

Conservation Policies Improve

A number of forest policies emerged as national goals and priorities in response to public concerns. The success of those policies depended upon effective cooperative relationships among federal, state, and local governments, as well as private forest landowners and other private sector interests.

The policies and priorities that had the greatest effect on the improved condition of our forests are the following:

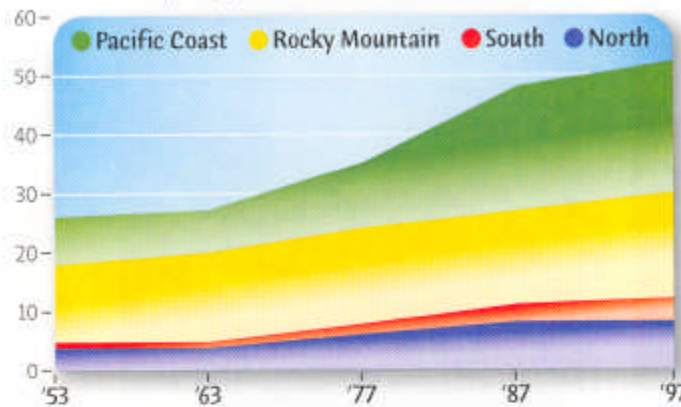
- Focusing on fire suppression, prevention, and public education to protect the forest;

- Establishing and enhancing the profession of forestry, and later of wildlife management, hydrology, and other natural resource disciplines, through establishment of accredited natural resource schools, professional societies, etc.;

- Improving the art and science of forest regeneration and management, including research, establishment of tree nurseries, and providing technical and financial assistance to forest landowners;

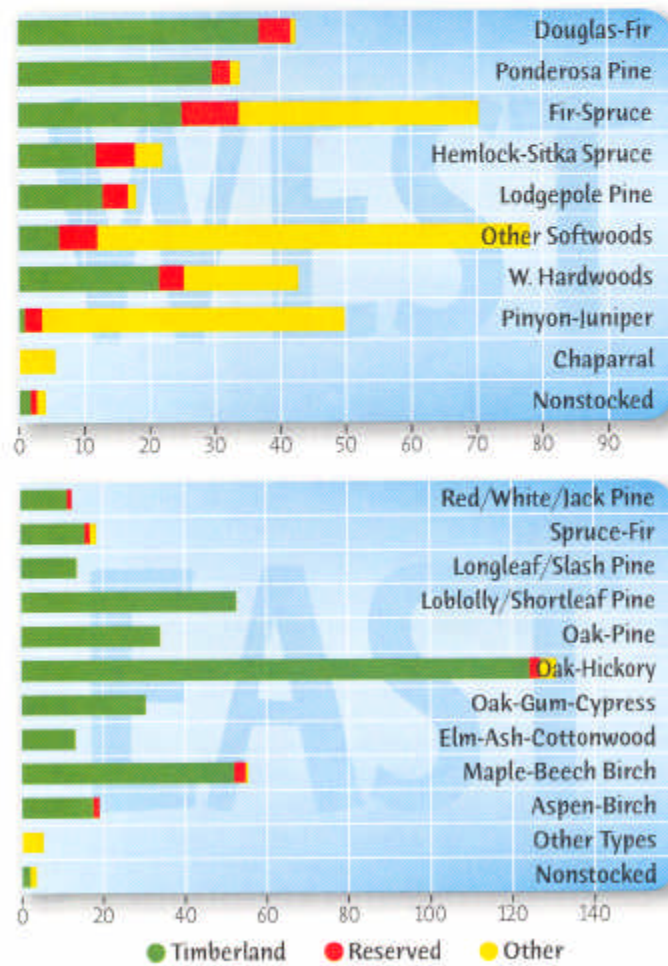
- Improving the efficiency with which wood products are utilized in the woods, at the mill, and in end-product applications. Such gains are the result of wood utilization research, its effective application, and the incentive created by increasing real prices for forest products. The Forest Service's Forest Products Laboratory in Madison, Wisconsin, established in

Trends in Reserved Forest Land - 1953 to 1997
by region - in millions of acres



Trends in Reserved Forest Land by Region [USFS, *Forest Resources of the United States, 1997*; GTC-NC-219, 2001]

Forest Land in the West & East - 1997
by forest type & land class - in millions of acres



Reserved Forest Land, East and West, by Forest Type and Land Class [USFS, *Forest Resources of the United States, 1997*]

1910, has been a significant contributor over the years to expanding the technical knowledge necessary for improving the utilization of wood products;

- Improving the quality of forest management on private lands by improving economic incentives and removing tax and other disincentives;

- Establishing the Forest Reserves (later the National Forests) for watershed protection, irrigation, and sustained timber production.

- While not established for forestry purposes, one policy that nonetheless had a significant beneficial impact on the nation's forest resources was the strategic decision made in USDA in the early decades of this century to emphasize agricultural research aimed at increasing crop yields. Prior to that, USDA primarily focused on statistical reporting, soil and farm implement testing, and related activities.

- An additional factor that has had a significant positive effect on forest conservation has been the increasing real price of wood over the decades. Between 1850 and 1950, the real price of lumber, and of standing timber, increased by more than five times, adjusted for inflation. This has created powerful economic incentives both for growing and managing forests and for reducing consumption of wood by using it more efficiently. The power of such economic incentives for conservation and efficient use of the resource by the private sector was largely unrecognized by early conservation leaders.

Forests and Wildlife Conditions

A significant factor in the conservation of the nation's wildlife was the establishment and proliferation in the late 1800s of politically active sportsmen's organizations. These groups waged a protracted, and ultimately successful, war against market hunting. They also vigorously supported the enforcement of game laws, self-taxation to support state game management, and acquisition of habitat reserves and management areas.

The policies and other factors that had the greatest effect on the improved condition of U.S. wildlife are the following:

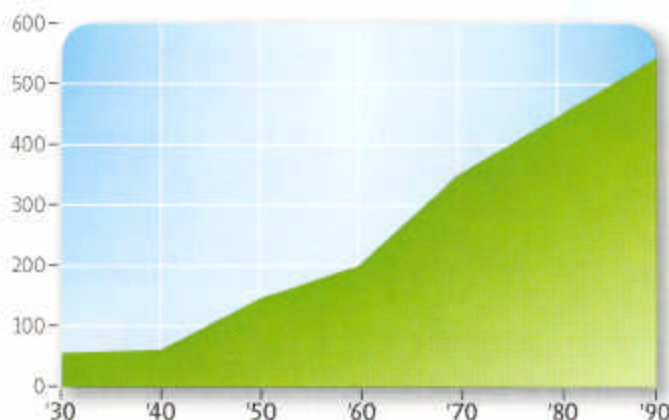
■ Adoption of a variety of strong state and federal wildlife conservation laws, and the establishment of the agencies effectively to enforce them. This game law framework includes the following:

- Halting market hunting of wildlife for meat and most other products, including feathers (market hunting of furbearers has continued under state regulation);
- Eliminating spring shooting of waterfowl and other game birds;
- State regulation of resident game and non-game species;
- Prohibition under federal law of: a) hunting of song birds, plume birds, and other migratory non-game birds, and b) interstate commerce in wildlife products taken in violation of state law;
- Federal regulation of sport hunting of waterfowl and other migratory game birds;
- Federal protection of endangered and threatened species after 1966.

■ Improving the art and science of wildlife management.

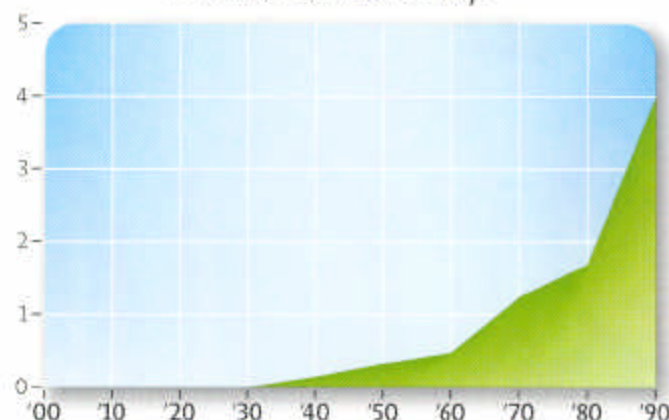
■ Establishing professional state fish and game departments devoted to scientific wildlife management and game law enforcement.

Elk Populations - 1930 to 1990 in thousands of elk



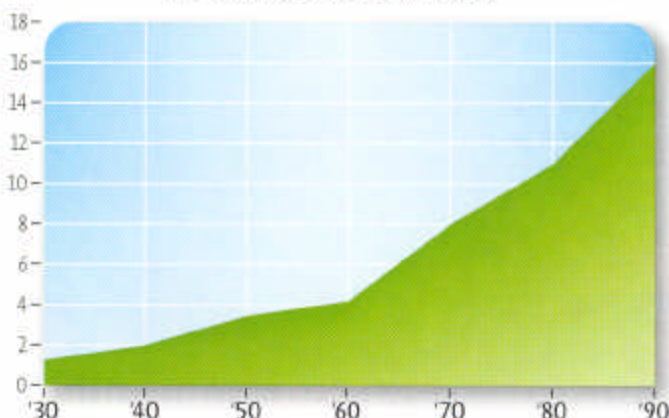
Trends in Elk Populations, 1930-1990 [USFS, A. Christensen, *Elk in North America*]

Wild Turkey Populations - 1900 to 1990 in millions of wild turkeys



Trends in Wild Turkey Populations, 1900-1990 [Wild Turkey Federation]

Whitetail Deer Populations - 1930 to 1990 in millions of whitetail deer



Trends in Whitetail Deer Populations, 1930-1990 [American Forestry Association, Chapter 8, Jack Ward Thomas]

■ Improving habitat conditions especially in the East and South, where millions of acres of agricultural land have reverted back to forest.

■ Reintroductions of species into formerly occupied range.

■ Establishing about 90 million acres of National Wildlife Refuges and 4 million acres of state wildlife reserves. Wildlife refuges and reserves in the contiguous 48 states were financed largely by hunting license fees and taxes on sporting arms, ammunition, and equipment.

■ Establishing the National Forests, National Parks and other federal and state lands for conservation objectives:

• In the West, National Forests and Parks acted as wildlife reservoirs by providing protection for beleaguered populations of many wildlife species, especially large game, until state and federal wildlife programs and enforcement was put in place in the 1930s and beyond. The National Forests were the source of animals for a number of later reintroductions into formerly occupied habitat elsewhere.

• East of the Mississippi, millions of acres of abandoned and depleted farm and forest lands became National Forest lands after 1920. After acquisition, feral cattle, dog and goats were eliminated and the land rehabilitated. Today, these areas provide superb habitat supporting rich populations of many wildlife species, some of which had not existed on these lands since before the American Revolution.

• The multiple use mandate of the 191-million-acre National Forest System lands provides for full consideration of wildlife values and objectives in land management decisions. It has also encouraged the development of highly constructive joint effort with state wildlife agencies in the management of wildlife habitats and populations.