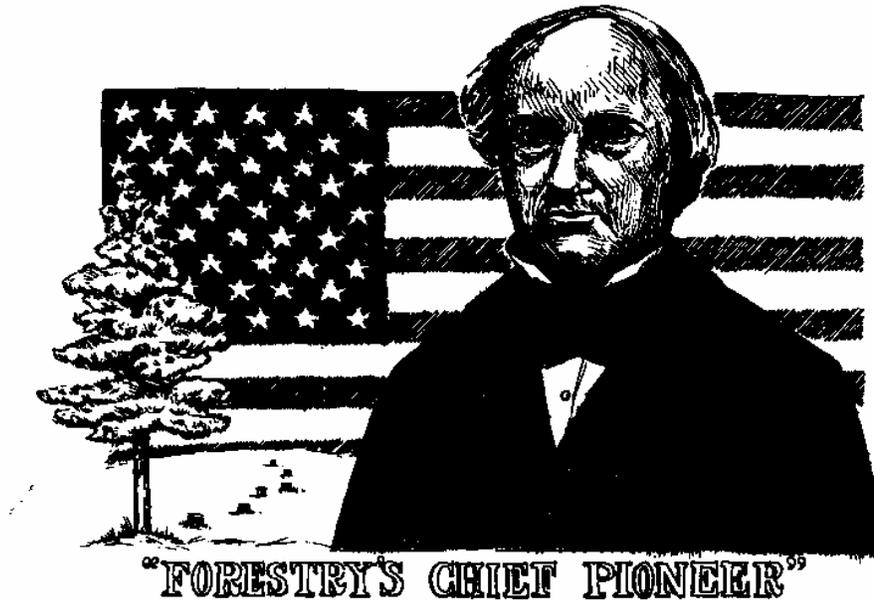


United States Department of Agriculture
Forest Service
FS-518

CENTENNIAL MINI-HISTORIES OF THE FOREST SERVICE

Congress Initiates Forest Study

4 Congress Initiates Forest Study



It may be said that the Forest Service started as a research agency. When Congress appointed Dr. Franklin B. Hough the first Federal Government forestry agent in 1876 and assigned him to the Department of Agriculture, his duty was to compile a statistical inquiry on the conditions of U.S. forests.

Hough, who was born in 1822 in Martinsburg, New York, was a physician in rural upstate New York. Typical of his class and the period, he had other interests, including history and statistics. It was the latter interest that alerted him to the timber supply issue when he was directing the State censuses of 1854 and 1865. When he compared the two, he noted that timber production levels shifted as loggers searched for new stands of timber to harvest.

The visible decline of timber stands was becoming increasingly apparent along the east coast in the 19th century. It was the sight of forest destruction during the Civil War that led the Reverend Frederick Starr (1858–1933) to predict a timber famine in 30 years in a 1865 report to the recently founded (1862) Department of Agriculture. To prevent this scarcity, he advocated planned forest management research done by a Government-funded private corporation.

No Federal action was taken on this proposal until the efforts of Hough revived the concern over the future of public forests. Hough, a 20-year member of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, presented a paper at

the 1873 annual meeting: "On the Duty of Government in the Preservation of Forests." On the next day, the AAAS passed a resolution to petition Congress "on the importance of promoting the cultivation of timber and the preservation of forests." The following year Hough went to Washington, DC, to formally present the memorial, meeting first with **Joseph Henry (1797–1878)**, director of the Smithsonian Institution, to discuss forestry.

Congress opted to fund a study of the subject by appropriating \$2,000 and Hough was appointed to the position. He gathered data through travel (in the United States, Europe, and Canada), correspondence, and publications. The multivolume *Report on Forestry* (1878–1884) called for management of Federal timber lands, creation of Federal forest experiment stations, tree planting, and public education on the need for forest conservation.

In 1881, Hough was named chief of the Division of Forestry within the Department of Agriculture, and although later demoted, he remained an agent of the division until his death in 1885. He is credited with writing the first book of practical forestry in the United States (*Elements of Forestry*), which he did in 1882. For this and many other actions on behalf of forestry, at his death he clearly was, as stated by Gifford Pinchot, "the chief pioneer in forestry in the U.S."

References

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