

Problems and Solutions in Field Administration

by

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There are a thousand and one problems in field administration of the Philippine Forestry Service—from the minutest pin to the personnel. I would, however, begin with what I believe to be the most important problem and go down to the less important. Let it be understood, however, that these problems are discussed “with malice towards none and with charity for all.”

DECENTRALIZATION

The WAPCO contemplated a decentralized Forestry Service. That was why provision was made for the creation of eight regional offices. The Bureau of Forestry was one of the latest, under the Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources, to create a token of its eight regional offices—six men to a region. And not all the regions have the six men under them. Out of the six men only two are technically trained foresters—the Regional Director of Forestry and the Forestry Supervisor I. There lies the futility of our regional offices.

The trend of public administration is decentralization. That is true in all progressive countries. Why we are slow in doing it here is beyond me. Ours is a small country; but its forestry service has become, and is becoming more and more, complicated. Hence, its need for decentralization.

The Philippine Forestry Service is closely patterned after the U.S. Forest Service. We have the Director of Forestry—they have the Chief, U.S. Forest Service; the Regional Director of Forestry—they have the Regional Chief; the District Forester—they have the Forest Supervisor; the Officer in Charge—

they have the Ranger District. The chain of command in the US Forest Service is from the Chief down to the Ranger District. The line officers are the Chief, Regional Chief, Forest Supervisor, and the Ranger. We have the corresponding line officers, but the chain of command by-passes the Regional Director of Forestry, except on very exceptional cases, and goes down to the District Forester. Our Regional Director of Forestry's job generally is the supervision and coordination of forestry activities in the region when it should be administration, supervision and coordination of all forestry activities in a region. But how can a Regional Director of Forestry administer his region with only one forestry technically trained man in his office!

The solution of the problem is simple. We can have additional forestry technically trained men, yes; but for the moment we can spread out men from the Central Office to the different regions. Under a decentralized service there is not much need—as in centralized service—of men in the Central Office. What should be left in the Central Office are the staff officers with the consequent clerical help. Theirs is the duty to make studies, plans, and policies for implementation by the line officers. In other words, they are the ones to conceive the things to be done, and done properly, by the line officers as given out by the Director of Forestry. Theirs, too, is to go out to check for the Director of Forestry that the work is done properly.

POOR DISTRICT HEADQUARTERS

By and large our district headquarters are on buildings which are better suited

for poultry coops. It is a sad commentary to see our district personnel congested in small spaces like they are not members of the human race. Our district headquarters cannot by any means compare with provincial offices and some lucky national offices in the provinces. There are three or four exceptions in fifty six (56) district offices.

The solution of this problem is not simple. We need money to build these headquarters. It is hard to get the money but we can keep on trying. Meanwhile, District Foresters should be on the lookout for possible places to build these offices. If possible they should be set aside as Civil Reservations by Presidential Proclamation for District Foresters Office sites. There are, however, provinces or cities which have government lots for national offices. On these lots we can build our district offices. How? We really don't build them ourselves. We appeal to our forest users to build the offices and the builders donate them to the Bureau of Forestry. We can do this in our busy timbering districts. This was done before in at least one district office. We can do it again and again. Is there any objection to this?

LACK OF FORESTRY TRAINED PERSONNEL

The Philippine Forestry Service since I can long remember lacked forestry trained personnel. This shortage is more keenly felt today, what with our forestry practice becoming more and more complicated—scientific, that is. Our College of Forestry, University of the Philippines, it would seem, cannot produce the men our bureau needs. And there are the Reforestation Administration, Forest Products Research Institute, College of Forestry, and lumber companies to absorb the graduates of that College, too. So there you are! It will take time before other colleges or Institutes of Forestry can graduate men to suit our needs. Then there is a question of fiscal limitation in our bureau which discourages the upper bracket of graduates from joining it. Imagine a BSF graduate being

appointed a forest guard! And there are vacant positions for foresters which are not filled.

There is one Forest Experiment Station which has only one forestry technically trained personnel—its Forester in Charge. Other foresters under him left for “greener pastures” in the bureau. Very soon, God forbid, all the five Forest Experiment Stations—and may be the Forest Research Division, too—will have nothing but the Foresters in Charge. Why? Because the foresters in there will seek “greener pastures” in the bureau or elsewhere.

The solution to this problem is not as easy as it seems. First let us get the necessary appropriations from Congress to enable us to give our forestry graduates better positions when they join the bureau. Meanwhile there are forester positions which must be filled with forestry graduates now in the service and those vacated by them could be given to graduates just coming in. Let us not save from our appropriation on positions which require technical training in forestry. We can sacrifice by foregoing so many clerical help, not on technically trained forestry men. But even then we do not have as many forester positions in our budget which will take care of all our forestry graduates. So they have to come in on Scaler positions. That is sad but that has to be done meanwhile.

Our forest research work has been neglected notwithstanding the fact that research is the key to management. Let us give our researchers better salaries. The WAPCO had foresight when it gave section chiefs in the Forest Research Division and Foresters in Charge of Forest Experiment Stations higher salaries than section chiefs in other divisions of the bureau and District Foresters. That is not true anymore. So what will be the incentive of Foresters to go to the Forest Research Division or to the Forest Experiment Stations? Research is a very unglamorous job. Our young forestry graduates want glamor and more money, too. So they go for land

classification and lumber grading, not for research. Let us, therefore, give our research foresters better paying jobs, better paying than those of other divisions in the bureau. And keep them there unless they resign from the service.

FOREST PROTECTION

Destruction of our forest has been going on since time immemorial. The rate of destruction increases as the years go by. We are destroying our forest faster than in any other country of the world. Now more than ever we need to protect our fast dwindling forest resources. Now is the time or never; because we can lose these resources in no time at all. If you fly above our forests you will find how badly pockmarked they are with kaingins. Our forest guards and forest officers do not seem to get much headway. It can be that there are so few over so wide a territory. And there is a sneaking suspicion that many of our forest guards are not really forestry conscious notwithstanding the law against forest destruction. The law punishes a forest officer who gets lax on forest destruction.

The solution to this problem depends upon our field men. There is a district I know that files in court hundreds of kaingin cases. There should be prosecution, yes; but prevention is much better. Prosecution is the last resort. A campaign for forestry consciousness should be carried on far and wide. This is a job for every forest officer, in addition to his normal duties. At any rate, there is need for more thoroughly trained and indoctrinated forest guards solely for forest protection work. In-service training should be given every now and then.

There are a lot of obstinate kaingineros. These are to be prosecuted. To handle the prosecution enough duly deputized lawyers be sent to the regions or districts to handle the prosecution of kaingin cases in court. Invariably the Provincial Fiscal has no time for our cases. Our lawyers will do the job.

Their assignment to the regions or districts must invariably be included in our preparation of the budget. This is not easy but we must by all means try to do it. We may yet succeed.

LIMITED ALLOTMENT

Our field offices are hamstrung by very limited allotment for travelling expenses. By and large a district allotment per quarter is finished during the first one and a half months of the quarter. After this expenses are sent to Manila for reimbursement. The reimbursement of these expenses is a sixty-four dollar question.

This is a difficult problem for our budget officer to solve. Invariably there is enough amount of allotment for travelling expenses when our budget is submitted; but there are a lot of pruning knives that it must pass through, the biggest of which is the pruning knife of Congress. Our budget officers always try to do better in every budget preparation. They can yet succeed to get enough allotment for our travelling expenses.

LIMITED SUPPLIES AND EQUIPMENT

Our field offices carry on with very limited supplies — even stationery. The officers resort to asking from forest users just so the office work must go on. Lumber crayon, pencil, ink, carbon paper, pin, clip, fastener, folder, and a lot of little things that go with office administration are seldom seen in district offices. Then we have to reckon on the more important equipment — table, chair, typewriter, adding machine, filing cabinet, etc. — these, our district offices badly need. Many of our field men do not even have compass, chain, marking hatchet and leather notebook. The forest officer now is a far cry from pre-war forest officer in terms of supplies and equipment.

The situation our field offices is in can no longer stand the test of time. We should do something about it. Keymen of the Administrative Services Division should go out