

Chapter 3-14

Forests and Forestry

Abstract

The forests that cover roughly half of the prefectural land play a wide diversity of roles such as watershed cultivation that fosters the waters of Lake Biwa.

To ensure the sustained effectiveness of these functions, the Shiga Prefectural Government has formulated ordinances and basic planning for forest conservation and promotes both policies aimed at the independent promotion of forestry and policies from the perspectives of environmental focus and the cooperation of the prefectural population utilizing prefectural taxes levied for forest conservation.

Keywords: Lake Biwa, Environmental focus, Cooperation of the prefectural population

1. Lake Biwa and Forest Conservation

The forests of Shiga Prefecture, combining artificial woodlands planted with varieties of tree such as cedar and Japanese cypress and natural woodlands featuring varieties such as Japanese red pine, konara oak and Japanese beech blend with Lake Biwa to provide seasonal scenery.

In addition, these forests and woodlands represent an important water source for the lake and also fulfill such roles as providing sites for lumber production, the prevention of global warming, conservation of prefectural land and the provision of habitats for all kinds of fauna and flora. These woodlands cover roughly half of the prefectural land, with artificial and natural forests accounting for approximately 40% and 60% respectively.

To ensure the maintenance of healthy forests for the future, the Shiga Prefectural Government formulated the "Ordinance for Lake Biwa Forestation" in 2004. As well as this, strategic projects for the tangible promotion of policies are set in the "Basic Plan for Lake Biwa Forestation" to realize the concept of this ordinance which are announced after examination and assessment of the status of project progress every fiscal year and reviewed every five years. Undertakings during the five years from 2010 are based on the theme of "Urgent improvement of the

system for the stable supply of lumber produced in the prefecture and promotion of the conservation and improvement of forests through measures to secure forests as a source of absorption to prevent global warming."

2. Implementation of the Basic Plan and Restoration of Forestry

Implementation of the basic plan is based on the following two forest conservation initiatives.

2.1 Promotion of Forest Conservation through "Environmental Focus" and "Cooperation of the Prefectural Population"

2006 saw the beginning of implementation of forest conservation utilizing prefectural taxes levied for forest conservation from the two perspectives of environmental focus and the cooperation of the prefectural population, and various approaches have been undertaken including support for forest conservation activities by entities such as NPOs, intensive periodic thinning of neglected artificial woodlands, the improvement of countryside forests called "Satoyama" and projects such as the "Yamanoko (Children of the Mountains)" initiative to provide education on forest environments.

2.2 Encouraging Forest Conservation through Independent Forestry Promotion

In common with the rest of the country, many of the artificial forests planted and cultivated in Shiga Prefecture after the Second World War have reached maturity, and a dramatic increase in the amount of usable forest resources is foreseen in the future. In addition, changes are taking place in the world of lumber imports such as growing demand for lumber from emerging nations and problems with tariffs in exporting countries. And opportunities to use domestic lumber are prompted by circumstances such as the increasing amount of domestically-produced lumber used by major factories that produce plywood using lumber produced overseas.

On the other hand, seen from a nationwide perspective, the amount of raw materials (logs) produced in Shiga Prefecture is low. The use of lumber not only enriches our lives, but also plays a supporting role for the vitalization of forest-

improvement activities such as periodic thinning, the vitalization of villages in the mountains through increased employment and undertakings aimed at realizing a low-carbon society. The promotion of forestry encourages the promotion of forest conservation.

For this reason, to enable the low-cost stable supply of lumber produced within the prefecture, initiatives need to be undertaken including mechanization and the streamlining of work-route networks, reductions in production costs through steps such as the consolidation of forestry sites, appropriate classification matched to applications and quality, reduction in logistics costs through direct shipment to plants such as plywood producing factories, the building of work-route networks and training of human resources to secure personnel for the high-performance forestry machinery operators.

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Fig. 3-14-2 Felling and transporting using high-performance forestry machinery



Fig. 3-14-3 Properly managed artificial forest

Watershed Cultivation Function: Function fulfilled by accumulation of rainfall in the soil in forests, thereby averaging the amount of water that flows into rivers and mitigating floods, hence stabilizing river flow. In addition, the passage of rainwater through the soil in forests purifies the water.

Periodic Thinning: The felling and removal of some of the standing timber that has grown and become congested. This term refers to the felling of trees with the aim of improving the value of standing timber for usage and promotes the maintenance of the functions of the forest. Felled trees are referred to as thinned timber.