

Francis Marion History
20th century section
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Prelude to a National Forest: Cooperative Forestry in the Lowcountry, 1901-1918

At the end of the nineteenth century, the center of lumber production was shifting from the Great Lakes states and the Northeast, to the vast southern pine belt which stretched in a crescent from Virginia to Texas. As the big industrial timber corporations began running out of forests in the north, they turned to areas with seemingly inexhaustible lumber resources.¹ Though logging and lumber milling had occurred in South Carolina throughout the nineteenth century, the turn of the twentieth century marked the commencement of large-scale industrial logging in the coastal plain pine belt. Companies funded by Northeastern capital, such as the Atlantic Coast Lumber Corporation, the E. P. Burton Lumber Company, the A. C. Tuxbury Lumber Company, and the North State Lumber Company, began building mills and buying up land and stumpage in the lowcountry around 1899. Within a decade these companies controlled most of the forest land in Berkeley, Georgetown, and upper Charleston counties. By 1913 their mills had a cumulative annual production of over 300 million board feet of lumber, and the Atlantic Coast Lumber Corporation was considered one of the largest producers on the Eastern seaboard.²

When the timber companies left the Great Lake states, they left behind hundreds of thousands of acres of depleted lands, almost completely denuded of timber. Implicit in the growth of the South Carolina lumber companies was the possibility that the same cycle would be repeated, this time in the Southern pine belt. However, the U. S. Bureau of Forestry (predecessor to the U. S. Forest Service)

¹ William G. Robbins, *American Forestry: A History of National, State, and Private Cooperation* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1985), 20-21, 37-39; Thomas D. Clark, *The Greening of the South: The Recovery of Land and Forest* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1984), 14-15.

² George C. Rogers, Jr., *The History of Georgetown County, South Carolina* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1970), 499; Thomas Feters, *Logging Railroads of South Carolina* (Forest Park: Heimburger House, 1990), 14; R. C. Hawley, "A Report on the Lumber Industry in the Coastal Plain Region of South Carolina," December 1903, Mudd Library, Yale University, New Haven, CT, 4-5; 1936 Management Plan, Francis Marion National Forest, appendix 4-5, Records of the Forest Service, RG 95, Entry 64, General Correspondence of the Office of Timber Management, 1905-1952 [hereafter referred to as NA RG 95-64], Box 269, National Archives, College Park, MD.

assured the country that industrial logging could safely continue with the guidance of scientifically trained professionals. Profitable use of the forests still could be possible if the timber corporations took steps to prevent waste and plan rationally for future use.³ Under Gifford Pinchot's leadership, the Bureau of Forestry sought ways to work cooperatively with private landowners and the timber industry to accomplish these goals.

Federal cooperative forestry began in South Carolina in 1901 when the Bureau sent a field party to make management recommendations for 60,000 acres of cut-over and fire damaged longleaf pine lands owned by the Okeetee Gun Club in Beaufort and Hampton counties.⁴ One year later, the E. P. Burton Company requested assistance with its 39,000 acres of pine and swamp land in Berkeley county, and Pinchot described the tract as "one of the most promising with which the Bureau has yet had to deal."⁵ The resulting cooperation with the E. P. Burton Company marked the beginning of a relationship between the Forest Service and South Carolina that would eventually culminate in the establishment of the Francis Marion National Forest. Between December of 1902 and March of 1903, Charles S. Chapman, Coert DuBois, and four other assistants worked under the supervision of Frederick E. Olmsted to examine the Burton tract, ranging from the company's temporary camp at Limerick plantation north to Bethera and the Hell Hole swamp area.⁶ Burton had begun its logging operations on the Limerick tract in 1899 and had worked northwards, and though some areas had been cut-over, Chapman found that the lands were already bouncing back well and that loblolly pine lands reproduced plentifully as long as fire was kept out. Work progressed well and enjoyed the support of

³ Robbins, 37-39; Samuel P. Hays, *Conservation and the Gospel of Efficiency: The Progressive Conservation Movement, 1890-1920* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1959), 27-35, 265-266.

⁴ Thomas Sherrard, *Working Plan for Forest Lands in Hampton and Beaufort Counties, South Carolina*, Bulletin No. 43, revised edition, USDA Forest Service (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1907).

⁵ U. S. Department of Agriculture, *Report of the Forester*, 1902 and 1903 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1902 and 1903).

⁶ Telegram from F. E. Olmsted to Charles S. Chapman, 15 December 1902, Records of the Forest Service, Record Group 95, Entry 3, General Correspondence of the Forest Service, 1898-1908 [hereafter referred to as NA RG 95-3], Box 3, C. S. Chapman File, National Archives, College Park, MD; Report of the Forester, 1903; George L. Clothier, "Report on Lumbering in the Carolinas," 1903, Mudd Library, Yale University, New haven, CT.

the E. P. Burton's general manager, Harrison W. Blake, who arranged for the party's expenses to be paid by the company.⁷

During the next year and a half, the Bureau continued cooperating with the Burton Company, and began developing conservation networks in the area. As Chapman prepared a working plan for the company, the Yale University forestry school repeatedly sent down students to report on the Burton forests. Between 1902 and 1906, George L. Clothier, Samuel N. Spring, R. C. Hawley, John E. Keach, and Fred E. Ames photographed and documented all aspects of land conditions, logging methods, and attitudes towards forestry in the Berkeley, Charleston, and Georgetown county areas. Clothier found that the "loblolly pine makes an enormous growth on the lands of the Burton Company," and that the biggest obstacle to conservative forestry was "the inefficient and irresponsible nature of the native population upon who the Company must largely depend for labor."⁸ In contrast to the Burton Company, Hawley discovered that the Atlantic Coast Lumber Corporation, which was also working in the area, cut the forest over completely, "seemingly with no idea of ever returning again, trusting rather to their ability to buy up more land or stumpage as needed."⁹

In the meantime, Pinchot and Overton Price of the Bureau of Forestry corresponded regularly with the vice president of the E. P. Burton Company, E. W. Durant, Jr. Durant showed great enthusiasm for conservative forestry, and even asked to go along with a field party in the summer of 1903 to observe their work.¹⁰ When Chapman completed his working plan, he traveled again to Charleston, where in December of 1904 he wrote to Washington that Durant and the Burton family

⁷ Deposition of E. H. Burton, 1934, in the E. P. Burton Depositions, Files of the Archaeologist, Francis Marion National Forest, SC; Charles S. Chapman, *A Working Plan for Forest lands in Berkeley County, South Carolina*, Bulletin No. 56, USDA Forest Service (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1905), 8, 29; F. E. Olmsted to C. S. Chapman, 9 February 1903, NA RG 95-3.

⁸ Clothier, "Report on Lumbering in the Carolinas," 6, 8.

⁹ R. C. Hawley, "A Report on the Lumber Industry in the Coastal Plain Region of South Carolina," 9.

¹⁰ Geddings Hardy Crawford, ed., *Who's Who in South Carolina* (Columbia: McCaw, 1921), 52; E. W. Durant, Jr. to Overton Price, 16 March 1903, NA RG 95-3, Box 23, "Du" file; Telegram from E. W. Durant, Jr. to F. E. Olmsted, 17 April 1903, NA RG 95-3, "Du" file.

wished to “follow out the recommendations of the Bureau . . . almost to the letter.”¹¹ In fact, Chapman was already in the process of implementing the plan before Christmas.

Chapman recommended that the company increase efficiency by leaving loblolly pines to act as seed trees, and minimize damage caused to them by the steam skidders. He also suggested that stumps be cut lower, to reduce waste, and that fire be kept out of the woods completely to allow the loblolly to reproduce to its full potential. Additionally, he advised that longleaf pine and hardwoods be eliminated and replaced with loblolly whenever possible, mainly because loblolly enjoyed such rapid growth and good reproduction. All of this work was best supervised by a trained forester, who could be employed directly by the company for a modest cost. It was Chapman’s feeling that any forester employed in this capacity would be able to “practice forestry more fully than would be possible anywhere else.”¹² But most importantly, Chapman explained that if the company wished to continue production at the same level (about 20 million board feet annually), they would have to take measures to achieve sustained yield. While greater efficiency was a part of this, true sustained yield could only be accomplished by purchasing more forest; Chapman estimated that an additional 53,000 acres would have to be acquired.¹³

The Burton Company quickly complied with most of the recommendations. They asked the Bureau to supply them with a forester who could fully implement the plan. Gifford Pinchot’s choice was Max Rothkugel, a German forester who had worked as an agent for the Bureau, and whom the Bureau felt had the necessary experience and would get along well with the loggers. Rothkugel soon arrived at Conifer, the new company town in Berkeley county, and began work under the guidance of Chapman, who the Bureau had asked to remain and spend yet another Christmas in the Hell Hole tract. By January of 1905 he had begun to prepare fire breaks and mark timber, and like others before him, Rothkugel was impressed with the potential of the land. In early 1906, he wrote the Bureau,

¹¹ C. S. Chapman to T. H. Sherrard, 11 December 1904, Records of the Forest Service, Record Group 95, Entry 66, Correspondence of the Office of Timber Management [hereafter referred to as NA RG 95-66], Box 4, C. S. Chapman file, National Archives, College park, MD.

¹² Chapman, *A Working Plan for Berkeley County*, 47-57; C. S. Chapman to T. H. Sherrard, 11 December 1904, NA RG 95-66, Box 4.

¹³ Chapman, *A Working Plan for Berkeley County*, 48-49.

saying that “you ought to see the reproduction of loblolly, Limerick is colossal.”¹⁴ Of the four large companies working in the area between Charleston and Georgetown, Burton was the only one to employ a forester at this time, and the only one to request and adopt a Bureau working plan.

Unfortunately, Rothkugel lasted only fourteen months as the Burton forester, quitting in April 1906 after a disagreement with the logging superintendent J. R. Hardison. Chapman was once again called down, this time to fill in and train a new man for Rothkugel’s job.¹⁵

Clearly the U. S. Bureau of Forestry had accomplished a lot in cooperation with the E. P. Burton Lumber Company. Adoption of Chapman’s plan, and the work of Rothkugel helped reduce timber mining in the area, and may have mitigated damage so that when the Forest Service later acquired this land its conditions were better than they would have been otherwise. But the cooperation was a major failure in another regard. The company never purchased the additional land necessary for achieving sustained yield, and ceased its operations in 1916 holding the same acreage it had owned in 1903.¹⁶ In effect, despite the best efforts of the Bureau staff, the Burton Company failed to implement the key ingredient of Chapman’s plan, and as a result long-term protection of South Carolina’s coastal pine forests would have to wait for more direct federal intervention. Fortunately, this cooperative work carried out in the early part of the Twentieth century created a relationship between the Forest Service and South Carolina’s lowcountry, thus sowing the seeds for later national forest establishment.

¹⁴ C. S. Chapman to T. H. Sherrard, 11 December 1904, NA RG 95-66, Box 4; Letter to C. S. Chapman, 15 December 1904, NA RG 95-66, Box 4, Chapman file; Letter to C. S. Chapman, 20 December 1904, NA RG 95-66, Box 4, Chapman file; C. S. Chapman to T. H. Sherrard, 24 December 1904, NA RG 95-66, Box 4, Chapman file; Max Rothkugel to A. K. Chittenden, 12 February 1906, NA RG 95-66, Box 9, Rothkugel file.

¹⁵ Fetters, *Logging Railroads of South Carolina*, 16; Max Rothkugel to T. H. Sherrard, 24 April 1906, NA RG 95-66, Box 9, Rothkugel File; C. S. Chapman to T. H. Sherrard, 19 May 1906, NA RG 95-66, Box 4, Chapman file.

¹⁶ 1936 Management Plan, Francis Marion National Forest, p. 4 of appendix, NA RG 95-64, Box 269.