The Relation of the Soil Survey to Land Classification.


We are nearing the end of our easily available virgin timber resource. Presently we shall be dependent on our annual forest production for our timber supplies. Our agricultural expansion has absorbed all of the natural high quality farm and grazing lands and has extended to lands of lower or marginal quality. Meanwhile our population continues to grow in numbers yearly. This increase in population is paralleled by a growing demand for the products of the land, - food, fiber, and forest products, - and the use of land for other purposes than production. Out of this growing demand competitive uses for land arise, and when, as frequently happens, these competitive uses meet and compete for lands which are of marginal quality for either use then there is confusion in determining which use shall prevail. In the past such determinations have mainly been made by the slow and costly process of "trial and error."

Because of the loss in time and money and human energy which such "trial and error" experiments have involved, as well as the abuse which they have inflicted on our land resources, we hear a more and more frequent call for "land classification." No one seems to know definitely just exactly what this "land classification" should attempt or accomplish in detail, or exactly how it should be applied. There seems to be only one point of agreement, namely that we should have a "land classification."

Granted! A "land classification." But for what purpose? On what basis? Why for the purpose of establishing land use. On the basis of utility. But use and utility, at least for the bulk of our land area, implies production and many factors other than land enter into the economics of production. Labor, capital, markets, transportation, supply and demand for the product, and a host of other changeable economic factors will give an ever changing complexion to any land classification based on utility.

When we admit that we cannot classify land in a fixed, arbitrary, "once and for all time" sort of manner then the problem becomes much simpler. We will inventory the relatively stable and tangible physical characteristics of land like soil character, topography, climatic influence, ability to produce certain kinds of plants and animals, and we will appraise the influence of the relatively unstable and intangible economic characteristics.

With such inventories and appraisals before us we can set a classification for today knowing and anticipating that ten years

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