

# Historical Considerations and Evolution of the Forest Policies for Small Woodlot Owners of Quebec

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In order to understand the present forest policies for the small woodlot of Quebec, it is essential to understand the history of settlement of Quebec. Following this brief description, the author introduces the various forest policies (programs) which have been initiated in Quebec by various levels of governments in order to deal with the management of these lands.

## Introduction

The small private forest land of Quebec covers an area of 55 000 km<sup>2</sup> (see map 1) which represents 10 % of the total productive forest land of the province. More than 92 % of this land is divided into plots smaller than 800 ha, the average forested area of these small properties is 45,9 ha and if we include the agricultural area it reaches 55,6 ha. These properties belong to a little less than 120 000 owners: of which 30 % are farmers; 50 %, professionals and specialized workers; and 20 %, retired people. The main production of these forests (80 %) consists of producing round wood (4 feet long) for the pulp and paper industries which accounts for 20 % of their total roundwood requirements.

In this paper, I will review some of the historical events, mainly the history of settlement in Quebec, which explains the creation of this private territory. This section will be followed by a brief review of the main policies which have been initiated since the 1940s up to now in dealing with the management of these lands.

## History of settlement in Quebec

In order to review the history of settlement in Quebec, I will use the model developed by Vattier (1928) – *Esquisse de la colonisation au Québec* – that I will complement with some other research.

In his model, Vattier divides the settlement of Quebec in three major periods, 1608 to 1760, 1760 to 1860, and 1860 to 1925. This latter period I will extend to the thirties.

### *1608–1760*

From the arrival in Québec of the first French settlers in 1608 to the conquest of this territory by the English in 1760, colonization was restricted to a narrow strip on each side of the St. Lawrence River and a few of its main tributaries (see map 2). At the time the main means of communication was along the water ways. It was important to be close to the water for canoeing during the summer and horse sleighs during the winter. The French had brought with them a feudal land tenure system called the seigneurial system.

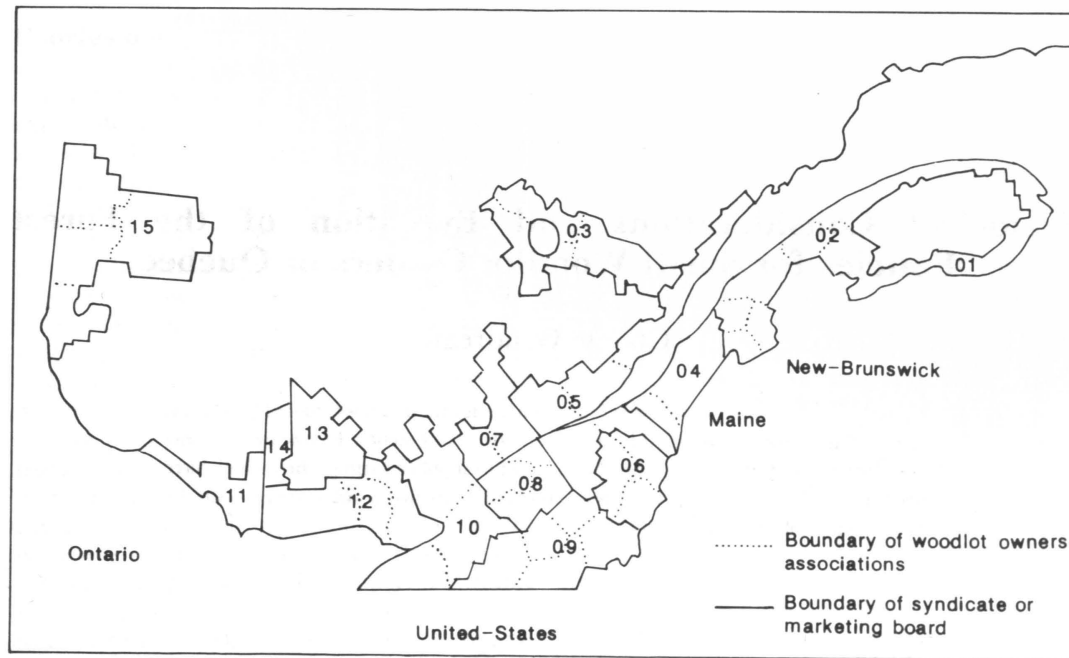


Figure 1. Territory of the small private forest in Quebec.

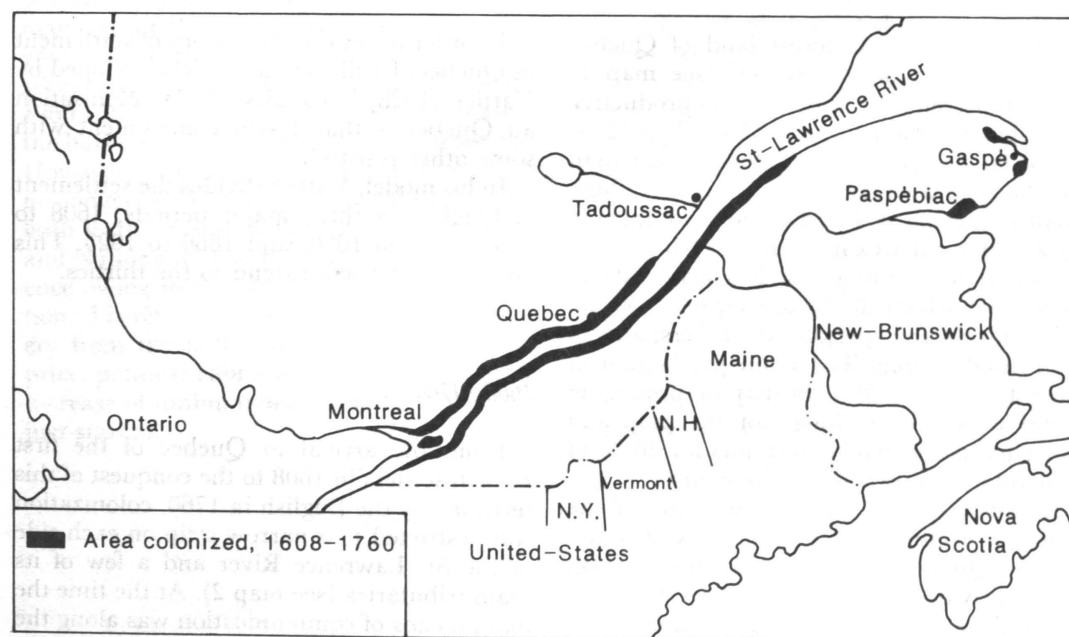


Figure 2. Colonization period, 1608–1760.

From 1608 to 1760, two hundred seigneuries were granted covering an area of 4 000 000 ha. The largest apart from the Anticosti Island in the St. Lawrence gulf was Mingan in the Saguenay region which was granted to Mr. Bissot in 1661. Its area covered 340 000 ha. The smallest seigneuries were only 15 ha, however most were few thousands.

In principle, the King of France delivered the seigneurial rights to the new Lord, but in practice, from 1608 to 1627, these rights were delivered by the New France Viceroy, from 1627 to 1663, it was the Company of New France followed by the Companies of the Western Indies from 1666 to 1674. Then, till 1760, it was the King's representative, the Governor or the Intendant.

This system provided the framework for the distribution of control over, and payment for land. Harris (1966) described the the Canadian seigneur as follows: "His admirers write of the seigneur as a leader who settled his censitaires' small disputes and calmed their anxieties and who was the fulcrum of a community which he had created and watched over with loving care; his deprecators write of him as a parasite who lived off royal appointments and gratifications and illegal dealings in the fur trade, while totally neglecting the welfare of his censitaires".

During this period, about 10 000 emigrants arrived and dispersed on the new continent. At the conquest by the English in 1760, the population has been estimated at 65 000 people, of which 8000 were living in Quebec, 800 in Trois-Rivieres and 4000 in Montreal (Vattier 1928). It became evident that these first settlers and their descendants were preoccupied with the conquest of this new continent. This had disastrous effects when the new colony needed to be protected against pretenders to the new territory.

Colonization during those 150 years had been slow and labored, mainly because the King of France gave the mandate to colonize this territory to the "Company of New France" and the "Company of the Western Indies". These companies were much more interested in the lucrative fur trading business, than establishing new settlers.

#### 1760–1860

Following their conquest in 1760, the English took control of all economic and political institutions. The French could only fall back on the land in order to assure their subsistence and to rebuild their economy.

As soon as they arrived, the English established a new land tenure called "Free and common soccage" and for awhile the new settlers had the choice between this system and the Seigneurial system established by the French. With this new system, the English introduced outside of the seigneuries already established a new concept for subdividing the territory. This new approach consisted in creating townships, a system still in force today. A township was 61 600 acres when it is inland and of 67 200 acres when it was located along a major river. Each township was divided in 7 sections, one of which was reserved for the Crown, another one for the Protestant Church, and the remaining five sections, which represented an area of between 44 000 to 48 000 acres, were distributed among the new settlers in parcels not larger than 200 acres.

The main distinction between the French and the English system is that the lands under the latter were directly conceded and without any other obligations on the part of the new settler. The new settler became owner of the land upon the payment of the cost of survey and the transmission of the property act. Esdras Minville (1943), a famous French Canadian interested in rural development, believed that this approach towards land concession had, and for a long time to come, put the French Canadian community in a disadvantageous situation vis-à-vis the new English settlers, mainly because the French settlers did not have any liquidity.

At the beginning of the 19th Century, the scarcity of space in the seigneuries made it more and more difficult for farmers to subdivide their land between the numerous children.

At the same time, the French Canadian community found itself in a very uncertain and confused situation. They were faced with the possibility of not only losing control of all political and socio-economic institutions, but in addition their language and religion. We also have to remember that just a few years

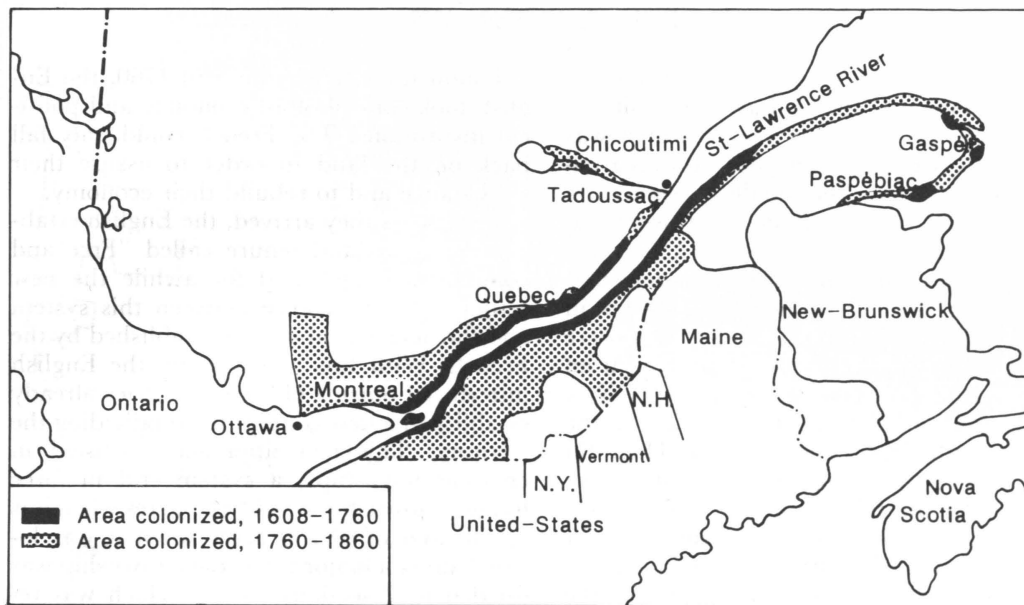


Figure 3. Colonization period, 1760-1860.

before (Fall 1755) the Acadian deportation took place.

Faced with this great insecurity and as a strategy for cultural survival, the French religious and civil elite of the time proposed to their peers to conquer the land outside of the seigneuries. The following regions were then colonized: North of Montreal, Gatineau, Saguenay/Lac St-Jean, Beauce, and the St-Hyacinthe and Gaspé Peninsula (see map 3). It is during this period (1834) that the "Fondation de la Société Nationale Saint-Jean Baptiste", a society devoted to the defense of French community rights was created. Their slogan was "Our language, our institution, our laws" and their keynote of policy "Take hold of the land".

At the end of this period, there were almost 200 000 farmers. The Church led this movement because of the lack of interest of the English, who like the French were more interested in the lucrative activities such as fur, wood, and fish trade.

#### 1860-1930

The colonization efforts initiated in the previous period intensified.

In addition to the forced fall back of the French Canadian society to protect their language and religion, new problems emerged such as the important migration of French Canadians to the Northeastern United States and a high level of unemployment. It is estimated that between 1850 and 1900, more than half a million French Canadians left Canada for the United States and more precisely Northeastern United States. Morrissonneu (1978) proposed some psycho-cultural explanation for this phenomenon. He suggested that these migrants were similar to the first settlers and their descendants, they were thrilled by the unknown, the adventure, and the unpredictable. On the other hand other authors proposed explanations which are a little bit less esoteric. They suggested that during this period, the French Canadian society was experiencing high unemployment both in urban and rural areas.

The unemployment in the rural areas was

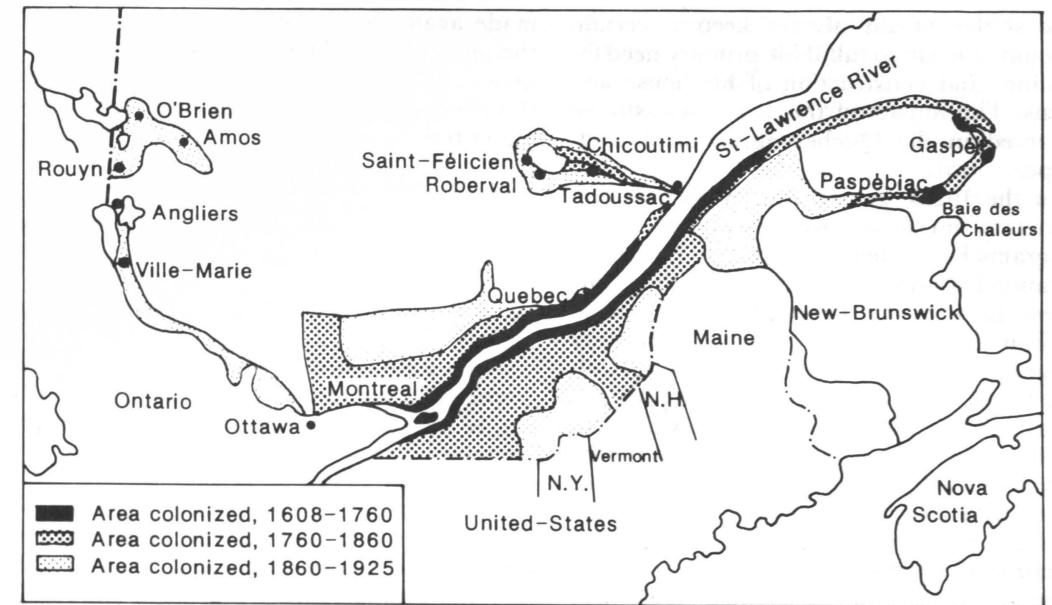


Figure 4. Colonization period, 1860-1925.

mainly caused by the large French Canadian families (ten to twenty children were common) thereby, land became scarce. It was almost impossible for fathers to establish their sons and offer them the same life-style.

Conscious of these problems, the religious elite with the collaboration of the civil elite took advantage of this context to propose that the French Canadians conquer the north. This is how the northern myth was created. This myth consisted of dreaming of a new land where they could regain control of all the institutions they had lost in 1760, and this way prevent assimilation. Stanislas Drapeau (1858) in a document forwarded to the French municipalities of Quebec described the essence of this myth in the following words:

"The time has come where we must push as far as possible the boundaries of the land on which we must settle in order to transfer to our descendants the land which has been discovered by our ancestors." (Morissonneau 1978)

It is during this period that a great number of settlers were established in Abitibi-Temis-

comingue, in the Outaouais, and in the Saguenay/Lac Saint-Jean region. Others moved toward the Eastern Townships, the Haute-Beauce, the Temiscouata and the Matapedia Valley (see map 4).

During this period, the state replaced the Church in the efforts to occupy the land. This take-over by the state was concretely materialized by the creation of the first Quebec Ministry of Agriculture in 1852, the Agricultural Merit Award in 1880, and the establishment of the Ministry of Colonization in 1888. It is following these events that we witness the first assistance program toward colonization at the beginning of the 20th century.

Going back to the first provincial laws written at the beginning of the 20th Century to regulate forestry practices on granted lands, I notice that a new settler was forced to keep at least 15 % of his land in forest production during the first twenty years following acquisition (Dussault 1942). The primary purpose of this law was to prevent speculators from acquiring a piece of land clearcutting then moving on elsewhere. The second purpose was to make sure that the

new settler would always keep a certain amount of wood to fulfill his primary need for heating, and construction of his house and barns. The impact of this law can easily be observed in the Quebec agricultural landscape.

In the 1920s, government programs with monetary incentives were initiated. These programs had either deforestation (land preparation for agriculture) or reforestation purposes. In 1923, for example, the provincial government of Quebec launched a subsidy program to promote the clearing of agricultural land. The subsidies for this program went from \$4./acre in 1923 to \$6./acre in 1924, to \$8./acre in 1925, to finally reach \$12./acre in 1926 (Garon 1940). During this period and more precisely in 1924, the farmers got together to create the Farmers Association of Quebec, which in the years to come became the official channel for farmers when dealing with the provincial government.

During the same period, in 1925, the government of Quebec passed its first reforestation law. This law stipulated that a subsidy of \$10./acre will be given to anyone who reforests his land. In addition to this subsidy, the settler would be given the seedlings, his property taxes would be frozen for the next thirty years. But on the other hand, the settler had to maintain his plantation for five years following planting (Minville 1944).

During the fiscal year 1925–1926, the government of Quebec spent \$143236 to promote creating agricultural land and \$12000 was used for reforestation (Vattier 1928, Minville 1944). These numbers help us understand where the governmental priorities were at that time. As previously mentioned, the major problems were high unemployment and mass migration to the northeastern United States.

On July 16, 1932, in order to create jobs and to generate economic activity following the economic crash of 1929, the government of Quebec signed in Ottawa, one of its first federal-provincial agreements dealing with rural development. This agreement is known as the "Gordon plan" (Rapport annuel, Ministère de la colonisation, 1933). In this agreement federal and provincial governments along with interested municipalities agreed to subscribe \$600, of which \$500 was

made available in the first year, to "settle" the unemployed. This \$600 was equally paid by each of the contractants. To be eligible to this program, settlers had to fulfill the following criteria:

- to be unemployed;
- to be on public assistance or on the verge of becoming so;
- to have a rudimentary agricultural experience;
- to be in good health together with the members of his family;
- to have a good physical constitution appropriate for colonization work; and
- to be courageous, hard working, frugal and other necessary qualities of a settler.

These historical considerations help understand why, when, and how the small private forest land of Quebec were created. Cultural survival, unemployment, migration and rural population growth all played important roles. The life of the small mixed farming habitant was a mode of subsistence of last resort and, at the same time, a cultural icon.

#### Forest policies for small woodlot owners

One of the first actions taken by the government in dealing with the small woodlot owners was the set up in 1941 of the Renault Commission (Ministere de la . . .).

This Commission had the mandate to inquire among the farming community about their concerns for marketing wood with the large pulp and paper industries. At the time, farmers felt that they could not negotiate a fair price for their wood with big corporations.

The following year, on June 11, 1942, the government of Quebec established the Forest Extension Service. This new office was attached to the forest economic section of the Quebec Ministry of Lands and Forests, and its objective was to promote rational forest management on the small woodlot properties. According to the Land and Forest Annual Report of 1942–1943, its principal tasks were to inform the 200 000 forest owners on the various techniques of how to treat their forest

Table 1. Variation in the number of farmers and the woodlot owners.

Year	Number of farmers	Number of woodlot owners
1891	217 000	217 000
1911	204 000	
1920	143 000	
1941	150 000	200 000
1951	135 000	
1961	91 000	
1971	61 000	
1981	38 000	
1985	30 000	~125 000

and maple sugar bush so that they produce on a sustained yield basis. Other tasks were to help the forest owners in marketing their forest products and to help them in their reforestation efforts. In 1965, this office became the "Rural Forestry Service" and it was regionalized in 1969 when the Ministry of Lands and Forests opened its regional offices. It had a staff of twenty foresters.

The next step taken was in the wood marketing area. In 1956, the Agricultural Products Marketing Act (Gazette Officielle . . .) was adopted which created the Marketing Office of Agricultural Products.

This new law also conferred on wood whose provenance was from small woodlot the status of an agricultural product and allowed the woodlot owners to form marketing boards. Fifteen were created in the beginning of the sixties.

Practically at the same time, the government of Quebec instituted the "Forestry Merit Award" in order to recognize and stimulate good forest management among small woodlot owners.

In 1961, the government of Canada adopted the ARDA law, which had been initiated to help rural areas promote economic activities in order to raise their standard of living (Fournier 1972).

We can see that this law had a major impact on future forest policies for small woodlot owners in Quebec during the following twenty-five years, starting in the Bas Saint-Laurent/Gaspésie region. It allowed for

the creation of a non-profit organization "Bureau de l'aménagement de l'est du Québec (BAEQ), financed by both the federal and provincial governments but only reporting to the latter. The main goal of this office was to elaborate a strategic plan for economic development in this territory the Bas Saint-Laurent/Gaspésie.

At the time, the unemployment in this region was twice as high as the provincial average and the production per capita was twice as low. The personal income was \$716/per capita of which one third already came from the State and was almost half of the average income in Quebec \$1383/per capita (Fournier 1972).

The strategic plan for economic development was to bring this region to the same level as the rest of the province by 1982.

In 1965, a green paper on forest policy was published. In this paper, the government of Quebec proposed to create a rural forestry service.

In July 1966, the BAEQ in its final report presented the various scenarios which have been proposed to stimulate the economy. For forest resources, it has been recommended to:

- regroup areas;
- zone the forest territory;
- prepare forest management plans;
- create demonstration forests;
- set up experimental forests;
- set up elementary forestry teaching centers; and
- create forest farms.

These propositions were well received but with no special enthusiasm. It wasn't until a few years later that the community began to realize that some of the recommendations of the final report of the BAEQ included closing some of the villages and relocating the population to larger urban centers along the St. Lawrence River (Banville 1977).

At the end of the sixties and the beginning of the seventies, the population realized that they would have to move out of their villages and they reacted violently opposing the closures. Faced with this situation, the provincial government was forced to come up with other suggestions so that economic development could take place. Various programs had been tried: Operation Dignite I, II, III, the



creation of farm forests, and finally it was suggested to set up woodlot owners associations (WOA). All these measures were intended to favor and to stimulate regional economic development through the use of the forest resources.

During the seventies and early eighties, the number of the WOA went from 0 in 1970 to 44 in 1985 all because of the governmental program which created and supported them. The support for these organizations was officially recognized in the forest policy presented by the Quebec government in 1971-1972.

During the same decade, the forestry credit law appeared. This law allowed small woodlot owners and private companies to borrow money at a lower interest rate to purchase forested land, equipment, materials or labor to practice forest management of their properties. This program has been in operation since 1976 under the responsibility of the Quebec Farm Credit Bureau.

In 1978, the Minister of Lands and Forests set up a task force with the mandate to study forest management activities on small private forests in Quebec and to propose solutions to the Minister. This task force produced a voluminous report known as the Paillé Report (Paillé 1976) which contained several recommendations.

The following year was characterized by some rearrangements of programs justified by efficiency criteria, bureaucratic reduction and, the introduction of economic criteria in the amount of subsidies given for forest management.

No new program has been initiated during the eighties apart from the "Plan de l'Est". This program was initiated in 1983-1984 by the Government of Canada as part of the Economic Development plan for the Bas Saint-Laurent/Gaspésie. Its objective was to help small woodlot owners which were not members of the Woodlot owners Association. Also during this period, the government of Quebec started special projects, such as the creation of private nurseries, of bio-physical and socio-economic regional profiles, and of regional forest management plans in addition to subsidies to individual owners interested in forest management.

In 1983-1984, the government of Quebec decided to set up the Lortie commission to

study the future of small woodlot properties. The final report of this commission proposed reorienting subsidies from woodlot owners association to individual woodlot owners which is supported by the new forest policy deposited in June 1985.

Following a change of government in December 1985 the province of Quebec is presently preparing a new forest policy for both private and public lands.

## Conclusion

In this presentation, I have tried to present how private small forest land emerged and briefly described the various programs which have been initiated over the years.

I intentionally avoided commenting on the pertinence, the success, the failure, or the difficulties of the implementation of these programs since any worthwhile evaluation must be put in its context and address the whole system. We must stop believing in miracles or in an instant truth developed in time of crisis.

In our time, any government intervention in any sector must be guided by past experience but never must we copy closely our solutions of present and future on the past. The small private woodlot will fully play its socio-economic role in the future if we are sufficiently perceptive and intuitive in identifying the leverages and factors which will allow its full development.

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Total of 13 references