LOGGING ADJACENT TO WALNUT CANYON AND SUNSET CRATER VOLCANO NATIONAL MONUMENTS

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This document has been prepared as an overview and does not represent an exhaustive search of the lumber industry activities as they developed over the past century in and around Flagstaff, Arizona. This document does represent a search of documents available at the Cline Library Special Collections including the Arizona Lumber and Timber Company and the Saginaw and Manistee Lumber Company records and maps. Documents surveyed for this project also include recent timber atlases (1950s-1970s) of the Coconino National Forest held by Forester Dick Stephens, and historic timber atlases (1910-20s) held by Forest Archeologist Peter Pilles. Pat Stein’s Logging Railroads of the Coconino and Kaibab National Forests and Platt Cline’s They Came to the Mountain were also consulted. More recent atlases for the Peaks Ranger District could not be located; consequently, timber harvesting and thinning projects from the 1980s forward are not included in this survey.

Logging has always played a significant role in Flagstaff’s economy employing at times half of the town’s population (Stein 1993). Intensive logging began in northern Arizona in the 1880s, coinciding with the development of the transcontinental railway (Stein 1993). The railway created an enormous market for lumber locally and nationally that lasted well into the 1930s. By 1940 the majority of “good” timber had been harvested from the Coconino and Kaibab National Forests and the industry was in decline.

Several logging companies were in operation during Flagstaff’s formative years, but the Arizona Lumber and Timber Company (AL&T) owned and operated by the Riordan family conducted the majority of logging around Walnut Canyon and Sunset Crater Volcano National Monuments. By the latter part of the nineteenth century the AL&T negotiated rights to almost all of the timber owned near Flagstaff by the Atlantic and Pacific Railroad (868 alternating sections) (Stein 1993). In 1897 the AL&T purchased the Greenlaw Lumber Company, located near the present Flagstaff Mall (the mill had been in operation since 1886) (Cline 1976). The AL&T used the Greenlaw mill for cutting areas north, northeast and south of the mill (this includes the areas adjacent to the monuments). It’s probably safe to assume that the Greenlaw brothers were cutting in areas near Walnut Canyon prior to the purchase of the company by the AL&T. A 1912 timber atlas identifies an area near the monument as being “cut over several years before”.

The AL&T also operated the Central Arizona Railway (CAR) from 1889-1937. The railway was used to access stands of timber quickly and cost effectively. Stands that were difficult to access were passed over. Figures 11 and 12 show the CAR grades adjacent to Sunset Crater Volcano and Walnut Canyon National Monuments. The AL&T logged the area around Walnut Canyon using the railway between 1922 and 1923. The AL&T logged Lenox Crater and adjoining areas of Sunset Crater Volcano using the railway in 1916 and 1917.
Prior to 1910 the Forest Service provided no management of timber stands and it can probably be assumed that timbered areas were clear-cut. By 1910 forest management practices dictated that at least two mature trees per acre be left to promote forest regeneration. These areas are described in the timber atlases as “cutover”.

It appears that no logging occurred around the monuments in the 1930s and 1940s. Timber sales conducted in the 1950s and 1960s on Coconino National Forest lands adjacent to or near the monuments were primarily salvage logging operations or timber sales that focused on dead or dying trees (Dick Stephens, Personal Communication). Several sales were conducted around the monuments and within the boundaries identified by the vegetation mapping study between the 1950s and the 1970s. Timber from the Burnt Fire (1974) south, west, north and northwest of Sunset Crater Volcano was also salvaged as part of a sale, but is not mapped here.

It’s interesting to note that between the 1970s and 1980s the Coconino National Forest was harvesting well over 100 million board feet of timber annually. Today the forest practices ecosystem management and is harvesting approximately 20 million board feet annually.
Reference Cited

Cline, Platt

Stein, Pat

Timber Atlases

Cline Library Special Collections: Arizona Lumber and Timber Company and the Saginaw and Manistee Lumber Company records and maps.


Personal Communication

Dick Stephens, Forester, Coconino National Forest, Supervisor’s Office.

Mike Bathen, Marking Foreman, Mormon Lake District, Coconino National Forest.
Figure 12. Greenlaw South line

Scale: 1 inch = 2 miles
Figure 11. Greenlaw North line

Scale: 1 inch = 2 miles