CHAPTER 5

The Triumph of State Forestry, 1748–1754

Ensenada’s Push for Peace and Naval Revival, 1743–1748

From 1737 to 1739, the Marqués de la Ensenada oversaw a program of forest reconnaissance in nearly all forests within accessible range of Spanish naval shipyards to determine their suitability for shipbuilding. The scale and urgency of the forest reports were unprecedented and appeared to signal a new commitment from the crown to fulfill Ensenada’s desire to strengthen Spanish naval power. However, during the War of Jenkin’s Ear and the War of Austrian Succession (1739–1748), the institution charged with overseeing the Spanish navy’s forest inspections, the Almirantazgo (Admiralty), effectively dissolved, and Ensenada left for Italy in 1742 with the former Almirante (Admiral), Prince Felipe. Ensenada returned to Spain after the death of the prime minister José del Campillo in 1743, and was soon appointed secretary of Finance, War, Navy, and the Indies, becoming Spain’s new prime minister in practice. Ensenada found it difficult to achieve anything with a king entrenched in a war that was draining military resources in Italy.

The death of King Felipe V (1700–1746) came two years before peace and Ensenada wasted no time in presenting the new king, Fernando VI (1746–1759), with his proposals for reform and his pleas to put an end to the war. Ensenada addressed foreign relations, the state of the royal treasury, and Spanish government and power. Primarily, Ensenada wanted a single tax based on income, and a stronger state bolstered by an enhanced navy. At the end of Felipe V’s reign, Ensenada was able to increase the traditional range of coastal forest inspections from two leagues to fourteen leagues from the sea or a navigable river, and in 1745, he ordered a general report on forests from all three departments, the first single representation of forest conditions near all the coasts of Spain.

2 Archivo General de Simancas (Hereafter, AGS), Secretaría del Despacho de Marina (Hereafter, Marina), legajo (Hereafter, leg.) 571, Madrid, July 17, 1742. Some towns disputed the royal order. Town officials in Osuna claimed that their forests were more than fourteen leagues from the sea. The crown responded by saying that while the town was seventeen leagues from Seville, which was a port, and therefore within the navy’s forest jurisdiction. AGS, Marina, leg. 571, April 24, 1747.
Spain, but forests continued to show signs of rapid depletion. To persuade Fernando VI that Spain required peace to generate the finances to build up its navy, he wrote numerous well-reasoned memoranda. For example, in 1747 he wrote, “There is no power in the world that is in greater need of maritime forces than Spain; it is a peninsula, and has to protect its vast American possessions.” Having a large navy, Ensenada argued, would make Spain a pivotal player in European politics once again.

On January 31, 1748, King Fernando VI issued one of Ensenada’s most ambitious measures, the Ordenanza para el aumento y conservación de montes y plantíos (Ordinance for the increase and conservation of forests and plantations). Forest conservation was part of a larger body of reforms designed to increase state control over Spain’s resources, but it is fair to say that it was among Ensenada’s top priorities, because it was among his earliest legislative achievements and it related directly to his mission of naval resurgence. This chapter places the January 1748 forest conservation ordinance in historical context and argues that while it emerged from Bourbon reformism, most of its goals and methods retained a close connection to Habsburg legislative and methodological precedents. Many of the articles in the January 1748 ordinance differed little from their seventeenth century counterparts. However, the degree of territoriality represented by the ordinance was new, with important implications for the future. Due to its link with the goals and methods of the past, the implementation of the forest ordinance under Ensenada can be viewed as a triumph for state forestry, which had been designed principally to accommodate the immediate interests of naval supply by maximizing accessibility to suitable shipbuilding resources for the long term. Then, the chapter examines other pieces of forest legislation issued by the crown between 1748 and 1751. In this time, the crown extended the principles of naval forestry to the interior, no longer limiting the ordinances to twenty-five leagues from the coast or navigable rivers. Some resistance to the new legislation, examined in the next section, occurred from all over Spain, particularly where the rules of naval forestry were completely new. Naval administrators produced numerous forest reports from both the interior provinces and the coastal naval

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3 AGS, Marina, leg. 571, “Estado por mayor de los árboles se han encontrado existentes en los montes de los tres departamentos.”
4 AGS, Marina, leg. 554, Guarnizo, May 28, 1744, Don Juan de Rebollar, “Sobre talas hechas en las montes de la Montaña: y la necesidad de remediar este daños.”