

# The History of Ohio Forest Management

The American forestry movement started in 1875 with the creation of the **American Forestry Association**. Seven years later, the first American Forest Congress was held, creating the momentum to preserve and restore the nation's forests. Ohio was at the forefront of this movement, creating a state forestry agency in 1885.

Ohio's **Division of Forestry** established a forestry station on the grounds of The Ohio State University. They found that Ohio's forests – virtually all of which were privately owned – were in poor condition and nowhere near as forested as it was 100 years earlier with only 10 percent of the state with forest cover. The legislature amended the Ohio Constitution in 1912 to allow for the creation of a forest reserve system and to pass laws encouraging the propagation and cultivation of forestry on all lands.

In 1949, the **Ohio Department of Natural Resources** was created along with the consolidation of recreation areas under the newly created **Division of Parks**. The “forest-park” areas managed by the Division of Forestry were combined with the Canal Lands from the Department of Public Works to create a new state park system. And in 1965, the Division of Reclamation teamed up with the Division of Forestry to take responsibility for badly damaged strip-mined land in desperate need of rehabilitation.

Reforestation became a viable method for the reclamation of abandoned mine lands and for grassland-reclaimed sites. It involves preparing a top soil layer and planting two types of trees: one for early succession species for wildlife and soil stability, and another to produce a commercially valuable crop for “logging”. This became an economical alternative to traditional reclamation, which returned the land into pastures.

Since 1982, over 6.5 million trees on 5,400 acres of privately owned land, barren or poorly vegetated spoil banks, strip mines and abandoned coal refuse piles have been planted to return land into thriving forests. Approximately 66 percent of the trees planted in Ohio have been inoculated with a naturally occurring fungus that enables the tree to tolerate a low soil pH, drought conditions, and high spoil temperatures increasing the tree's ability to absorb water and nutrients. This inoculation has resulted in a seedling survival rate of 75 percent in a very harsh mine spoil land.

The environmental movement of the early 1970s paved the way with public demand for protection of natural areas with botanical and wildlife significance, and led to the creation of “natural areas” on some state forest lands. Public interest for this type of protection expanded and these unique habitats were transferred to the **Division of Natural Areas & Preserves**.

Today, the Division of Forestry's management has broadened to ensure that other natural resource values, including soil and water quality, endangered species, wildlife habitat, and back-country recreation, are protected or enhanced. The ODNR indicates that state forests are more than timber and a haven for recreation, they are a habitat for almost 100 endangered species, and home to some of the oldest tended trees in the United States. However, it is also important to note that more than 400 million board feet of forest products have been removed and processed over the last 50 years through forestry operations. The current value of the revenue to the state for these products removed are in excess of \$100 million.