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PUBLIC AND PRIVATE FOREST LANDOWNERSHIP IN THE PACIFIC NORTHWEST SHOWS STABILITY

by

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Ownership of forest land in the Douglas-fir and ponderosa pine subregions of Oregon and Washington shows little change over the past two decades, according to Forest Survey inventories made in the 1930's, 1945, and 1953. Prior to 1945, some shifting of the ownership pattern occurred, with the area of private forest land decreasing and public ownership increasing. However, since 1945 the change between public and private ownership has been negligible (figure 1).

Private ownership was subject to greatest dislocation during the depression years of the 1930's. Between the inventories made in the 1930's and 1945, approximately 1,500,000 acres of private land reverted to public ownership. In addition to the unfavorable economic conditions of that period resulting in forfeiture of lands for taxes, there were other factors that contributed to the reversion of private land to public ownership. Chief among these was a lack of understanding by owners of the objectives of continuous forest management. As a result, timber stands were liquidated without regard for future forest crops. Also, inadequate fire protection discouraged forest management and burned areas frequently reverted to public ownership. An example of this occurred following the Tillamook and Wolf Creek fires in 1933, where approximately 200,000 acres of private land, largely burned over, reverted to county and State ownership by 1945.

By the early 1940's many of the factors causing reversion had been removed through improved economic conditions, a growing awareness of forests as a renewable crop, and better fire protection. By 1953 the proportion of private forest land was increasing.

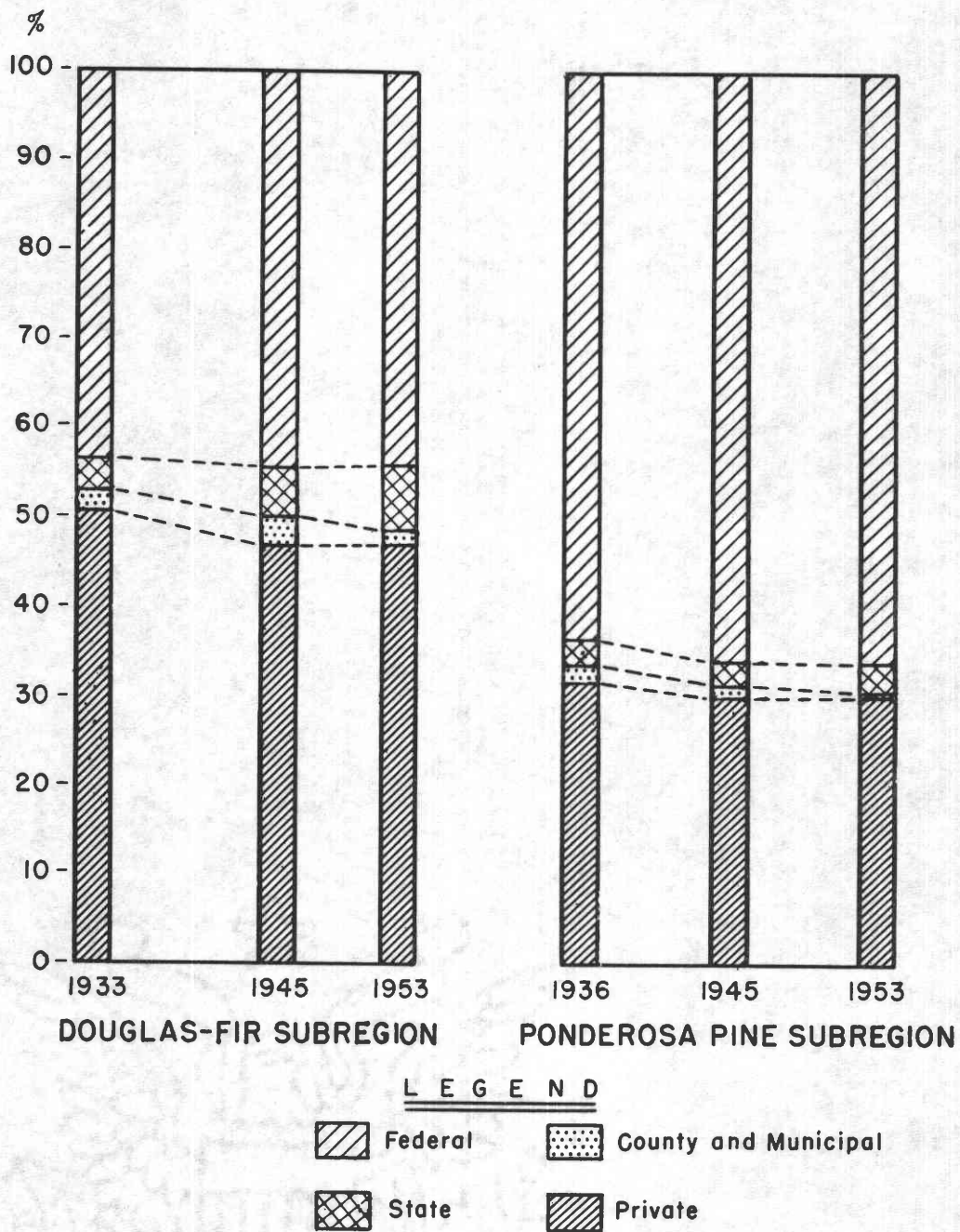


Figure 1-- Forest Ownership 1933 (1936), 1945 and 1953

County ownership of forest land has been subject to considerable fluctuation, increasing as private lands reverted and decreasing as these lands returned to either private ownership or to the State. County ownership decreased almost 900,000 acres between 1945 and 1953. Municipal ownership, which is small, is included with county figures.

Ownership of forest land by the State increased by 1 million acres in the Douglas-fir subregion between 1933 and 1953. Much of this increase was accomplished through legislation which allowed the States, at the option of the county, first opportunity to acquire tax delinquent land.

Federal ownership in the two decades between inventories increased by about 300,000 acres in the Douglas-fir subregion and in the ponderosa pine subregion by about 850,000 acres, most of which resulted through exchanges of cutover private forest land for Federal timber. However, exchanges gradually became less significant and by 1953 had virtually ceased. In recent years, acquisition of forest land by Federal agencies has been negligible.

Forest landownership in Oregon and Washington in 1953 was as follows:

<u>Owner</u>	<u>Douglas-fir subregion</u>	<u>Ponderosa pine subregion</u>
	<u>Thousand acres</u>	
Private	13,583	7,518
County and municipal	466	92
State	2,040	775
Federal	<u>12,958</u>	<u>16,697</u>
Total	29,047	25,082