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A Plan to Save the Forests

It is almost needless to say that this country needs a thoroughly scientific and permanent system of forest management in the interests of the people of today, and, above all, in the interests of their children and grandchildren. There is need of this in the East, but the need is greatest in the Rocky Mountain regions, and it is precisely in these regions that the destruction of the forest is most reckless. Many of the people in these imperiled legions are not permanent inhabitants at all; they are mere nomads, with no intention of remaining for any great length of time in the locality where they happen to be for the moment, and with still less idea of seeing their children grow up there. They, of course, care nothing whatever for the future of the country; they destroy the trees and render the land barren, often from sheer brutal carelessness, often for a pecuniary reward which is absolutely trivial in comparison with the damage done; yet their selfish clamor is allowed to stand in the way of a great measure intended to benefit the whole community.

The damage from deforestation is often very severely felt in land remote from the deforested region. Because of this fact alone the whole matter should be in the hands of the National Government. Professor Sargent's scheme seems to me in its general outlines to be good, and West Point would seem to be the propel place in which to establish the chair of instruction of which he speaks. Without more information I cannot express an opinion as to whether it would be well to try to instruct all the officers in forestry, or merely to have a special corps trained in forestry in addition to other subjects, with the idea of producing a specialized permanent body of foresters. The duties of the ordinary West Point graduate ought always to be mainly military. The specially educated men who intend to enter the profession of forestry would be entrusted with the supervision of the forest reservations. Of course a body of local foresters would have to be enlisted to work under these officers. There should be more than one forest reservation. In the East this might have to be purchased, but in the West there is no such need: Yellowstone National Park, for instance, and the other timber-land reserves, stand ready to hand.

The question of forest preservation is one of utmost moment to the American people, and no effort should be spared to awaken them to a sense of its importance; for at present they are steeped in a profound ignorance of the matter, and of how it affects the interests of themselves and their children.