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Forestry research —year of decision

FOR THOSE CONCERNED with agriculture, the Hatch Act of 1887 is a major landmark. The cooperative research conducted with the support provided under this Act has been a major factor in providing the American people with an increasingly nutritious and diversified food supply, at costs representing a declining proportion of disposable personal income.

For those concerned with forestry, the McIntire-Stennis Cooperative Forestry Research Act of 1962 has the potential of becoming a comparable landmark. However, despite the very real and important accomplishments under this Act in the last ten years, the true significance of the Act is yet to be determined. The level of funding is less than half that envisaged by this date in the hearings leading to the Act. The level of expenditures in fiscal year (FY) 1973 is only 7% of that under the Hatch Act. Further, the executive budget proposes a 21% reduction in federal support for the program in FY 1974.

The basic purpose of the McIntire-Stennis Act is to promote research in forestry in land-grant colleges and agricultural experiment stations, and also in schools of forestry at other appropriately qualified State institutions. In the pattern of the Hatch Act, it requires that federal funds be at least matched by state or private funds for forestry research in these institutions. During FY 1973, 61 cooperating institutions have been active in the program, conducting more than 500 projects and involving more than 500 faculty members and nearly as many graduate students.

Such numbers, however, are abstractions. To get a real sense of the program, consider current activities in a single state. During 1973 the California Agricultural Experiment Station had 16 research projects supported in part by McIntire-Stennis funds. The work included:

ecological studies, improvements in forestry nursery practices, urbanization impacts, effects of grazing practices, analysis of artificial regeneration of forest stands, analysis of long-range timber supplies, economics of forest thinning, logging research, satellite photography data analysis, and improving utilization and the machining of wood. In addition, members of the forestry faculty at California State University, Humboldt, are conducting several studies, mainly in the redwoods, with McIntire-Stennis support.

This is the McIntire-Stennis Cooperative Forestry Research Program in a single state, representing only 3% of the total federal funds made available under this Act. In each of the states similar research is being conducted, responding to national needs through studies that are important in the individual states.

We live in a period of rapidly mounting demands on the forest lands. High prices for forest products are a matter of national concern and have become adverse to realization of the national goal of decent housing for all the people. Recreational use of the forests is growing explosively and is taking on many new forms which multiply the environmental effects. The improvement of yields and quality of water from the nation's forested watersheds is a critical need.

The one-third of the nation in forest lands is increasingly important to all of the nation. What should the role of federal-state cooperation be in contributing to the base of forestry research essential in meeting these demands? In 1962 the McIntire-Stennis Act provided the basis for a strong and productive response to this question. The question itself, remains however, unanswered and with overall fiscal constraints and a re-evaluation of national priorities, has come to the fore once again. Will the potential of the McIntire-Stennis Act be realized? The year of decision appears to lie just ahead.