Prior to large scale deforestation efforts of the late 1800s to early 1900s in the valley and surrounding area, hardwood forests consisted of primarily *Picea rubens* (red spruce), *Tsuga canadensis* (eastern hemlock) and *Betula alleghaniensis* (yellow birch). The understory was dominated by *Rhododendron maximum* (rhododendron), making the land practically impassable wherever it occurred (Rives, 1898). Red Spruce in the area grew to a height of 18 to 27 m and .5 to 1 m in diameter. The largest reportedly had a diameter of more than 2 m and produced 5 m logs (Clarkson, 1964)

Lumber industry in Davis, West Virginia dominated the valley, Blackwater Canyon and the Allegheny Front from 1885 to 1924. The timber industry began in earnest once the West Virginia Central Railroad reached Davis in 1884. After completion of the rail line which connected Davis with surrounding industrial / urban centers tree felling quickly commenced. During the timber period, six lumber companies operated out of the town of Davis J.L. Rumbarger 1887 – 1888, Blackwater Boom and Lumber Company 1888 – 1893, Blackwater Lumber Company 1893 – 1905, Thompson Lumber Company 1905 – 1907, Babcock Lumber and Boom Company 1907 – 1924 (Clarkson, 1964). After 1924, the region was effectively clear cut and logging activities were abandoned.

Initially, large scale logging commenced in the southern region of the valley in the watersheds of Sand, Club and Mill Runs (Thompson, 1974). Splash dams were constructed up to 25 miles upstream of Davis on the Blackwater and its tributaries. Once the trees were felled, they were transported to the streams, where they were floated to Davis for processing. During this time period, rail lines were also being constructed that connected lumber mills to the eastern and southern edges of the valley. By 1900, logging and rail activities moved from the southern reaches of the valley to the southern side of Blackwater River and into Blackwater Canyon. In 1916, Camp 70 was constructed and the northern end of the valley was clear cut (Thompson, 1974).

Throughout this time period, fires completed the total destruction of the virgin timber stands in Allegheny Mountains and throughout the State of West Virginia. Slash leftover from the spruce harvest, and de-barked hemlock harvested for tanneries provided the fuel for numerous fires. From the time railroads reached timbered areas, fires were commonplace. Fires not only decimated regrowth, but commonly burned underlying humus in the areas surrounding the valley (Clarkson, 1964). The land surrounding the valley and throughout West Virginia was made virtually unproductive during the logging era. It wasn’t until the formation of the West Virginia Chapter of the Civilian Conservation Corps in 1933 that the forests over much of the state began to be cultivated.

Reference:

Unreferenced Photos from The Tucker County Highlands History and Education Project Logging exhibit. Taken From Friends of the 500th. http://friendsofthe500th.org/committees/tchhep-committee/