

# Vermont Environmental Report

## Vermont's Forest Resource

### Ending Neglect: What Should Be Done?

In the January, 1977 issue of the VERMONT ENVIRONMENTAL REPORT, Dr. Carl Reidel, Director of the University of Vermont Environmental Studies Program, wrote an editorial calling for a program of action to end the neglect of the Vermont forest resource.

Reidel wrote. "The situation is critical. Seventy-five percent of the land in this state is in commercial forests -- 4.5 million acres -- contributing upwards of \$200 million annually to the gross state product. Most of these forests are poor quality, producing considerably less than their potential. Net annual growth is 21 percent less than the average for New England forests because of insects, disease and lack of management. Much of what is grown -- some 2 million cords of low-quality cordwood -- remains unused for lack of markets. In sum, our forests are a mess by any standard of good forest management."

Now, a year later, the VER asked forestry specialists, in and out of government, to answer this question, "Given the neglect of the state's forest resource, what would be the first one or two steps that you would recommend taking to attack this problem?"

#### WILLIAM MEYER

former U.S. Congressman and Forester, Rupert

William Meyer spoke with regret at the lost opportunities he has witnessed through the years in efforts to manage the state's forest resource more intelligently.

Meyer worked in New Jersey before coming to Vermont in the early 1940's. In New Jersey, the need was the same, to manage farms and forests better, to better utilize the products of woodlands and farms. Said Meyer sadly, "If they had voted in land use regulations through Soil Conservation Districts most of the fine agricultural land in New Jersey would not have been zoned for homesites and for industry."

Meyer spoke of efforts in the 1940's here in Vermont to gain a hearing for the idea of land use regulations through local Soil Conservation Districts. "In 1940," Meyer said, "Vermont could have started its land use planning through soil conservation districts. Each individual district could have voted its own land use regulations." That opportunity was missed, and so we have seen the land converted to house lots, second homes and condominiums.

Meyer talked of the need to develop good marketing associations, local landowners' marketing cooperatives for the products of farms and forests. The idea of the small marketing cooperative has been tried in Vermont. But it has never been successful. But this is a mechanism that Meyer still feels has merit and that ought to be tried.

Meyer expressed dismay at talk in the Legislature of limiting tax relief to owners of large parcels of forest land. "On my small woodlot," he said, "I have managed more efficiently than on certain large woodlots."

Meyer believes that the secret of developing a well-managed woodlot is the love and reverence that the best woodsman brings to a piece of woods. "There has to be a regard beyond materialism," Meyer said. "We have to go beyond the period, the generation. If we are going to have a purely gross and material world, we are not going to solve the problem." Remembering the finest woodlots he has seen he said, "Some of the best choppers were great at splitting up firewood. They liked to work in the woods. They liked the woodlot. This is an important factor."

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