THE FORAGE COVER IN HEAVILY GRAZED FARM WOODS OF NORTHERN INDIANA

Oliver D. Diller

LAND planning reports of many of the Corn Belt states recommend an extensive shift from excess areas of grain crops toward greater production of hay and more acreage in permanent pastures. These recommendations have focused increased attention on the millions of acres of pasture land in the Corn Belt which, to use Secretary Wallace's words, "are producing only one-third to one-half as much as they might in terms of milk and beef" (10). The Soil Conservation and Domestic Allotment Act of 1936 is encouraging this general shift toward hay and pasture and agronomists have recently made noteworthy contributions on the establishment and management of productive pastures.

These studies, however, have not covered to any great extent the problems of woodland pasture which in the Corn Belt comprises practically one-third of all the pasture land east of the prairies. While recorded in the Census as "Woodland Pasture", these areas vary widely in their character and carrying capacity. Most of these woodland pastures have been so seriously injured by continuous overgrazing as to be inadequate for the satisfactory maintenance of livestock and ruined for sustained timber production (2). Agronomists recognize the poor quality of such pasture and in the better agricultural sections discourage the practice of grazing the woods. It is unfortunate that with the acknowledged need for more productive grazing lands there has been no critical study of woodland pastures with the object of improving the carrying capacities of the better areas and determining the best land use for such areas as are definitely submarginal for forest production.

In land use projects too frequently the error is made of assuming that lands which are marginal or submarginal for agriculture or forage production are ipso facto forest or potential forest land. Fully 50% of the pastured woodlands have been so seriously injured by continuous overgrazing that they are no longer capable of yielding forest crops and are definitely submarginal for profitable forest production as well as for pasture. Since one of the first principles of good farm management is to obtain good crop yields from each unit of land, it is obvious that these unproductive pastured woodlands present an important problem in land use which requires additional study by both foresters and agronomists.

As a phase of the problem of managing farm woodlands for the continuous production of forest crops, certain aspects of woodland grazing have been under investigation for a number of years at the Central States Forest Experiment Station in cooperation with the Departments of Forestry and Animal Husbandry of Purdue University Agri-