

Trees for Tomorrow

Vilas County

Ever since bearded explorers tramped the forest wilderness of Wisconsin, trees have played a functional role in the economic, biological and social life of this state. A unique organization, Trees for Tomorrow, has played a part in shaping that role.

Trees for Tomorrow was founded on a wintry day, February 29, 1944, in Wausau. M. N. Taylor, advertising manager of the *Merrill Daily Herald*, was executive director. The other original officers were paper company executives Folke Becker, Rhinelander Paper Company, president; Sven Bugge, Tomahawk, Kraft Paper Company, first vice president; and David B. Smith, Merrill, Ward Paper Company, secretary and treasurer.

At that time, 85 percent of wood consumed by Wisconsin paper mills was imported from other states and Canada. Wisconsin's landscape had been stripped of its virgin pine cover. Remnants of less desirable species, containing fiber for gunpowder and thousands of other uses, could have been used to help win the war. On the other hand, vast fields of barren, non-agricultural land lay idle. Cut-over acre-

age was tax delinquent or selling for \$1 an acre.

It was in this wartime climate, the fall of 1943, that the Wisconsin wood-using industry sparked a crusadelike campaign to stimulate the production of pulpwood for the war. Some mills, due partly to lack of manpower, were down to a week's supply of wood.

The *Merrill Daily Herald* dramatized what could be accomplished through coordinated effort by organizing a Pulpwood Roundup and publishing a Pulpwood Tabloid. The War Production Board in Washington, the Wisconsin wood-using industry, Forest Service, State Conservation Department and local agencies jointly sponsored this effort to stimulate the production of pulpwood. Women cut pulpwood, Sunday sermons in church stressed the shortage of wood, county agents contacted farm woodlot owners, war bonds were offered as prizes for best-appearing and largest loads of wood at the Roundup. When 125 trucks of pulpwood rolled down the main street of Tomahawk, paper industry executives reasoned that if this pent-up energy could be channeled into the planting of trees, Wisconsin might again be covered with new forests. The result was that M. N. Taylor, who had spearheaded the pulpwood campaign, was named head of a committee to implement a long-range Trees for Tomorrow program.



Trees for Tomorrow Camp: W. A. Sylvester, William Bjorge and M. N. Taylor

(c. 1948)

Excerpted from ***Every Root an Anchor: Wisconsin's Famous and Historic Trees***
by R. Bruce Allison
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The first step was to become known and accepted. Initial projects included: a two-day Reforestation Institute at Rhinelander; hand planting of 10,000 trees by high school students; the organization of machine planting; and the distribution of free trees with 200,000 seedlings handed over to private landowners.

In 1945, the 2-for-1 program was introduced. Two trees were given free for each tree planted. Landowners, schools and communities planted four million trees in the Wisconsin River valley. Forty-two school and memorial forests were dedicated. As many as 730,000 free trees were distributed each spring. There were no strings attached. Trees could be planted for any forestry purpose.

Before long, landowners sought help in managing their second growth forests. The first of five foresters, William Sylvester, had already joined the staff. Three foresters were now employed in Merrill and two in Eagle River. At first, the organization offered forest management services free of charge. Strangely enough, when a small fee was charged, requests for management services increased 56 percent. The fee put a value on the work.

Trees for Tomorrow became a catalyst for action programs, which provided an opportunity for the involvement of others. An example: the Wisconsin Bankers Association sponsored forestry field days. They bought 24 tree-planting machines in the Wisconsin River valley and planted millions of trees.

Landowners began to ask for help with timber sales. Trees for Tomorrow added assistance in harvesting timber to its services. Foresters cruised

a piece of property, prepared a sales prospectus, contacted producers, asked for bids, secured a performance bond and made sure the operation was covered by insurance. Again, they charged a small fee.

Many changes were taking place in wood procurement. Sophisticated machinery was going into action, but there was a shortage of woods workers. So, Trees for Tomorrow set up the first all-around loggers' apprenticeship training program in the Lake States at Eagle River and initiated a loggers' course for Nicolet College at Rhinelander.

During the span of the forestry program, Trees for Tomorrow had distributed and machine-planted 23 million trees; prepared management plans for 370,000 acres of private woodlands; and estimated, marked and supervised the sale of 440,000 cords of wood.

But the time arrived for Trees for Tomorrow to evaluate its forest management and tree-planting program. The plain fact was that Northern Wisconsin was running out of open fields on which to plant trees. More field services were also becoming available from public agencies. So, a chapter in the history of forestry in Northern Wisconsin came to an end. The Trees for Tomorrow Camp, founded in 1946 at Eagle River, however, still functions as a resource education headquarters. And the idea of self-help, still sponsored by industry and a wide cross-section of the public, continues to be a viable one.

Source: From an article by M. N. Taylor, Merrill