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[Statement from John Muir.]

John Muir

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natural wealth, and that they must not be left, as heretofore, at the mercy of every wandering hunter, sheep-herder, or lumberman.

The people are beginning to know that forests affect climate, act as barriers against destructive floods, protect and hold in store fertilizing rain and snow, and form fountains for irrigating streams. Gold and silver are stored in the rocks, and can neither be burned nor trampled out of existence; the wealth of our magnificent soil-beds is also comparatively safe: but our forests — the best on the face of the earth — are still exposed to perils which have inflicted calamities on many other countries. The main forest-belt of the Sierra Nevada, with which I am best acquainted, 400 miles in width, is planted just where it does the most good, and where its removal would necessarily be followed by the greatest evils. Therefore its preservation can hardly be regarded as less than a physical necessity. Here all the rivers on which the fields in the San Joaquin and Sacramento valleys depend for irrigating waters draw their sources. Here the snow falls and is stored up, being prevented by the trees from slipping into the canions in avalanches, from being drifted into heaps by the winds, and from melting with wastefully destructive energy. Every pine-needle and clasping root, as well as fallen trunk and branch, may be regarded as a dam, and the forest is a barrier of beauty; have taken the energy. Lumber-mills may be regarded as centers of desolation in the grand forests of the Pacific coast, but the desolation of sheep and sheep-herder has no center — it is universal.

Incredible numbers of sheep are driven into the California forest pastures every summer, and their courses are marked by desolation. Not only the moisture-absorbing grasses are devoured, but the bushes also are stripped bare. Even the young conifers, which are not eaten by sheep when they can find anything else to stay hunger, are greedily devoured in their famishing condition; and to make destruction doubly sure, fires are set during the dry autumn months to clear the ground of fallen trunks and underbrush in order to facilitate the movements of the flocks and to improve the pastures by letting in the sunshine. The entire forest-belt of California, the noblest and most valuable on the face of the earth, is thus annually swept and devastated from one end of the Sierra to the other, the young trees on which the permanence of the forests depends being eaten and trampled and burned. Indians also burn off the underbrush to facilitate hunting; mountaineers and lumbermen sometimes carelessly allow their camp-fires to spread: but the fires of sheep-men form more than ninety per cent. of all. Even in the moist climates of Oregon and Washington the woods have been swept with destructive fires again and again; for, besides the fires set by man, nature sends down fire from heaven every year in the form of lightning, making the care of man all the more necessary. Only on the wet coast of Alaska have I ever seen a forest wholly free from the destructive marks of fire. Surely the tremendous conflagrations last year in Minnesota and Wisconsin, and lately in other States, ought to be enough to spur any government to action.

I believe that the Sargent forestry plan will prove a complete solution of all our forest troubles. Already a good beginning has been made by Presidents Harrison and Cleveland in making extensive forest reserves and parks; but the good work must go on. Let the forests on all the head waters of all the rivers in the country be reserved and put under the charge of the War Department,—the most reliable, permanent, unpolitical, and effective department of our Government,—and then forest affairs will be definitely settled, and all our living trees will clasp their hands and wave in joy.

But it is impossible, in the nature of things, to stop at preservation. The forests must be, and will be, not only preserved, but used; and the experience of all civilized countries that have faced and solved the question shows that, over and above all expenses of management under trained officers, the forests, like perennial fountains, may be made to yield a sure harvest of timber, while at the same time all their far-reaching beneficent uses may be maintained unimpaired.

The effectiveness of the War Department in enforcing the laws of Congress has been illustrated in the management of the Yosemite National Park. Three years ago, when the park was organized, the Department of the Pacific was called on for a troop of cavalry to protect it. The sheep having been rigidly excluded, a luxuriant cover has sprung up on the desolate forest floor, fires have been choked before they could do any damage, and hopeful bloom and beauty have taken the place of ashes and dust. On the other hand, on the great reservations to the southward of the Yosemite National Park, the forests, except that they are withdrawn from private ownership, are in as bad a condition as before. Warnings against trespass have been posted in abundance on the trees along the trails leading from the lowlands to the head waters of the streams in the woods, warning everybody not to trespass on the nation's property. But in the absence of enforcing power these have proved of no avail. Hundreds of thousands of sheep have been driven into the upper forest pastures, as before, and the usual destruction has gone on unchecked. One soldier in the woods, armed with authority and a gun, would be more effective in forest preservation than millions of forbidding notices. I believe that the good time of the suffering forests can be hastened through the War Department, as outlined in Professor Sargent's plan, and I heartily indorse it.

MARTINEZ, CALIFORNIA.

John Muir.