

The History of the Protection of Nature in National Forests

1. Forest reserves

National forests occupy about 30% of the forests in Japan, and most of these areas are distributed in hinterlands of alpine mountain areas. They include forests with a valuable natural environment, such as virgin forests and forests where rare wild fauna and flora live and grow. To keep these valuable forests in good condition and adequately preserve them, an original system of 'protected forests' for national forests was established by a mandate from the Director of the Forestry Agency in 1915. These protected forests played an important and leading role in the preservation of valuable fauna and flora, the preservation of scenic beauty, and the contribution to academic studies.

2. The history of the protected forest system

(1) Inauguration of the protected forest system (1915 - early in the Showa era)

Protected forests started as an original, internal, and voluntary system and contributed significantly to the preservation of nature as per the mandate of the Director of the Forestry Agency 'On the forest reserves' is issued on June 9, 1915. This was four years ahead of the "law to preserve, historic sites, places of scenic beauty and natural monuments" and 16 years ahead of the "national parks law."

Forests that have been categorized as protected forests and specially protected by this mandate are;

- 1) Virgin forests, quasi-virgin forests, and similar places. These are valuable grounds for scientific research or forest operations. (Scientific forest reserves)
- 2) Forests that are seen from trains, ships, and main roads and that are, indispensable in maintaining the scenic beauty of noted areas or that add something to those areas. (Forests of scenic beauty)
- 3) Forests that are indispensable in maintaining the scenic beauty of celebrated places and places with a rich history. (Forests of scenic beauty)
- 4) Forests that are indispensable in maintaining the scenic beauty of places for public entertainment or places that will become such an area in the near future. (Forests of scenic beauty)
- 5) Legendary and noted trees or trees that are not yet famous but are precious from the standpoint of shape, size, age, or kind of species, and that are valuable on the grounds of scientific research or forest operations.

- 6) District where alpine trees grow and that is indispensable for scientific research.
- 7) Indispensable places where birds or other animals breed that needs to be protected from the point of view of scientific research or for other purposes.
- 8) Specific species of plants used for medicine or industry, plants indispensable for the preservation of soil and stone that are necessary for scientific research or economic activities, or plants that are necessary for the breeding of fresh water animals.

Areas that fall into these eight categories are designated as forest reserves.

The first protected forest designated by this mandate was 10,907 ha of the Kamikochi area. It was designated in 1916 for the purpose of protecting alpine plants and was named the 'Kamikochi scientific protected forest.' In 1922, areas of what is the Mount Chubu national park were designated as the "Hakuba mountain range scientific protected forest." The "Takasegawa scientific protected forest" was established in 1925. In 1930, the "Tateyama mountain range scientific protected forest" and "Yarihodaka scientific protected forest" were established. Furthermore, the Hakusan protected forest was designated in 1920 and 1932, and the Towada lake/Oirase mountain stream protected forest and the Kirishima protected forest were designated in 1916. As of 1932, the number of protected forests totaled 93, occupying 108,000 ha.

When the first national parks were designated around 1934 - 1936, these protected forests formed the core of scenic beauty for these national parks. Protected forests in special areas such as special protection districts in national parks are re-designated from a forest reserve to a national park.

(2) Rapid period of economic growth (1955 - around 1970)

Due to the consolidation of forest administration in 1947, some forests in Hokkaido and Imperial forests were incorporated in the administration of the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry when these forests were designated as protected forests. In 1949, the number of protected forests totaled 121, occupying 81,368 ha; in 1959, the number of protected forests totaled 300, occupying 101,410 ha.

During this period, the elimination of protected forests increased and the area of protected forests decreased. This is due to the idea that protection measures by internal regulations had become unnecessary as designation by the National Parks Law and the Cultural Properties Protection Law progressed. At that time, the policy of forest administration changed from a forest resources maintenance policy to a policy of promoting lumber production. There were attempts to actively promote reforestation, backed by an abrupt increase in the demand for lumber and revolution in fuels as non-forested lands during the war were mostly reforested. The national demand at that time was the increased supply of wood from forests.

(3) Towards new forest operations (around 1970)

With the degeneration of the living environment due to increased pollution from the concentration of populations in cities, the expansion of urban areas, and changes in industrial structure accelerated by rapid economic growth, peoples' concern focused on the maintenance and promotion of public welfare with efforts like the conservation of forest land, maintenance of water resources, and preservation of the natural environment. Accordingly, forest policy changed its direction to achieving a balance between a forest's functions for public welfare and wood production.

The "New forest operations for national forests" were established in March of 1973. With the legislation, corresponding operations were conducted in national forests by decreasing clear cutting (a decrease and diffusion of cutting areas and a progressive increase in protected forest areas), increasing virgin forest operations in subalpine zones (a transition from clear-cutting operations to shelter/wood cutting operations or selective cutting operations), increasing the number of protected forests for the protection of valuable fauna and flora and for scientific research, and the establishment of recreational forests for the health and comfort of the people. Thus, a change in policy occurred in relation to national forests as part of active contribution to the promotion of a forest's functions for public welfare. The Forestry Agency has subsequently been carrying out operations according this concept. Due to the change in policy, the establishment of protected forests has increased and the area of protected forests totals 133,925 ha.

(4) Enhancement of opposition movements against the cutting of virgin forests (around 1975 - around 1990)

After the change, in national forestry policy to an expansion of the public welfare function as directed by the establishment of "New forest operations in national forests" in 1973, the national demand for natural protection in forests continued to increase. Around 1975, people's concern for protection of the natural environment increased again in connection with the management of trees in national forests and particularly the cutting of virgin forests. National disputes aroused people's concern for the cutting problem in national forests with the crosscut road construction around Shiretoko (1981, 1986, and the cutting of virgin forest), with protection of the Shirakami mountain range (1982, 1986, and construction of roads and cutting buna [Siebold's beech]), with protection of the Kakkonda river (1986 and protection of black the woodpecker), and so on.

This movement was provoked by a change in Japan's socioeconomic situation from "material riches" to "enriching the mind," a multiplication of demands on forests, a decrease, in hardwood due to the cutting of virgin forests, progress of large-scale reforestation, a decrease in primeval forests, conservation of primeval forests, and preservation of forest ecotypes including rare fauna and flora. This movement posed a question concerning how to treat the forest itself. Demand for the protection of ordinary forests, which do not have particular value like a primeval forest or

scientifically valuable habitation, began to be proposed by not only nature protection groups or local residents, but also by local municipalities.

(5) Inauguration of the Committee on Forestry and Natural Protection (1987)

People's concern increased with the confrontation of opinions between the demand for protection of primeval forests in national forests, provoked by the recent decrease in virgin forests, and economic demand for forestry. Under the circumstances, the Forestry Agency inaugurated a "Review Committee on Forestry and the Preservation of Nature" in October of 1987 and requested discussion on how to protect and manage forests from the point of view of adjustments for forestry and natural protection.

This committee issued a report in December of 1988 saying;

- 1) The Forestry Agency should establish a method of district classification in order to present the goals of forest protection and management in an easily understandable form, such as preservation of primeval forests, conservation of national land, forest recreation, and lumber production.
- 2) Today, the demand is increasing for the protection of forests, which is important for the preservation of the primeval natural environment, valuable fauna and flora, and genetic resources. Therefore, adequate protection and management should be rapidly examined and carried out for primeval forests before the completion of techniques for district classification.
- 3) For that purpose, the Forestry Agency should broaden and intensify the protected forest system for the preservation of forests, adopting the concept of a 'Forest Biosphere Reserves.' The core area of this forest biosphere consists of local primeval forests that represent main forest districts in Japan with a circumference surrounded by buffer zones.
- 4) For examination of the classification method by location for the Forest Biosphere Reserve, 12 specific districts where functions for national forests are preserved in a satisfactory condition such as the Shiretoko and Shirakami mountain ranges are included.

In addition 12 Forest Biosphere Reserve presented by the reviewing committee, 14 other locations such as the Hidaka mountain range and Ogasawara area were added in April 1991. A total of 26 locations had been decided as of 1995.

(6) Reorganization and expansion of protected forests (1989)

In accordance with the report of the reviewing committee, a mandate "on the reorganization and expansion of protected forests" was issued by the Director of the Forestry Agency on April 11, 1989. Thus, the former mandate on protected forests of 1915 was fundamentally revised.

Due to the new mandate on protected forests, protected forests are classified into seven categories by objective. They are the "Forest Biosphere Reserve," "Forest Bio-genetic Resources Preservation Forest," "Forest Tree Genetic Resources Preservation Forest", "Plant Community Protected Forest," "Specific Animal Habitat Protected Forest," "Specific Topography Protected Forest," and "Hometown Forest." As of April 1, 1998, there are 808 protected forests with a total area of 508,000 ha, which has greatly largely from the 167,000 ha before reorganization.

(7) Functional types of national forests and promotion of operational management corresponding to functional types (1991)

In accordance to the report of the Forestry Administration Council, issued in December 1990, the Forestry Agency revised "national forestry management policies" that stipulate the object, policy, etc. of national forest management in all aspects in July 1991. In contrast to the older policies that classify forests by local species, national forests are classified by functions which it is primarily expected to display that should be:

- 1) land conservation forest
- 2) nature preservation forest
- 3) forest for space utilization
- 4) lumber production forest

Functions for water conservation should be provided by all forests, and the display of specific functions for all types of forests should occur through adequate management control.

Under the classification due to function, protected forests are classified as a nature preservation forest, because this purpose is to preserve the forest ecosystem and to protect animals and plants.

(8) Operational management according to new functional classification (1998)

Due to the "Fundamental Plan for the Administration of National Forests" stipulated on December 25, 1998, each forest is classified by the function it is primarily expected to display in accordance with the change in policy for expansion of public welfare functions. Each forest is classified into one of three categories:

- 1) Forest for water and land conservation
- 2) Forest for human and nature
- 3) Forest for cyclic use of resources

By the new classification, forests that play an important role in the preservation of the natural environment, animals and plants, genetic resources, etc. are "forest for human and nature." For forests in this category, management is mainly for the preservation of the natural environment. Primeval forests and habitats of valuable animals and plants where preservation and management are necessary are classified as protected forests and intensively managed