

Unsung Forest Concessionaires

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Local newspapers recently published articles depicting heavy and consistent denudation of our hills and mountains, brought about mainly by kaingineros and loggers. Those articles depict that practically all loggers are destructive and they benefit only themselves and never our country at all.

However, this picture is not totally correct because there are many forest concessionaires that systematically plan reforestation of or properly manage their respective areas to perpetuate their forest holdings, knowing fully well that it will be to their very great advantage if the forests that they are now operating can be made to yield commercial timber forever, thus assuring future supply of logs that can be sold or processed locally or exported to bring in indispensable foreign exchange.

These licensees are in many ways civic spirited. They have built kilometers upon kilometers of roads in their respective forest areas that cost, on the average, no less than ₱10,000 per kilometer. The Philippine government practically has not contributed a single centavo to the construction of said logging roads that presently traverse our forests in many parts of the country.

In addition, these enlightened logging operators have put up and financially supported schoolhouses and hospitals in their company sites. To educate the youth of the land, at least to give our young boys and girls elementary education, and to attend to the health of the people are primarily governmental functions. However, these are taken over by the

management of many of these civic-spirited forest concessionaires in their respective jurisdictions.

The countless employees of these concessionaires naturally derive incomes and many of them pay income taxes to government coffers. Also, the government derives revenues from the harvested logs as well as from wood-processing factories that use these logs or wood residues, such as hardboard, sawmills, pulp mills, veneer and plywood factories and many others.

These forest concession operators have invested tremendous amounts of money in installing expensive machinery in their factories. They send pensionados to the University of the Philippines College of Forestry or elsewhere; they train forest guards and later employ them as well as professional foresters to operate and manage their respective forest concessions and logged-over areas so that in due course of time the same areas will grow desirable timbers for future logging purposes. They operate forest nurseries at their expense.

It is believed that those who picture the evils of deforestation, due to illegal cutting and kaingin making, are not fully unaware of but that they unwittingly overlook mentioning the worthwhile achievements of many bona-fide logging companies such as, if some are to be mentioned, Bislig Bay Lumber Company, Aguinaldo Development Corporation, Nasipit Lumber Company, Inc., Aras-Asan Timber Company, Inc., Alcantara and Sons Plywood Manufacturers, Mañalac Enterprises,

Inc., Misamis Lumber Corporation, Lianga Bay Logging Company, Inc., and numerous others.

Impartial observers, who may visit these forest concessions, will surely notice the desirable and costly improvements introduced by this enlightened group of operators in their respective areas. They have purchased expensive logging equipment, i.e., heavy bulldozers, logging trucks and trailers, locomotives, light airplanes, sawmilling equipment, veneer and plywood machinery and what have you. In practically all cases, they have to pay customs duties on these importations thus contributing substantially to our national treasury.

Some of these unsung forest licensees also have built private wharves, which, at times, even other people are allowed to use. In view of all the foregoing, therefore, it can not be truthfully stated that all forest concessionaires in this country are destroying our forests very fast and are not contributing at all to their regeneration. Many of them, as above mentioned, are actually doing the greater portion of what our government agencies should be doing, viz., reforestation, forest management and protection, etc., for which they really deserve to be encouraged and congratulated.

Perhaps there are hundreds, even thousands, of fly-by-night or get-rich-quick logging licensees or dummies that operate on the principle of cut and quit, especially if they are given a very short period only, say one year or so, to cut logs from their concessions. These people, under such a set-up, can not be expected to take pains in protecting, conserving or reforesting their logged-

over areas, for they have no assurance that their temporary licenses will be renewed upon expiration.

To remedy this situation, therefore, our Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources should give qualified applicants for forest concessions reasonably longer period of time to operate, say 25 up to 50 years, so that these licensees may be able to recover their heavy investments and still make reasonable margin of profit. (Remember our log or wood products exportation bring the second largest amount of foreign exchange into this country.) Otherwise, our standing forests will dwindle fast and the Philippines will suffer inevitably from water scarcity, especially during summer, and destructive floods during rainy season; our fertile agricultural lands will sooner or later be covered with sand, gravel, and even with boulders from the eroded uplands; wildlife may disappear completely from the rural scene and, ultimately, this rich and beautiful country that God has given us may become dry, barren, and infertile and our people's standard of living will surely regress.

Some progressive forest concessionaires have recently banded themselves and organized a non-stock corporation, the Philippine Association for Permanent Forest, Inc., the main objective of which is to work for the proper protection, conservation and enlargement of our present forested areas.

Let us congratulate and give this group our unstinted support and cooperation in its determined struggle to make our country heavily forested, particularly in those areas declared by our DANR to be permanently forested.

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