

History of Capitol Forest – Published by DNR 1976

Tumwater and Olympia were the northern terminus of the Oregon Trail to which pioneers came in the 1840s and 1850s. Since an abundance of rich agricultural land in the river valleys made the forest-covered, more mountainous areas such as the Black Hills undesirable for homesteading, it wasn't until the 1880s and 1890s that these lands were recognized for their valuable timber.

During the 1920s and 1930s the small lumber "company" town of Bordeaux, on the southern edge of the Black Hills, supported some 300 to 400 people who lived there. As logging changed from manpower, to brute power, to steam power, lumbering companies like the Bordeaux Brothers' Mason County Logging Company, the Vance Lumbering Company and the Mud Bay Logging Company, built railroads into the Black Hills, established camps and logged the virgin timber. The great fires of 1902, 1910 and others took their toll of the forest, too.

By the mid-thirties it became evident to such far-sighted foresters as Ted Goodyear, State forester, and this assistant, L.T. "Mike" Webster, that Nature needed man's help to replant trees in the Black Hills. The state purchase 33,000 acres of logged over, burned over, "worthless" land for fifty cents an acre. Eventually, they put together more than 70,000 acres now known as Capitol Forest, which includes school land, gifts from companies and individuals, and delinquent tax (County Trust) land. It was planed under an intensified forest management program which has made the Capitol Forest prominent in the annals of forestry history. The certified tree farm movement came about 8 or 9 years later but the Capitol Forest holds its unique place as one among the first of rehabilitated forest in the west.

The Capitol Forest Tree Nursery was established in 1936 on Cedar Creek in the middle of the Black Hills to produce the seedlings needed to reforest the land. Later, in 1958, it was moved to its present location south of Tumwater. The Civilian Conservation Corps did much of the first planting of seedlings from 1938 to 1942, and, as a result, Capito Forest is producing – a "working" forest today. Some 14 million seedlings were planted in the counties of Thurston and Grays harbor with about half of that number planted in the Capitol Forest. Those seedlings are now contributing to the 7.5 billion board feet of timber growing there today.

The original state nursery at Cedar Creek assumed a new role in 1952 as a juvenile rehabilitation facility operated by the Washington State Department of Institutions (now the Department of Social and Health Services) jointly with the Department of Natural Resources providing the work program in the Capitol Forest Multiple Use Ara.

Until 1955 a closed gate policy in the Forest protected the reforestation efforts from possible forest fire damage. That year the gates were left open permanently for public recreational use which has grown steadily to the point where the Capitol Forest Multiple Use Area is a major recreational area.

It became the first multiple use area to be designated by the Department of Natural Resources for intensified management under the MUA concept.

An innovative trail use has been established in the Capitol Forest MUA. Approximately the southern half of the trail system has been set aside for horseback riding and hiking while the northern half of the trail system is developed for off road vehicle use. Since trailbiking is the single most prevalent use of Capitol

Forest, which is one of the more popular areas in western Washington for this type of recreation, a good deal of thought and planning has gone into the development of the trail system.

Hollywood Camp is the principal ATV facility which attracts many groups to the approximately 65 miles of trailbike trails built and maintained by ATV users and user-generated funds.

The most popular route for many trailbikers runs from Hollywood Camp to Porter Camp over the North Rim Trail.

Not only are trailbike trails paid for directly by the users through their gasoline tax but several trailbike volunteer groups have cooperated with the DNR in the development and maintenance of the system.