

Appendix C.  
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SECOND GROWTH DOUGLAS FIR FOLLOWS CESSATION OF INDIAN FIRES

By F. L. Moravets, Pacific Northwest For. Exp. Sta.

Whidby Island, once largely deforested by the Indians' repeated "light burning", is now well forested with second growth Douglas fir. It is a striking example of the ability of Douglas fir quickly to reclaim lands long scourged by fire, after the periodic burning ceased. This was noted by the author in the course of type mapping Island County, Washington, in connection with the Forest Survey of the Douglas Fir Region.

This island, the second largest in Continental United States, is approximately 110,000 acres in area. The greater portion of the island is covered with even-aged stands of second growth Douglas fir, most of which range from 65 to 80 years in age. In practically all of these stands no evidence of previous occupation by old growth Douglas fir was to be found and apparently the areas had been deforested at one time.

This assumption was verified by questioning Charlie Snakelum, the oldest and probably the last survivor of the Indians who occupied the island before the white men came. Old Charlie, over 90 years of age, antedates the second growth stands, and still retaining full possession of his faculties, can plainly recall conditions on the island in his boyhood. Like many aborigines, he has a remarkable memory but, unlike others, he is quite garrulous.

Many of the Puget Sound Indians used the island for a hunting ground and it was also the location of an annual "potlatch" attended by many of the neighboring tribes. Deer were plentiful and large portions of the island were burned over annually to make better hunting. Charlie recalls the time when areas now forested were treeless grass plains. The white settlers located on the better soil from 1850 to 1860 and repeated history by gradually driving the Indians out, stopping the practice of light burning. A scattering stand of relict firs provided seed, and, with the strong prevailing winds disseminating the seed, the denuded areas were soon reclaimed.

Charlie pointed out one area of considerable size slashed by him for a white settler some fifty years ago, which was abandoned after a few years and now supports a dense stand of 40-year old fir. This same condition may be observed on many of the larger islands of Puget Sound, other parts of Washington, and in the Willamette Valley, Oregon.

Practically all of the forest area of these islands was found to be of low site, sites IV and V predominating; consequently, growth is slow, the stands densely stocked, and thinning a slow process. It is not uncommon to find 70-year old trees only four inches in diameter and forty feet high. Stump rot is common in the young stands and what mature trees are found are likely to be defective and wind-skaken. At present the principal use of these stands is fuel wood for lime kilns operating on some of the islands. The young stands can be utilized to some extent for piling.