

WOOD AND FIBER

JOURNAL OF THE SOCIETY OF WOOD SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

VOLUME 9

FALL 1977

NUMBER 3

Wood and Fiber, 9(23), 1977, p. 171
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NATIONAL PROGRAM OF RESEARCH FOR FORESTS AND ASSOCIATED RANGELANDS

Perhaps you are wondering what connection a forest and rangeland research program has with wood science and technology. The connection, as far as publicly financed research in harvesting, processing, and marketing wood is concerned, is made clear in recently published research plans.

The U. S. Forest Service and forestry schools from which most publicly supported wood research comes have just issued plans for national and regional research programs that include wood science and technology research. The reports were prepared by Forest Service and university researchers but are unique in the extent to which the public was involved.

High priority research areas identified in the national plan include:

- Speed development of efficient and environmentally acceptable harvesting.
- Find ways to use low-quality trees and residues economically.
- Extend the resource base and conserve energy by improving processing efficiency. An objective of a 20-percent reduction in the amount of energy consumed per ton of wood raw material is not unrealistic.
- Devise more efficient and economical methods for end-use application of wood and the protection of wood in use.
- Develop efficient, economical methods of using wood as a source of energy and chemicals.
- Produce more information on the economics of forest products utilization techniques.
- Provide more accurate marketing information to meet the needs of timber owners, wood processors, and product distributors.
- Increase our capability to evaluate trends in forest products consumption and trade.

In addition to the National Program document, plans have been prepared for the southern, northcentral, northeastern, and western regions. These have similar titles: Program of research for forest and associated rangelands, with subtitles for the respective regions. These documents are available from the various regional Forest Service stations and the Washington Office of the Forest Service.

Plans call for an increase of 121 scientist years devoted to research in harvesting, processing, and marketing of wood products by 1985, a 37 percent increase. Such an increase will require considerable money because a scientist year includes all technical, clerical, and administrative support, together with any other operational costs necessary to support one scientist for 1 year.

To implement the plans will take, besides money, the commitment of scientists and research administrators. The commitment is there but the money may not be. Seventy-five to 80 percent of the Federal budget is allocated to fixed costs, open-ended programs, and prior-year contracts and obligations. Much of the money for forestry research is within the 20 to 25 percent that is controllable. But, the public is demanding less taxation, and Administration policy is to hold the Federal budget to not more than 21 percent of the gross national product. Thus, a 37 percent increase for forestry research by 1985 appears unlikely.

Though they may not be fully implemented, the new plans point the direction of publicly supported research in forestry and related areas of wood science and technology. I urge everyone to read both the regional and national programs.

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