

Francis Marion History
20th Century section
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“Timber Mining” Reaches a Peak in Coastal South Carolina, 1918-1927

Economic conditions favorable to lumber production during World War I caused logging activity in the southern pine belt to reach a crescendo by 1918. As demand for lumber and prices soared during the war, companies in South Carolina such as Tuxbury, North State, and the Atlantic Coast Lumber Corporation probably reached the apex of their production. The Atlantic Coast Lumber Corporation, which R. C. Hawley predicted in 1903 had only enough forest to support logging for twenty-five years, was beginning to substantially cut-over its holdings. Across the South, land conditions deteriorated and deforestation loomed, and once again timber depletion caused concern in the Forest Service.¹ By this time, the Forest Service was becoming aware that the forest problem was really part of a larger land use problem that was possibly too big for individual landowners to handle alone. The question was not just how to keep the lumber industry going. Though policy did not yet reflect it, foresters were beginning to see the forest problem as a part of a vast land problem in which water, agriculture, soil, fire, labor, housing, and industry were all interconnected. Not only were forests suffering, but the communities dependent on the timber industry were being shattered as land was cut-over and mills shut down. As historian Henry Clepper noted, “the end of the South’s inexhaustible timber was in sight. As the tide of logging swept onward, it left in its wake hundreds of thousands of acres, cutover and burned over, that nobody wanted at any price. The little sawmill towns disintegrated among the charred stumps.”² By the mid-1920s most southern pine belt lands were completely cut over, “a blackened fire-scorched world, dominated by millions of stumps.”³

¹ Thomas D. Clark, *The Greening of the South: The Recovery of Land and Forest* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1984), 26-28; William G. Robbins, *American Forestry: A History of National, State, and Private Cooperation* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1985), 116; 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, p. 9.

² Henry Clepper, *Professional Forestry in the United States* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1971), 233, cited in Robbins, 39.

Such was probably the condition of the holdings of the Atlantic Coast Lumber Company in Georgetown County, which were mainly upland longleaf pine lands. Not surprisingly, Atlantic Coast began making plans to sell its timber depleted property as early as 1929. But not every part of the South suffered equally. Some areas, particularly those dominated by loblolly or slash pine, were in better condition due to natural reseeding.⁴ Most likely this was the case on the former E. P. Burton Company lands, now owned by North State and A. C. Tuxbury Lumber Companies, where logging still continued at a reduced rate in 1927. As forester Charles S. Chapman had noted in 1905, these loblolly lands had phenomenal reproductive rates, as long as forest fires were kept out. If Tuxbury and North State could find a way to protect their young second growth of loblolly from fire, they might still be able to continue profitable production for a while longer.

Not surprisingly, the timber companies became increasingly interested in forestry programs that centered on wild-fire prevention and control. Though the Forest Service had not been active in the area for several areas, its experts were ready to once again step in to aid the companies. For example, in 1924, J. Given Peters met with numerous lumbermen interested in forest protection at a meeting of the Conservation Society of South Carolina. Lumbermen representing eight coastal timber companies attended this meeting; two of the most vocal were F. G. Davies of the A.C. Tuxbury Company, and G. J. Cherry of the North State Lumber Company.⁵ The lands of these two industrial lumber corporations would later form the core of the Francis Marion National Forest. Possibly the Forest Service began to consider acquiring lands in Berkeley and Charleston counties at meetings like this one.

³ Clark, *The Greening of the South*, 29.

⁴ Unlabeled file, Box 19, Records of the Atlantic Coast Lumber Corporation, South Caroliniana Library, Columbia, SC; Report on the Black River Purchase Unit, Minutes of the National Forest Reservation Commission, 18 February 1928, Volume 16, Records of the Forest Service, Record Group 95, Entry 27 [hereafter referred to as NA RG 95-27], National Archives, College Park, MD; Clark, *The Greening of the South*, 31.

⁵ "Would Establish Forestry Bureau, 19 August 1924, pp. 1-2, *The State* (Columbia, SC); Minutes of the Service Committee, 21 August 1924, Records of the Forest Service, Record Group 95, Entry 8 [hereafter referred to as NA RG 95-8], National Archives, College Park, MD.

By the summer of 1927, the Tuxbury and North State Companies committed a set amount of their own money for forest fire control. Both companies committed fifteen hundred dollars, as did several other companies, including the Cooper River Timber Company and Myrtle Beach Estates, Inc. F. G. Davies of Tuxbury wrote that his company had purchased a fire truck and were in the process of building a fire tower, but that he was skeptical that they would be able to successfully stop the fires.⁶ This tower, a hundred foot tall wooden structure, was built in 1927 on Tuxbury's land in Berkeley county, and is considered the first fire tower to have been built in South Carolina. Unfortunately, the tower burned in a woods fire shortly after it was completed, and Tuxbury withdrew its fifteen hundred dollar commitment.⁷ According to F. G. Davis, the company was "up against a hard proposition this year and must economize to the utmost."⁸ Though work continued with the Berkeley county landowners, it was not clear that cooperative work could successfully solve the forest problem, not to mention the huge surrounding land problem in the coastal area.

⁶ Henry H. Tyron to F. G. Davies, 12 June 1927; F. G. Davies to H. H. Tyron, 15 June 1927; F. G. Davies to H. H. Tyron, 20 June 1927; F. G. Davies to H. H. Tyron, 26 August 1927; H. H. Tyron to G. J. Cherry, 12 June 1927; G. J. Cherry to H. H. Tyron, 5 August 1927; H. H. Tyron to G. J. Cherry, 15 August 1927, all in Records of the State Forestry Commission, Unarranged Records 1927, South Carolina Department of Archives and History, Columbia, SC.

⁷ South Carolina Forestry Commission, "Forest Fire Control: A Brief Review," in *Annual Report of the State Forestry Commission*, 1969, pp. 8-9.

⁸ F. G. Davies to H. H. Tyron, 26 August 1927, Records of the State Forestry Commission, Unarranged Records, 1927-33.