

Arthur A. Wood



Arthur A. Wood was born on a farm in the vicinity of Lost River State Park, in Hardy County, West Virginia. He started in the U.S. Forestry Service as a temporary forest guard on the Monongalia National Forest in the spring of 1913. That fall, he passed the “Forest Ranger” examination, the very first person in the Eastern United States to do so. Then, with the proper credentials in hand, he was promoted to Assistant Ranger, Ranger, and then Senior Ranger on the Potomac District. In 1925, he became Assistant Supervisor of the Shenandoah National Forest; and in 1931, Supervisor of the Monongahela National Forest.

When Arthur Wood became administrator of the Monongahela National Forest, it was known, desirably, in forestry circles as the “Monongahela National Briar Patch.” Little wonder! It was a 250,000—acre wasteland. Most of the forestland has been recently harvested, and most of it had been seared by ground fires that burned down to bare rock or mineral soil. It was a discouraging prospect for any forester to face.

But Arthur Wood went quietly to work with professional skill, complete integrity, and abundant tact as his guiding principles. He recognized his unique opportunity: his was the only national forest in the country dominated by hardwoods. So, he set out to make the Monongahela a showcase of hardwood forestry, and over the years he succeeded in a magnificent way. He proved to adjacent landowners that good forestry practiced pay dividends; and during his administration, an additional 550,000 acres were purchased and included.

When in the early 1930's, a forestry program was being developed at West Virginia University, Arthur Wood became a tower of strength in support of the new venture. His beliefs convinced others and his sage advice was always available. When the Division of Forestry at West Virginia University became a reality with a two-year school in 1935, he was credited with having been the major force for its establishment. He is spoken of as the “father” of the School. Later, he worked hard to get it changed to a four-year program.

One of Division's early needs was for a summer camp where students could practice timber management practices, logging, and lumbering, land surveying, and other related activities. After the four-year program started, he made sure that the faculty has the pick of any of the eight abandoned Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) camps. He helped select one at Neola in Greenbrier County. It was later named Camp Wood. He also made another CCC facility, Camp Thornwood, available for the Pocahontas County 4-H Camp. The National Youth Science Camp has also used this facility since 1963.

The famous Cranberry Glades in Pocahontas County was a forest feature near to Arthur Wood's heart. He was determined that it be protected and preserved and, after a long effort, he succeeded in having the Glades proclaimed a “natural area” where disturbances would be kept to a minimum and the wet area little disturbed. Arthur Wood was a diplomat and he provided it time and time again as he worked with farmers to acquire land to expand his forest. He was technically competent and one of the very first to use the multiple-use concept of forest management, a practice that was later congressionally mandated. He was politically knowledgeable, as he proved by his cooperative efforts with other agencies and by convincing the Legislature and University to establish a forestry school and the Federal Government to donate facilities. He developed the “Warden System” of forest protection as applied to forest fire control, and he nurtured this system until it was eventually used throughout the region.