat, to control of water hydrology. Professional foresters have changed their emphasis from managing forests for increasing wood production to managing forests for the production of this wider range of services. Nevertheless, one of the principal uses of wood has been for fuel and for construction materials. Consequently, wood production remains an important issue, particularly, perhaps, in countries where mineral fuel resources are scarce. Wood fuel thus has an enormous role in both industrial development and domestic life.

One of the industries that attracted a certain amount of notoriety for the ways it used the forest was iron smelting. People in North America blamed forest destruction on iron works. In fact, most of the destruction resulted from clearing land for agriculture, but nevertheless the iron industry got a bad name. The roots of this “bad press” are deep. Historically in Europe (and particularly in Britain), there was intense competition between the needs of shipbuilders for timber and other needs. Henry VIII’s desire to re-arm his country against possible invasions by installing fortifications produced a large increase in smelting, which in turn created a large increase in the demand for wood.

That raised an interesting question, since Britain’s forest resources were not adequate to meet both those demands. The solution that emerged is one that has been frequently used since, namely, to manage the forest for sustained production. The earliest northern European evidence of this approach goes back to the 16<sup>th</sup> century, at an abbey in Great Britain, where the iron works divided their forest land into twenty plots and cut only one plot per year. At the end of twenty years they had enough timber on the first plot to cut there again.

In North America, people used that same technique after they had first mined out the forest resources that were available here. Even before the arrival of Europeans, these forests were used heavily, though for different purposes. Settlers arriving in northwestern

Connecticut, for example, were surprised and dismayed to find very few trees in some zones, due to the North American Indian practice of burning to flush out deer to be slaughtered. So we find complex, layered forest uses that go back a long, long time. That, no doubt, is one of the more important themes to emerge in this section of the volume.

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