Commercial forestry in Texas is primarily restricted to 13% of its land base, that being located in East Texas. It generates $5 billion to the economy annually and is considered the 9th largest manufacturing industry in the state.

The commercial forests of East Texas total approximately 11.7 million acres spread over 25 million acres in 43 counties. Seven percent of that forestland is owned by governmental entities of which the National Forests are the primary component (650,000 acres, or 7%). Timber corporations (primarily Temple-Inland, Champion, International Paper Company, and Louisiana-Pacific) own 33%, and the remainder is owned by the non-industrial private landowner, i.e. 60%.

However, forest in Texas is not totally confined to the eastern portion. The Texas Forest Service has a small nursery and forestry project in Lubbock that services the Panhandle. Approximately 100,000 conifers and 200,000-300,000 hardwood species are grown annually at Lubbock for shelterbelts and windbreak purposes.

Neither is the fire control operation limited to the 3,000+ fires the agency experiences annually in Texas. In 1988 we suppressed the largest wildfire in the recorded history of the state. This 300,000 acre range fire near Abilene, Texas, required over 500 firefighters with the cooperation of the U.S. Forest Service, several other state forestry agencies, the National Guard, volunteer firemen and several other agencies. Losses were estimated at $5 million with a suppression cost of $430,000.

In Texas, timber ranks second only to cotton in terms of gatewood value. A major concern is that the annual harvest exceeded growth in 1987 by 17%. This followed 1986 in which growth was exceeded by 5%.

Industry has become sufficiently concerned in recent years to fund a cost-share tree planting program for private landowners. This amounts to approximately $400,000 per year through the Texas Reforestation Foundation (TRe). Corporation assessments are based upon annual consumption.

One of the primary concerns in East Texas is the southern pine beetle. In 1985 the state experienced an epidemic that included 16,000 infestations. It had a drastic affect upon timber prices as well as landowner motivation for timber growing. For example, on the U.S. Forest Service Four Notch tract the southern pine beetle epidemic that destroyed 3,000 acres reduced the market value of timber from $150 per thousand board feet to $7, a severe impact on private landownerships adjacent to the Four Notch. Not only did they see a drastic drop in the market, but adjacent landowner tracts were infested by spb from the federal lands.

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The oak wilt disease of Central Texas encompasses approximately 50 counties of what is considered non-commercial forestland. However, the effect on wildlife habitat in the rural areas and the real estate values in cities like Austin, Kerrville and Bandera has been devastating. A suppression project is currently being conducted in three counties utilizing the trenching method of braking root grafts through live oak motts.

Urban forestry has had a significant impact in the metropolitan areas of Texas both for the urban environment and the agency's image statewide. For example, a $10,000 federal grant resulted in leveraging $125,000 for a major palm tree planting project in Galveston coordinated by the Texas Forest Service.

A new industry developed by the agency is that of shingles and shakes from Southern yellow pine. We now have two mills in the state producing this 30-year guaranteed wooden roofing material. A third mill is located in Missouri and the state of Virginia now has a mill under construction with a waiting order of 40,000 squares. Georgia has also been over to review the program and the Georgia Forestry Commission is using the syp shake on its new headquarters facility in Macon.

The wilderness issue continues to polarize the forestry community and environmental groups and state agencies in Texas. The red-cockaded woodpecker issue of protecting an endangered species has had a significant impact on harvesting on the National Forests (200,000 acres under protection by a federal judge) and will also affect harvesting on two of the small state forests which the agency manages.

Pesticide use will continue to be increasingly monitored as it should be. However, the emotional curtailment of aerial spraying of pesticides on our seed orchard has increased the costs, increased the safety hazard for employees and been less effective.

Thus, it appears that forestry in Texas is being restructured by environmental demands, the demand for timber products, urban needs, insect and fire impacts and the development of new products. It is hoped that economists throughout the South can provide their counsel in this increasingly complex equation.