

Why Our Forests Should Be Preserved And Conserved

By
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It is human that what we have in plenty we use them with dissipation. God in his infinite wisdom has made plenty the things we most need. Water which is important in our daily life is inexhaustible, the soil, the mines and the forests abound everywhere. But all these, if not wisely used, will be exhausted. The forests one of the most important heritage that man has should be preserved and conserved for the benefit of the generations to come. We not only preserve the individual trees which compose this forest, but also we are helping other resources which directly or indirectly, depend upon it. We have experienced drought and to conserve water, we have constructed irrigation system which has cost the government considerable sum, yet we find our rivers dry when we most need water.

Less spectacular but more deceitful is the yield of our farms, because of soil erosion, the results of gradual but persistent loss of the rich top soil due to careless cultivation. Many of our farmers do not realize and will not realize this until their farms will produce no more. The hardships which many farmers felt and endured in Cebu, Ilocos, Cavite and other places in Luzon and in our province in the municipalities of Opol, El Salvador, Alubijid, Initao, Balingasag and Tagoloan are due to soil depletion.

Our neighbor province, Davao, is now losing a great portion if not all the abaca plantation due to mosaic disease and in some provinces where coconuts are raised, Cadang-cadang, another disease threatened to wipe

out plantations. A great amount of money has been spent in looking for a cure of these diseases but until now no specific cure has been found and it has already reduced our national wealth by the millions of pesos. Recently, the Bureau of Soils claimed that these diseases are caused by soil depletion and the remedy is to bring back the soil to its former conditions. This can be done by commercial fertilizers and right cultivation which is expensive and by the forest for lesser cost.

The tress are perpetual pumps which need no expense. They are living fountains. Their roots take up the water from the subsoil by transpiration as water vapor. They do not only obtain this water supply from the surface layers of the soil like grasses and field crops but also from the subsoil very often down to the water table. Wit the transpiration from the leaves of the trees in the forest the air above it is cooler and rain is a greater possibility.

The forest is more than the logs and timber which we get from them. It has several functions. It is soil-building, soil-conserving, water-retaining, water-conserving, rain-producing, wealth stabilizer, wind breakers and, last but not least, a provider of biological control of pest and disease which play great havoc on our agricultural crops. It is needless to explain to you all these beneficial effects but it is sufficient to say that civilization and empires have disappeared because their forest have been wantonly destroyed. The proper balance of the forest to agriculture is the safeguard of the progress of any country. When the forests on the slopes of the mountain and hills are destroyed the cumulative start of erosion by wind and water is started result-

¹ Speech delivered by Sr. Forester Timoteo Quimpo before the Seminar of the Boy Scouts held on July 17, 1957 in Cagayan de Oro City.

ing in the reduction of water storage capacity of the soil and the excess water during the rain descends from the mountain, washing away the fertile soil of our valleys carrying the debris of the hills, covering the fertile top soil of the lowlands, like what recently happened in some municipalities of this province. Erosion is the cause of the silting of the Osmeña Water Works in Cebu and of the irrigation works in Central Luzon. This eventually will cause the scouring of stream beds like that in Kabulig River in Balingasag and the spread of aridity in the farm nearby. The land which once was fertile is turned unproductive and the local progress is retarded, if not suppressed. With this, history is replete with examples. Mesopotamia which was once a fertile and prosperous land is now virtually a desert. Palestine and Syria had the same experience. The poverty of China and India, once the Cradle of Civilization, is due to the wanton destruction of their forests which brought erosion and aridity in their lands.

Shall we wait for all these calamities? Shall we not learn from the lessons of history? The wanton destruction of our forest must be stopped. It is already somewhat late to correct the evil but it is never too late to reform.

The forest is a resource which can be rapidly and thoughtlessly abused. It is a living resource. It can be replaced but it needs a longer span of years to regenerate, that we who plant the trees now will never see the fruits of our labor. Our forest is not inexhaustible and we have already destroyed them to a level lower than the safe minimum necessary for the well-being of the country and because of this a more drastic action for the preservation and conservation of this resource is believed to be in order.

We believe that the safe margin of the forest balance in our country as well as the province of Misamis Oriental is 42% of the total land area. If we want to be sure that our farm lands are protected and have the assurance of adequate supply of material benefits from our forest, we should maintain it at that level. Our commercial forest now is

only about 12,000,000 hectares representing 28½ of the land area of the Philippines. The forest cover of the island of Mindanao today is 53% and we are feeling already drought and aridity and the ideal climatic and physical conditions of the island are fast disappearing. In other provinces the forest are already about to go.

The lumbering industry in Misamis Oriental is presently confined to accessible places near the coast and the road. This is easily understood as the cost of production is very much less, but the industry has to compete with the illegal kaingineros who only destroy the forest for a pittance of its value. Presently it is impossible to find a solid commercial forest which is not honey-combed by the kaingineros. Thus we are losing a great amount of our potential income.

Since 1902 when the usefulness of our forest began to be appreciated because of the valuable and durable timber we have in them, we have cleared around half a million hectares and today we have over five million hectares of cogon lands. One and a half million of these areas should be held permanent forest and should be planted to trees to protect the watershed of destructive rivers. The government have been planting trees in these areas but only about 1000 hectares could be planted yearly at a great cost. Losses are encountered because of fires, negligently set by people who are ignorant of the damage they may cause. It is, therefore, important that we educate our people on the beneficial effects of our forest upon our lives, financially and socially. We should teach them to love and respect the trees and forest. We should establish woodland parks in all towns like in the old countries of Europe and even in America. We should line our roads with trees. We should convince every family to plant trees either for their fruit or shade in their yards. In one word, we should plant trees in vacant places anywhere and any place.

To you, Boy Scouts of Misamis Oriental, I would urge you to comply with that rule of your Organization to do one good thing a
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that applicants are thoroughly screened by his technical men before they are issued licenses. How can the Bureau, he asks, refuse to issue licenses if the applicants satisfy the requirements of pertinent laws, rules and regulations? Forestry officials bewail the fact that supervision of logging activities cannot be intensively carried out due to lack of men and traveling funds.

Loggers are not the only persons responsible for deforestation. There are the kaingneros who dramatize their economic plight to the authorities to get away with their illegal activities in our virgin forests. They clear valuable forest areas to plant a few insignificant crops. Using a shifting method of cultivation known as kaingin, they burn down trees and destroy other vegetative cover of the forest. Once they are through with a piece of forest land, they move to another, and so on. The abandoned areas, being denuded, cannot hold even a small amount of precipitation.

Agricultural lands badly misused also contribute to the uncontrollable surging of surplus water. More and more forest areas are being released from time to time for agricultural and settlement purposes to appease the landless. For the past three years, 1,175,098 hectares have been certified as alienable and disposable lands. The release of forest areas should be limited and permanent forest lands be kept for posterity.

Crooked rivers and streams, if not straightened by excavating channels, across the neck of the bends, have low flood-carrying capacity, according to P. McNee who undertook a study of floods that inundated Malaya in 1954. We have many rivers and streams of this kind, especially in Mindanao.

If only to help minimize floods, the selective timber management program strongly advocated by Director Amos should be nationally adopted to the letter. The important object in selective logging is to leave an adequate residual growing stock of undamaged

trees. The Director believes the system is the most reliable and cheapest means of restocking cut-over areas. Reforestation is expensive and tedious. But it seems most of the lumbermen are not receptive to the program although its adoption would in the long run redound to their benefit. Forests are replaceable resources if they are properly managed.

Nothing can prevent floods. But something can be done to give the public maximum protection. It requires the combined efforts of engineers, foresters, agriculturists, weathermen, soil experts and other technical groups.

The timely and correct prediction of the precipitation and wind velocity would prepare people against the possibility of destructive floods. A sound system of farming should be adopted in order to save the soil from erosion. Rivers and streams should be surveyed to determine their flood-carrying capacity. Marshy lands should be reclaimed.

Forest, however, are still the best natural agents in minimizing floods. The government should see to it that the bureau charged with the keeping of our public forests is given the full support it deserves.

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day, that is to plant a tree or convince your elders of the benefits man gets from it and urge them to leave this country of ours to you as it was left to them by their elders, by conserving the forests by wise use.

Man's greatest discovery is not fire, or the wheel, or the combustion engine or atomic energy, or anything in the material world. It is in the world of ideas. Man's greatest discovery is teamwork by agreement.

— B. Brewster Jennings