The Forest Service finds itself at a crossroads as we approach the 100th anniversary of its founding. My purpose in this chapter is to make some suggestions, based on experience, for possible modifications in law, operations, and budget that might smooth the transition to the next century.

I admittedly begin and end with a strong bias. I believe that the Forest Service—warts and all—is the best conservation organization in the world. The people of the past and present Forest Service have made it so. I came to the agency thirty-three years ago after ten years with a state wildlife agency because I simply wanted to be part of the Forest Service—part of something bigger than myself and an agency that set standards for the world.

I did not find perfection in the Forest Service. There were many squabbles as the times and the circumstances, knowledge, and desires of the American people changed. I was there when the emphasis shifted to intensive resource extraction and when it shifted yet again to focus on fish and wildlife, recreation, and water. Those changes reached a crescendo, and the Forest Service was caught with one foot rooted firmly in the past and the other tentatively venturing into the future.

The Forest Service’s place in the future is no longer tentative. Change has come, and there is no going back. That much is clear. But the next step is less obvious—and a matter of intense debate. I hope that my experience and insight can help, just a bit, to light the path.

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Some of these ideas were on the agenda when I left my position as chief of the Forest Service. I am appreciative that Chief Mike Dombeck has followed through on a few of them and added some new twists that I agree with and support. I refrain from discussing my disagreements here; those are for the chief’s ears only. The Forest Service can have and needs only one chief at a time, and my tenure has ended.

TOO MANY LAWS? TIME FOR REVIEW

The plethora of laws that affect Forest Service management, particularly of national forests, has at best made management activities increasingly expensive, uncertain, unpredictable, contentious, unwieldy, and unlikely to take place. Examination of these laws and pursuant regulations in terms of their compatibility, especially when complicated by applicable case law, reveals serious problems with contradictions, overlaps in authority, and certain conflicts. These problems are exacerbated by differing missions for different agencies and the power struggles between regulatory and management agencies as each, in good faith, struggles to achieve its mission.

I have heard the combination of these laws referred to as a “hodgepodge,” a “crazy quilt,” and “a cloak of many colors.” When I came to the chief’s job, my superiors assured me there was no problem with the laws, and exacerbating problems were billed as an unwillingness of prior administrations to comply with these laws. At the time, I thought that interpretation was wrong. By the time I left the job, I knew it was wrong.

But who could argue with the intent of each of those laws when considered individually? And who could argue that national forest management does not become more complex and problematic as these laws are applied in combination? The confusion is then magnified as the playing field is constantly reconstituted by new case law.

It is time—past time—to take a careful look at the laws that influence the management of the national forests (and perhaps all public lands) and to develop legislation that will clarify missions, reconcile conflicts, and define authorities. The mood of almost vicious partisanship that so dominates Congress at this juncture—most notably, in the committees and subcommittees that deal with Forest Service matters—essentially precludes the likelihood of any improvement evolving directly through that channel. Where there is no will, there is no way. The Left dares not offend its hard-core environmental constituencies (who are pleased with the evolving situation); the Right plays to those who profit from resource extraction from public lands and looks back to yesterday with longing and the desire to recreate the past. The situation is such that Congress can
neither lead nor follow, and, as politicians, they cannot get out of the way. So, how do we move toward a better situation than that which exists today?

One time-honored solution to handling such a hot potato is to name a large bipartisan commission, usually composed of big names with an interest. The real work, however, is done by a staff. The one certain result is the appearance that something is being done.

Maybe it is time again for a Public Land Law Review Commission—but with a twist. Maybe, for once, such a commission might be composed of real experts of proven competence with no particular ax to grind. The key to success would be to pick the right leader and allow that leader to put together a suitable team (with approval reserved to elected officials) and to develop the required budget. The team members should clearly understand the task at hand and have a fixed time to complete it. After appropriate analysis, including public hearings, the ultimate outcome would be draft legislation—perhaps in several forms.

WHAT IS THE FOREST SERVICE’S MISSION?

I probably spent more time in front of congressional committees in a shorter period than any of my predecessors, and my successor has likely broken my record. After the Republicans took over the Senate and House in the 1994 elections, the increasingly frequent hearings tended to display more and more acrimony—and produced little more than that.

Many times, I told those committees what I believe to be the crux of the debate over the national forests: The problem is not that the Forest Service does not have a clear and overriding mission but that the mission is not clearly spelled out in law and is not universally acknowledged. And the Forest Service can do little or nothing about it. The mission has simply evolved, with no open blessing from Congress or the administration.

The overriding policy for the management of the national forests is the preservation of biodiversity. That objective (policy) will be achieved first. That objective is closely followed by the assurance of water quality and then, if possible, some production of goods and services. In carrying out that policy, it is very difficult for the Forest Service to satisfy critics in Congress from the states with substantial federal lands who want to know why the Forest Service is not carrying out the mission. They define that mission as producing a “nondeclining even flow” of timber for their constituents who depend on federal timber, whether directly as employees or tax-paying industries, or indirectly in the form of receipts from resource exploitation to county treasuries. The same can be said of grazing and mineral extraction.
This situation has evolved as the direct result of the Endangered Species Act (ESA) of 1973 and the regulations issued by the Forest Service pursuant to the National Forest Management Act (NFMA) of 1976. The purpose of the ESA is “the preservation of ecosystems upon which threatened and endangered species depend.” The clause in the regulations issued pursuant to NFMA says that “all native and desired nonnative vertebrates will be maintained in viable numbers well-distributed in the planning area.” Oddly, this regulation is far more stringent in protecting species than the ESA is.

The period since the passage of the ESA has produced an ever-expanding list of plant and animal species considered threatened or endangered, and many more are likely to come. Disproportionate numbers of these species are found in national forests, in my opinion, not because the situation there is worse than the norm but because conditions are relatively better than on other ownerships. All of these species require special consideration in management.

With every such listing, the Forest Service gains a management partner with veto authority over proposed management actions. In the case of terrestrial species or aquatic life that is not connected with the oceans, the management partner is the Fish and Wildlife Service (U.S. Department of the Interior). In the case of anadromous species (that is, those that breed in fresh water and then go to the ocean), the National Marine Fisheries Service (U.S. Department of Commerce) is the partner. These partners are not equal. They have the duty to develop recovery plans and see that such plans are executed. That duty entails veto power over proposed actions.

Couple this with the requirements of the above-described clause in the Forest Service’s planning regulations and the consequences of a number of federal court rulings that have interpreted those regulations literally. Then, consider the resultant effect on management actions. It should be crystal clear that retaining biodiversity is the overriding mission of national forest management.

How that set of circumstances has evolved bothers me—a lot. The overriding attention to biodiversity does not bother me so much as an appropriate policy or a mission. In fact, as a biologist, I support the mission, but with considerable reservation as to how management direction has evolved from regulatory agencies. It troubles me that this mission has simply evolved out of a series of laws and pursuant regulations, court cases, and policy direction. This evolved mission should be ratified—or rejected—by Congress and the administration. If it is determined to be the Forest Service’s overriding mission, then so be it. If Congress disagrees, then it has a duty to clarify the situation. At least the committees in Congress should acknowledge this situation.
Frankly, I doubt that we will see any such clarification in the near term. Clarification would require a collective nerve that I do not believe exists. It is far easier to mollify constituents on the extremes of the preservation/exploitation debate by leaving the Forest Service in the middle to absorb the slings and arrows. But I will say this to my friends in Congress from the public land states and to those in the business of extracting and processing natural resources from the public’s lands: If you expect anything other than a constant decline in the availability of goods and services from the national forests resulting from this de facto mission, you are indeed dreamers of what was, not what is and what will be.

When we think about the mission for the Forest Service and the management of the national forests, we should consider some facts:

- The population of the United States is less than 6% of that of the world.
- The population of the United States consumes more than 25% of the timber resources exploited over the entire Earth.
- The population of the United States continues to increase and will likely grow another 40–60% by 2050.
- The U.S. per capita consumption of wood and wood fiber is the highest in the world—and is increasing.
- The U.S. per capita income is increasing and is expected to continue to increase.
- The United States has the largest, best-trained cadre of natural resource managers in the world.
- The United States has the greatest capability in the world to train natural resources professionals.
- The policy of the U.S. government is to increase consumption of both goods and services.
- The U.S. Congress has emasculated international forestry programs that would assist other nations in the practice of sustainable forestry as they meet the demands of American consumers.
- The annual timber harvest from the U.S. national forests has declined from approximately twelve billion board feet per year to much less than four billion board feet and continues to decline.
- Because the wood yield from the U.S. national forests is well under 5% of current national consumption, some groups are pushing for a “zero cut.”

These facts lead—or should lead—to nagging questions. Where does the wood for the world’s greatest consumer come from over the long haul? The answer seems to be “elsewhere”—wherever that is. We are losing acreage from the national timber base at a steady rate as a result of development and subdivision. As the ownerships get smaller, they are less and less likely to be timber producers. Industrial forest lands are owned
by corporations that are in business to make money for their stockholders, pure and simple. Such is the essence of capitalism: maximization of profit for owners. So, in a sense, any land-holding entity is simultaneously a land speculator. It seems likely that when the land is more valuable to satisfy that essence of the American dream—a place in the country—than it is for growing wood or some other higher and better use, the land will pass from the category of industrial forest land to nonindustrial forest land. Then, it will be turned into smaller and smaller ownerships.

After the national forests are out of the production of wood and wood fiber, is it likely that forestry on private lands will face increasing constraints imposed for environmental reasons and by higher costs? Quite probably. Then where will we get our wood? Elsewhere? What are the consequences of going elsewhere to meet our growing demands for wood? Much of the supply will, in my opinion, come from the poorer parts of the United States and the world, which have the fewest environmental constraints, the most people in need of work, and the biggest desire for American dollars.

Are there moral questions here? Do we, with our increasing wealth, simply say, “To hell with elsewhere”? No other place in the world has a better capability to practice sustainable, multiple-use natural resource management than the United States. Does that mean I defend all that has gone before? No. But thousands of practicing natural resources professionals have learned much and are learning more each day. We have learned from our successes and our failures—much like all professionals. If we can’t practice sustainable forestry, nobody can.

Before we rely on elsewhere, we need to consider the moral aspects of that decision.

**PROBLEMS**

**Micromanagement**

By micromanagement, I mean the increasingly detailed instruction given to the Forest Service, at all levels, by political appointees of the administration in power, individuals in Congress, and Congress in general.

As examples, consider the following scenarios, which show how the constant pressures of micromanagement can counter good order, discipline, efficiency, effectiveness, and coherent operations:

- An assistant to the secretary of agriculture, without explanation or discussion with the chief, orders—or passes down orders—that a timber sale be withdrawn.
- Congress directs that two ranger districts cannot be combined.
• Congress allocates research dollars to a particular university scientist who holds favor with a member of the Appropriations Committee.
• The undersecretary of agriculture pushes the chief to promote favored individuals to particular jobs.
• The undersecretary rejects the chief’s decisions on job selections.
• The secretary orders removal of particular senior executives, with no reasons given.
• The undersecretary refuses to allow the Forest Service, as was customary, to put forward a clearly identified Forest Service request on budget, thereby preventing Congress and the American people from knowing the chief’s opinion relating to the budget.
• The Congress passes and the President signs the Salvage Rider without consultation with the Forest Service.
• The undersecretary orders the placement of selected congressional staffers in the civil service.
• Political appointees and members of Congress interfere in assessments, planning, and selection of planning alternatives.
• Powerful members of Congress make threats in clear efforts to intimidate Forest Service personnel.

As micromanagement—from the administration and the Congress—increases, things become more chaotic. This is particularly true when the White House is controlled by one party and the Congress by the other, and the two parties view Forest Service operations in a different light. The Forest Service gets caught squarely in the middle. The people of the Forest Service look to the chief for leadership and direction, and when they see the political machinations undercutting their vision of the chief—whoever he or she may be—they feel rudderless and dispirited. Much of the élan of the Forest Service is predicated on the crucial internal mythology that surrounds the professionalism of the agency as personified in the chief. It does not mean that the employees cannot change. It means that esprit de corps and pride are attributes that have made the Forest Service a special agency and a special place to work. Maintaining pride in achievement is essential. That esprit de corps is being dangerously eroded by increased micromanagement. Change? Yes. Micromanagement as a mechanism to make change? No.

This trend can be addressed two ways. The first is to place the Forest Service (and perhaps all land management agencies) under a quasi-public organization. The organization would operate under a board of directors appointed to ensure overlapping terms (for continuity) and bipartisan composition. The chief, selected from the ranks of the Forest Service, would be appointed for a set term to begin at the midpoint between presidential elections. [Note: I consider the current chief, Mike Dombeck, to
be a professional from the ranks and tried and tested while being “on loan” to the Bureau of Land Management.]

The second, weaker alternative is to have the chief report directly to the secretary of agriculture by eliminating two layers (perhaps three—I was never sure) of intermediate political appointees. During my tenure in the Forest Service, I was personally acquainted with and dealt closely with several undersecretaries and assistant secretaries. Some knew next to nothing about natural resource management (particularly management of forested ecosystems), and some knew—or thought they knew—a lot. Some oversaw the Forest Service with a light hand, and others practiced almost daily internal involvement. These appointees should stick strictly with policy development and leave execution to the Forest Service. If policy is not appropriately pursued, then the chief should be replaced. An undersecretary who confuses his or her position with that of the chief is the ultimate threat to good order.

Over the years, undersecretaries have come and gone without much notice or much effect on Forest Service operations. More recently, we have seen two notable exceptions. One undersecretary appointed by Ronald Reagan pushed the Forest Service for a timber cut level far in excess of what seemed to many Forest Service professionals as either reasonable or sustainable, and the execution of those cut levels produced a backlash—and appropriately so. Another appointed by Bill Clinton pushed the Forest Service far in the opposite direction, producing a backlash in public land states and in committees in Congress. The whiplash effect produced by these powerful and dedicated men (each dedicated to a very different vision) has thrown the Forest Service and its various constituencies into confusion and a snapping, snarling dogfight.

The Forest Service’s path no longer seems a smooth and evolutionary journey; it seems uncertain as to direction and even purpose. Watching Forest Service managers reminds me a bit of a scene from The Wizard of Oz movie, when the journey of Dorothy and company along the Yellow Brick Road to the Emerald City leads them through the forest. They look into the shadows and surmise that there lurk “lions and tigers and bears.” As they walk on, they see specters in the forest and call out, “Lions and tigers and bears, oh my!” Feeding on their fears, they repeat, “LIONS and TIGERS and BEARS, OH MY!” louder and louder, and begin to run.

Now, the Forest Service line officers facing appeals, lawsuits, mixed directions, regulatory agencies, distressed community leaders, members of Congress, and micromanagement have to contend with lions and tigers and bears aplenty. These specters grow more vivid and make the Forest Service more and more cautious and less and less prone to action.

The chief should be clearly responsible for the Forest Service. When undersecretaries confined themselves to the policy arena, confusion and
consternation were relatively minimal. As these political appointees have more and more confused themselves with the chief, operations have become more chaotic, and morale among the seasoned troops has taken a downward turn. Having the chief report directly to the secretary of agriculture has the disadvantage of not having a political shield between the chief and the secretary, thereby drawing the chief closer to the political arena. I believe this risk is reasonable—one clearly supported in history. The required direct contact with the chief would, I believe, tend to improve the secretary’s interest in and appreciation for the Forest Service. I wonder what the first chief, Gifford Pinchot, would have been able to achieve if he had operated with two layers of political appointees between him and the secretary.

I am increasingly convinced that it is essentially impossible to manage natural resources with a hundred-year vision on the basis of a two-year election cycle. I also am convinced that the chief of the Forest Service should be a foremost proponent and spokesman for good natural resource management. To have a person in the chief’s chair who is limited by the politics of organizational circumstances is a lamentable waste of talent and experience.

The Forest Service was once the can-do agency and a source of leadership for conservation efforts. Such attributes were the attributes of the people of the Forest Service, not of the chief, per se. In my opinion, the “genetic code” for such remains embedded in the people of the Forest Service. Some means of letting these genes express themselves is sorely needed, for the nation, for the people who are directly affected by Forest Service actions, and for the people of the Forest Service. That release may well rest in the inclusion of the chief of the Forest Service in policy-setting circles and not submerged two bureaucratic layers below the secretary of agriculture.

Planning Regulations Issued Pursuant to NFMA

When the sponsor of the NFMA, Senator Hubert Humphrey, stood on the Senate floor and said something to the effect that, “We have taken the management of the national forests out of the hands of the courts and placed it in the hands of the professionals,” he could not have been more wrong. Planning proved to be much more expensive and has taken much more time than anticipated. It was expected to produce a consensus on the management of individual national forests but instead caused polarization. It was trumpeted as a way to increase stability and predictability, but both have decreased.

Congress expected planning, I believe, to be conducted by agency professionals—bottom to top—without coercion from political appointees.
Increasingly, that has not been the case. Many of the plans that emerged from the first round of planning included timber projections that were simply unrealistic, in my opinion, because of unrelenting pressure from the undersecretary of agriculture who had authority over the Forest Service at the time.

Then the Forest Service, in its best can-do style, set out to make it so. It was quickly apparent that there was a disconnect between plans and budgets at the forest level. The budgets for timber operations and road- ing were typically funded at requested levels (sometimes above requested levels), and other aspects of the plan (fish and wildlife, recreation, monitoring, and watershed) were funded at a fraction of requested amounts. Because the budget is the operative policy document, the Forest Service resolutely followed the budget instructions. The cumulative effect was inevitable and increasing conflict with environmental laws, regulatory agencies, and the rapidly growing environmental community.

The planning operations, because of appeals and lawsuits, became increasingly sensitive to the requirements for being “suit proof” or “appeal proof.” This requirement lengthened the process and resulted in page after page of gobbledygook that only a lawyer or a dedicated technowonk could appreciate or understand. The meetings with the public increased in number and duration as months stretched to several years. As time marched on, all but the zealots and the hired guns dropped out of the process.

From this battleground rose the “conflict industry”—the hired guns, the gladiators, the warriors. The “firms,” ensconced on the extremes of protection and exploitation, grew to include chief executive officers, technical experts, lawyers, fundraisers, publishers, press officers, field coordinators, and others.

Many of the problems arose from the regulations issued pursuant to NFMA. I believe the authors of NFMA considered that these regulations should, could, and would be tweaked on a regular basis as experience accumulated. And this tweaking, or full revision, would be handled by Forest Service professionals with cursory review by political appointees. The result? Any revision at all has proven impossible to achieve over twenty-three years. This continuing stalemate has resulted from political decisions above the chief’s level, usually in the form of a political decision to withhold issuance of final regulations until after an election. Then, as a result of vagaries of political fortune, a change in power forced reconsideration of the proposed regulations. The planning regulations somehow have evolved from planning guidance to a political document. As failure after failure to produce new regulations occurred, the planning regulations have evolved into the political football that they are today.

New planning regulations completed and ready for release during my tenure were withheld on the brink of the 1996 elections. After my depar-
ture, a Committee of Scientists (COS) was appointed to offer advice. The committee’s job is now complete, and the Forest Service planning staff is formulating yet another version of the regulations. And the beat goes on. The COS members, most of whom I know well and admire much, did an excellent job of analyzing and philosophizing, which was their job. But turning that philosophy into regulations is a different task altogether. One ingredient missing in the instructions to the COS was an instruction to cost it out. Cold-blooded assessment will reveal, in many cases, that the resources to achieve the stated objectives simply will not be made available.

Will revised planning regulations ever be issued? My faith is weak—unless there is a stimulus. The COS’s effort has fallen on bad times because the team leader and at least one committee member have withdrawn and then returned, or have expressed serious reservations. These circumstances have weakened the political cover for the new regulations that was hoped for in the decision to appoint the COS.

In my opinion, Congress should simply refuse to fund any additional forest planning until new regulations are issued. Enough is enough—twenty-three years is long enough—a plague on both houses.

It is essential, if planning is to mean anything at all, that the disconnect between plans and budgets be corrected. Few, if any, plans have been executed as projected. I am amazed that this noncompliance with plans has produced so little uproar and so little legal action. For example, assume that a forest planning effort produced five alternatives for consideration. The third alternative is ultimately selected. However, when funding comes down, some activities projected in the plan are fully funded and others are only fractionally funded—or perhaps not at all. This is the legitimate decision of Congress and those at higher levels in the administration that allocated the budget. So, the line officer proceeds with a year’s management activity on the basis of policy direction set in the budget. Has no one noticed that the third alternative is not being followed, or does no one care? A new management alternative is being pursued with only some semblance to the selected legal alternative.

This new alternative was not analyzed beforehand, nor were its likely consequences revealed to the public. Worse yet, whatever management is taking place is apt to change from one year to the next, depending on the vagaries of the budget. Such a process does not enhance a smooth operation nor produce a predictable outcome—not in terms of resources produced nor in desired future ecological conditions.

This situation might be corrected by requiring several budget scenarios for each alternative. The line items in the budget are arrayed at, say, three levels. Results are projected at each level. When the budget arrives, it is compared to the budget/results matrix. The level of activity related to ground or vegetation-disturbing activity is projected on the basis of the
level at which any line item is the lowest. This is the application of the biological principle of Liebig’s Law of the Minimum—that is, the action is limited by the weakest link in the plan (budget).

It also may be time to present the budget to Congress on a forest-by-forest basis. This plan could have one or all of several effects. First, Congress would be responsible for the distribution of funds and would get both credit and blame for budget outcomes. Second, members of Congress who had national forests in their congressional districts or states would, of political necessity, become quite interested in those entities. Third, members of Congress would become at least somewhat responsible for those national forests, thereby sharing the credit—or blame—for such activities.

Planning in its present form is quite expensive and, so far, has not yielded plans that are routinely followed. The process needs to be dramatically streamlined, and the plans that result should be followed until revised—and revisions should be made more frequently than in the past. Considering the recommendation of the COS, I have every confidence that the planning process, if ever changed, has a distinct probability of becoming even more unwieldy and costly. Coupled with the likely continuation of the disconnect between plans and budgets, it forces a serious question: Is this kind of planning worth the cost?

The Budget—Advice and Consent

It is critical that the Forest Service and its leadership be perceived as professional (that is, nonpartisan) and even-handed in dealing with Congress. This issue is particularly important when one party holds the presidency and the other party holds Congress.

The chief and the Forest Service work for and operate under the authority of the executive branch. Historically, this organization has not kept the chief and the Forest Service, a body of professionals who could be counted on for politically unbiased analysis and advice, from communicating freely with Congress. For example, until recently Congress could expect the chief, under questioning, to state clearly what the Forest Service had requested in terms of the budget, and why. Clearly, the opinion was of the chief’s office, unaltered by politically appointed officials above the chief’s level. Congress and all interested parties should be able to discern the chief’s advice to the administration. Congress should be equally privy to such advice. The chief is and should be expected to support the budget put forward by the administration. However, I believe it appropriate for the chief to inform Congress, on request, of his or her carefully considered position on the budget. To do otherwise is to deprive Congress of information critical to its deliberations over budget matters.
I have come to consider the budget as the most significant policy document guiding Forest Service actions. Clearly, then, it is the prerogative of the executive branch to set forth its desired policy through the budget sent forward to Congress.

Understanding how the budget request is formulated is important to our discussion. First, the Forest Service assembles a budget request. That request is reviewed by the undersecretary of agriculture (and undoubtedly others), who imposes policy and emphasis to be exercised through the budget. The budget is then sent forward to the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), where an examiner (who may know a little or a lot about Forest Service matters) makes alterations and passes it back to the undersecretary for negotiation with OMB to a final conclusion. In the process, the recommendations of the Forest Service professionals have been altered, perhaps dramatically, by the undersecretary and the examiner. The logic behind the process is that it ensures the budget both reflects administration policy through line item allocations and is within designated limits.

So far, so good. But when the congressional budget committees consider the budget request, they are deprived of the advice of the chief’s office. I was clearly discouraged from presenting views contrary to the administration’s budget position. This development, in my opinion, is not desirable. Congress should be able to rely on the chief to give candid, forthright, and complete answers to questions from any member of Congress. Congress is entitled to the advice, assessment, and recommendations of the chief who represents the professionals that make up the agency. The administration can justify its actions related to the budget. Then, the congressional committees can do their job with full information at their disposal.

The result would be better budgets aimed to achieve long-term goals and objectives. The best means of securing such a result would be to ensure that the chief can speak freely, completely, and promptly when asked for information, opinions, and advice. Any constraint on the chief in this regard deprives Congress (whose members also were elected by the people) of information and advice critical to its deliberations.

Constituencies and Accountability

The Forest Service’s organization was built, quite successfully for many decades, on an appeal to various constituencies. Those associated with the timber industry supported the timber and roads programs. Old-line conservation organizations—those associated with hunting and fishing, and some environmental groups—supported the fish and wildlife pro-
gram. Livestock permittees supported the range program. Recreationists supported the recreation and wilderness programs. Mining interests supported the minerals program.

To sustain that support and play to the propensity (perhaps need) of Congress to micromanage budgets, the appropriations for the Forest Service were divided into numerous line items. Each Forest Service staff group (and corresponding staff at regional, forest, and district levels) and its supporters then had its budget, which had been networked with support groups and congressional budget committees to achieve. That budget became and remains a measure of power and influence of the disparate groups.

It has become increasingly obvious in recent years that functionalism is producing internal divisions in the Forest Service while the need for fully integrated management is being more and more recognized. Line managers have plans to be implemented. Many feel unnecessarily constrained by having to operate with more than seventy separate line items or bank accounts.

When efforts were made to provide line officers more management flexibility by creating a line item for ecosystem management that pooled money from several previously existing budget line items, there was resistance—both overt and covert—from functional staffs and their supporters. Some staff leaders actively worked behind the scenes with their constituencies to overturn that decision. Each specialty group in the Forest Service felt that it was losing power and that some other specialty group was gaining at its expense.

As it becomes more and more obvious that the move toward ecosystem management, holistic management, or restoration ecology is both real and irreversible, it becomes more obvious that the budget line items that divide the Forest Service personnel into functional groups is operationally outmoded—through still quite viable politically. In fact, it divides personnel into groups, each with its own agenda, and works against the spirit required to achieve the vision of integration of disciplines into effective teams.

Line officers faced with the responsibility of achieving the goals and objectives of operative land-use plans are almost trapped into “innovative bookkeeping” as they balance their operational checkbooks. More faith and confidence—and responsibility and accountability—should reside with line officers as they strive to get their jobs done. However, that faith and confidence should be accompanied by much-improved accountability. That accountability should be reinforced with an increase in scheduled reviews and unannounced spot checks. Supervisors who run a tight ship would, if past experience is any indication, welcome such
reviews as a chance to demonstrate what their teams can accomplish and have accomplished.

In retrospect, the Forest Service once had a rigorous review process that was taken most seriously. It was a good system that should—appropriately modified—be reinstated.

In the sense of both internal and external politics, this erasure or softening of funding lines between disciplinary (functional) groups will be difficult or perhaps impossible to achieve. Distrust between the specialty groups, each with its political support groups, is significant. Some in each group routinely engage in efforts to subvert direction, decisions, or orders with which they disagree. This derision takes the form of stirring support groups to action in opposition to actions they deem inappropriate. The most pervasive action is the art of the leak, wherein constituency groups, allies in Congress, and the conflict industry receive copies of supposedly internal correspondence or e-mail. This kind of action is a violation of the canon of ethics of professional organizations such as the Society of American Foresters and The Wildlife Society, but maybe old-fashioned ethics have been replaced by “situational ethics” or “ethical adhocracy.”

Functional subgroups and their support groups also fear that they will lose power and a sense of independence. This fear is most pronounced in functional groups that had to fight their way into their present positions of influence in an agency long dominated by the timber and grazing programs. These groups, such as those concerned with fish and wildlife matters, have not yet come to grips with the fact they now wield considerable influence and power. Some cling to old ways in new times that demand new ways.

More power and prestige are to be gained in helping the Forest Service establish leadership through example in the struggle to retain biodiversity and to produce goods and services in a compatible and sustainable manner. We humans must exploit our environment to survive. That issue is not in question; the question is, “How do we do it?”

Unless the folks who comprise these specialty groups can overcome their distrust and subordinate individual power to the achievement of a common and potentially much greater cause, the Forest Service will have failed its destiny. At worst, the agency will fade into history as a noble experiment that flourished for a time, then failed to evolve to fit a changing environment. It will be just another federal bureaucracy—possibly, one no longer in existence.

Much, perhaps most, of the future of the Forest Service lies with its people. If every single reform I mention here were to be magically accomplished and the distrust and maneuvering between specialty groups continued in current fashion, then self-imposed deterioration would seem possible.
Sinking into the Swamp of Litigation

One of the outgrowths of the crazy quilt of law, regulations issued pursuant to law, and case law coupled with the consequences of the Equal Access to Justice Act is a constant tattoo of legal actions aimed at Forest Service actions. Paying litigants to sue certainly encourages legal action.

Win or lose, these legal actions impose significant costs in time and money on the Forest Service (that is, the taxpayers). Conversely, when the litigants win, the issue is clarified and can guide future activities. In such cases, the litigants have done themselves, society, and the Forest Service a favor, and the litigants should be fully compensated for the costs of preparing and trying the case. The same principle should apply when the Forest Service, faced with likely loss, settles a case with a litigant. However, when the litigants lose, they are sometimes compensated. And most commonly, when the litigants lose, they do not pay the Forest Service for costs incurred in defense.

The Forest Service has learned from past errors in judgment and now is winning a higher and higher percentage of lawsuits. However, given the circumstances of low-risk lawsuits, the rate of lawsuits has not diminished. Why? First, the risk to those who litigate is low, and the chances of a payoff are great. Second, a litigation strategy that diverts agency resources away from other uses has significant “harassment value” and, ordinarily, significantly delays the proposed management action. Third, there is always the chance that, considering the monetary and time costs, the agency will both negotiate a solution and pay the litigant’s costs.

Appeals and lawsuits are pursued in high numbers and now are considered a routine cost of doing business. In fact, for many, they are their business. This mechanism is simply too slow, too haphazard, and too expensive to be a satisfactory way to solve disputes. I suggest that such disputes be taken to mandatory arbitration before going to court. And when cases do go to court, the loser should pay the costs of the winner. It seems likely that one or both actions would dramatically reduce litigation.

Regulatory Agencies—What’s Good for the Goose Is Good for the Gander

When a species or even a subspecies of a plant or vertebrate is determined by a regulatory agency (the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service or the National Marine Fisheries Service) to be threatened or endangered, and that species is found in a national forest, then that national forest attains a co-manager. This co-manager arrangement is strange. One manager (the Forest Service) proposes, and the regulatory agency or agencies dispose
through approval or disapproval. In other words, the regulatory agency can trump the land management agency in the decision.

But the playing field is not level. First, the national forest has a multiple-use mission, whereas the ESA states a single purpose: to “preserve the ecosystems upon which threatened and endangered species depend.” Second, national forest managers, given the multiple-use mandate, understandably and routinely will opt for a greater risk over a shorter period. Regulatory agencies, given their preservation mandate, understandably will opt for lesser risk over a longer time frame. The result in terms of management flexibility (that is, decision space) is enormous. Third, when push comes to shove, the management agency proposes and the regulatory agency or agencies dispose.

When a management action is proposed, the burden of proof of compliance with demands (including recovery plans) is, quite appropriately, on the management agency. There is no reciprocal requirement—quite inappropriately, to my mind—for the regulatory agency to support a jeopardy opinion on the proposed management action. Because this power can and does place land management policy and action in the hands of regulatory agencies, the decisions of the regulatory agency should be subject to some form of peer review for appropriateness under the applicable science base. (Who watches the watchers? Who judges the judges?)

As is required of management agencies, the decision processes of the regulatory agencies should be transparent, technically justified, and subject to review. I do not think it was the intent of Congress, in passing the ESA, to provide co-manager status for national forests to regulatory agencies. Perhaps we should provide an appeal of regulatory agency decisions short of calling on the “God Squad.” Because the God Squad is made up of such high-ranking officials and the process is so expensive, logically enough, it has been applied rarely. In other words, the ESA provides for an appeal that simply cannot be used in the normal course of events. Therefore, in reality, it is not an appeals process at all.

Three-person review panels should be established in each region to settle disagreements over legitimate disputes between land management and regulatory agencies. These panels, by their decisions, provide case law that would evolve a better vision and more consistency in applying the evolving partnership between management and regulatory agencies. Clearly, the land management agencies have the responsibility to achieve the objectives of the ESA. Should there not be a reciprocal responsibility for the regulatory agency or agencies to assist the management agency or agencies meet their multiple-use mission and objectives? I think so.

The influence of regulatory agencies over federal land management is apparent in the case of the Pacific Northwest Forest Plan. The Forest
Ecosystems Management Assessment Team (FEMAT) delivered ten options to President Bill Clinton for consideration. The so-called Option 9 was chosen, and a multi-agency team went to work on the environmental impact statement (EIS) to institute that option. At that point, the process escaped the science team, and Option 9 was loaded down with bells and whistles to satisfy the concerns of the regulatory agency or agencies and allay distrust within and between agencies.

The result of the EIS was delivered to Washington during my first months as chief. The original FEMAT effort projected a probable sale quantity (PSQ) of approximately 1.2 billion board feet per year after a three-year ramp up. The EIS, even after significant modifications, projected a PSQ of 1.1 billion board feet. It was clear—to me, at least—that the PSQ was much more likely to be one-half, or less, of that projection and that the additional requirements for monitoring and search and manage probably were impossible to execute for technical, monetary, and personnel reasons.

The plan placed default buffers on all streams that were projected to remain in place until an assessment was completed for the watershed in question. At that point, site-specific decisions would be made as to retention of buffers with what configuration and with what treatment of stands included in the original default buffers.

The super-safe default buffer system is still in place and timber yields are, consequently, dropping precipitously. When one looks at the dendritic patterns of buffers on the landscape, it takes little detailed assessment beyond visual inspection of a map to discern that the remaining spaces cannot be accessed for timber harvest and that the highest timber sites have slipped into preservation status. This result is not what was proposed by the FEMAT under Option 9 and promised in the Northwest Forest Plan.

How has this situation come about? Too many cooks in the kitchen, I say. Where is the peer review? Does compliance with the ESA require such drastic reductions in timber yield? What do we know now that the FEMAT did not know? How far do we go to mollify distrust?

OTHER ISSUES

Cooking the Books, or Keeping Score

Many attributes of Forest Service budgets and bookkeeping practices have outlived their usefulness. These procedures had, I assume, good rationales behind them when the agency’s primary mission was a sustained yield or an even flow of timber to market.
The first of these procedures are the various trust funds that allow the Forest Service to retain a portion of timber sale receipts for reforestation, slash disposal, and other activities. The intent was to ensure that when a timber sale was made, funds would be available to reforest and manage the site. That seemed logical enough. But some critics maintain that these trust funds have become an incentive to sell timber. These funds were used to finance overhead and other organizational costs. The Forest Service was accused of making sales simply to support the agency. In short, the trust funds evolved into “distrust” funds. In addition, these funds are counted as costs of making timber sales. It is time to do away with trust funds. Receipts from the sales should be directed to the U.S. Treasury. Congress then, at its discretion, can appropriate funds for reforestation, management, and other purposes.

Similarly, 25% of gross receipts from timber sales and grazing activities go to the counties within which these activities take place. These payments are used to finance roads and schools and are considered as a cost of the management activity. They are considered contributions to the counties as a substitute for taxes. Perhaps the larger policy question is whether this mechanism of funding the education of essentially rural children is appropriate for the wealthiest nation in the world. Critics of this provision maintain that these payments are an incentive for elected county officials to support timber extraction and grazing.

However, as environmental concerns have reduced both timber extraction and cattle numbers, county officials are less and less enamored of this longstanding but now unstable, dwindling source of revenue. It is time for counties to receive yearly payments in lieu of taxes. This change would shift the tax obligation from timber extraction and grazing to payments to counties equal to but in lieu of taxes.

One result of such a shift would be that these costs would no longer be counted by critics as a cost of timber sales and livestock grazing. It would make the accounting for national forests more comparable with that for private lands.

Roads and Roadless Areas

Most appropriately, a review of roads and roadless areas is now under way before proceeding with building more roads, particularly into roadless areas. This activity has been both roundly praised and condemned. Yet this forceful move by Chief of the Forest Service Michael Dombeck was primarily in recognition of what already existed: reality. New road building had diminished to a fraction of historical levels, and entries into roadless areas were rare and declining because of actual or threatened appeals, lawsuits, and civil disobedience. Clearly, environmentalists had
influence enough above the chief’s level to force a withdrawal of any such prepared timber sales occurring within any roadless area, regardless of the operative forest plan.

The innovative aspect of the policy is a complete review of the existing road system to determine which roads should be maintained (or even upgraded), which ones should be closed to vehicular traffic (or even removed), and where new roads should be built. This review will make priority recommendations and estimate associated costs. It will not be done without conflict. The process likely will produce polarization, which is already beginning to blossom. Recreationists, whose activities are associated with road and trail use, are beginning to organize to resist closures and the decommissioning of roads.

I concur that it is simply time to acknowledge “the elephant in the room” that the Forest Service road system represents. The situation is a classic example of what economists call “externalities”—costs that are not accounted for in a transaction. In the case of roads, past Congresses and administrations continued to fund new construction to access timber and ignored the rapidly accumulating environmental effects, the maintenance backlogs, and the increasing need to maintain the existing roads.

Some wag once said, “When you find yourself in a hole, quit digging.” In the past, no amount of pleading by the Forest Service brought forth a willingness to face the burgeoning externalities of a deteriorating, inadequately maintained road system. So, Chief Dombeck decided to quit digging until we analyze and face up to the accumulated road system on the national forests. Finally, the bill for fifty years of aggressive roading and inadequate maintenance is due and payable. Good for Chief Dombeck.

It is probably best to remove most, if not all, roadless areas from consideration for timber production under present conditions. The political realities of the moment already have placed a de facto moratorium on roading and timber harvests in such areas. However wise this de facto decision, we must adjust forest plans immediately to remove the long-standing illusion that timber will be available from such areas—at least within the life of the current plan. This action may result in a larger drop in the forecasted timber supply than would be expected at first blush, because rates of timber harvest are predicated on the timber in these areas being available for cutting.

When I was chief (from 1993 to 1997), I issued instructions that either we build roads in roadless areas in the timber base so the timber could be cut, or we remove these areas from the timber base by amending the forest plan. Associated adjustments to anticipated timber yields were to be announced simultaneously. For whatever reason, probably the proximity to a new round of forest planning, little was done to respond to that direction. This unfortunate delayed response to instructions reduced tim-
ber yields even more dramatically than expected. So, I applaud Chief Dombeck’s decision to face up to reality—and the consequences of past actions—across the National Forest System (NFS).

Thousands upon thousands of miles of roads are the residual effect of initial timber harvest. These roads are but one example of externalities that were associated with initial timber extraction and were not considered costs at the time. Addressing such externalities (for example, channelization, damaged streams, and soil impacts) was either not recognized or put off for another day. That day has come.

The Interior Columbia River Basin Assessment (CRB) has clearly revealed the cumulative impacts of the externalities connected with grazing, timber extraction, and mining. It is also clear that restoration—that is, facing up to the extant situation—will be neither cheap nor easy. The reaction of elected officials from the region in question has been revealing. They have expressed outrage at declining levels of resource extraction from the national forests. Yet, simultaneously, they have expressed outrage at the projected costs of dealing with the consequences of accumulated externalities. One does not need a crystal ball to forecast the likely result of continued inaction. As I have heard some in Congress express it, “that dog won’t hunt”—at least, not any more.

I have heard it said that doing the same thing over and over and expecting a different result is called insanity. Interested parties ought to ponder this saying relative to the current situation.

**Authority Should Be Commensurate with Responsibility**

The chief is appointed by the administration in power through the secretary of agriculture. Traditionally, the chief’s appointment overlapped changes in administrations. Such was, to my mind, a good tradition. I hope that it is not dead.

The chief should be solely responsible for carrying out policy and directing activities of the Forest Service. Within legal and policy boundaries, the chief should be solely responsible for staffing, operations, and results. Micromanagement by administration political appointees is contrary to any set of management principles of which I am aware.

Additionally, the chief should be considered a primary expert (often through staff) on national resource management policy within the administration. As such, the chief (and appropriate staff) should be consulted by higher levels of government as resource management policy is formulated. Political policy decisions conducted without thorough knowledge (which the chief can help provide) of the technical, economic, legal, political, social, and historical ramifications of such policy are not apt to produce good results.
The chief (and the Forest Service in turn) should be consulted on any policy or activity that he or she is expected to execute. To do otherwise can and routinely does produce disastrous results. Examples that took place on my watch were the Salvage Rider and the proposed swap of national forest lands for the New World Mine.

**Below-Cost Management Actions**

One of the more popular political ploys used in the efforts to resist proposed land management activities is the issue of below-cost management activities, primarily forest stand treatments and livestock grazing. These ploys work well in influencing public opinion but grossly simplify very complex issues.

This complexity results largely from the rules on how to keep accounting records. The best example is the controversy over below-cost timber sales. Given the bookkeeping rules and the vulnerability of the proposed timber sale to legal action and political activity, it is increasingly unlikely that a timber sale will make money. Consider this scenario: First, suppose that payments of 25% of gross receipts are replaced by tax payments. This “cost” of a timber sale is eliminated. Furthermore, suppose that trust funds—such as Knutson–Vandenberg funds that set aside a percentage of gross receipts for future stewardship actions—no longer exist. Then, consider that some portion of the cost of the associated roads involved is marked off against recreation. Most of the recreational use of national forests is associated to some degree with forest roads, most of which were originally constructed to facilitate timber sales.

Finally, what if other actions, such as fuels reduction or thinning or production of a desired wildlife habitat condition, are an objective of the prescribed stand treatment—that is, the timber harvested is only one of several purposes for the management activity, and some appropriate allocation of costs to other benefiting functions is marked off accordingly? Such stand management activities are being referred to as stewardship sales in which the timber harvested pays for a portion of the costs, and some remaining portion of that cost is appropriately charged to the attainment of other values. For example, if significant costs are incurred to carry out stand management to reduce the danger to homes and human life in the forest–urban interface and the commercial material removed recovers only half the costs, is that a below-cost activity?

The result of these changes would be that more, if not most, such management activities would be closer to being above cost as far as the timber extraction aspects are concerned. The most significant part of the calculus, which determines whether such a management action is above or below costs, is the set of rules for making the calculations. One should
remember that some stand management activities—say, precommercial and commercial thinnings—will almost certainly be below-cost activities, when in reality, they are investments in achieving a future desired condition. In other words, such actions are investments.

New accounting rules, coupled with the fact that all receipts would go to the U.S. Treasury (because trust funds would have been abolished), would change the picture—and the bottom line—substantially.

To the extent that cost–benefit assessments are germane, the evaluation should reflect reality as much as possible. In my opinion, the present procedures are wacko, subject to manipulation for political purposes, and badly need to be reconstituted.

Timber sales made entirely for purposes of providing wood to the market below costs are another matter. Such sales provide benefits to a select, geographically defined segment of the population. There may be policy reasons for such activities, including support to local communities and industries and maintaining downward pressure on prices for wood products. The extent to which such actions are deemed desirable is a question of policy. Congress and the administration should determine such policies—not the Forest Service.

Throwing Research Scientists into the Management Breach

Over the past decade, the national forests have experienced a burgeoning demand for scientists to help in assessment, planning, and management duties. This demand has increased simultaneously, and probably coincidentally, with a decline in the number of key experts available to national forest managers because of “meat ax” downsizing efforts that offered incentives for early retirement or departure. My general impression was that many of the most experienced and talented employees took advantage of those buyouts to change employers.

The result has been that the Forest Service (and other agencies, such as the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service) fell back on scientists from their research divisions to head and staff high-profile SWAT (Solve with Available Technology) teams to address crises that erupted one after another. These efforts include the Interagency Scientific Committee to Address Management of the Spotted Owl (ISC), the Scientific Assessment Team (SAT), FEMAT, CRB, and the Alaska Plan and Assessment efforts.

These ad hoc science teams had credibility and capability and produced the desired results after they were given the independence, resources, and the necessary mandate to provide solutions to vicious management problems. Yet, confusion emerged as to what these efforts were and were not. Some people in power wanted to be assured that these efforts were good science. Yet, the efforts were not science at all.
They were assessment and planning exercises carried out by very highly qualified and skilled scientists—but they were assessment and planning nonetheless. These efforts required skilled scientists from an array of disciplines to consider and integrate the available science and then integrate with the science from other disciplines to produce coherent and defensible approaches to assessment and management.

Although it has been heartening to see how well these teams responded to their assignments and observe the quality of the products of such efforts, there is a significant down side. First, many of the Forest Service’s best and most respected scientists were abruptly taken away from their ongoing research assignments. Many of these research efforts addressed critical questions, and the research suffered as a result. The time pressures and the involved social, economic, political, legal, and ecological consequences of these efforts were enormous and immediate. Some of these teams essentially worked ten- to fourteen-hour days, seven days a week, for three to six months. And some of the most skilled and flexible team members moved from one such effort to another and then to another without respite—and without complaint on their part.

Perhaps the crises demanded such inordinate efforts and sacrifice. But this approach cannot be allowed to become the norm without significant adverse impact on the Forest Service’s research efforts and the consequences of combat fatigue and burnout on the scientists involved. It is critical to recognize that the demand for very high levels of technical expertise within the NFS will continue and likely increase. The use of research scientists in that role cannot continue indefinitely. Although it is improving, the NFS is not well equipped in terms of organization, appreciation of the problem, or philosophy to deal with this sea change. Appropriate reaction will include recognition that these crises are becoming routine and predictable. Therefore, these events should no longer be visualized as crises but as the norm.

The appropriate response is to better anticipate developing crises and to organize to meet the situations in a calm, controlled manner. Adhocracy in response to such matters should be replaced with a table of organization and standard operating procedures. The Forest Service and its co-managers now have enough experience and institutional memory in dealing with a series of such events to address this need effectively. The NFS must employ (or produce through additional training of current employees) an adequate cadre of scientists (probably at the Ph.D. level) of appropriate disciplines to address these needs. To ensure an appropriate workforce that reflects the required disciplines and experience, the table of organization will have to be coordinated nationally. The personnel required can be distributed across the NFS. Yet, the scientists and disciplines involved must provide a coherent array of talent. First, the NFS
needs to cultivate current personnel by using the Government Employees Training Act authorities to upgrade the technical capability of its best and brightest who also are willing to obtain additional training and face the rigor of addressing crises. The researchers who have made up the crisis teams have by and large been of senior rank and, not too surprisingly, have performed accordingly. The pay grades of these lead scientists were GS levels 13 and 14 and ST levels 15 to 17.

Attaining—and maintaining—such a cadre of staff will require not only cultivating current personnel but also recruiting and paying such personnel under a “person in job” concept. In brief, such persons may hold higher grades than their supervisors but are considered for reward on the basis of achievement and skill level, not their positions on an organizational chart. This situation has long existed in the Forest Service research division. It is time for the NFS to follow suit.

Addressing this issue will, of course, produce the grade creep that causes consternation in some circles. But that grade creep, I submit, is inevitable as the demands for educational, experience, and skill levels continue to grow. The game has changed dramatically, and the workforce must be adjusted accordingly.

It is essential to clearly define the role of scientists in dealing with management questions. Drs. Tom Mills and Fred Everest of the Pacific Northwest Experiment Station and Phil Janik, who was Regional Forester in Alaska, have led the way to significant progress in this regard. Under their concept, scientists will ensure that applicable science information has been brought to bear and then that this science has been appropriately considered and used in management assessment and planning—the so-called science consistency check. The designated Forest Service line officer is charged with the final decision, which may well involve information not of a technical nature. But the science is clearly documented and accounted for in the final decision.

Again, all sides involved in national forest planning and management profess great faith in science and scientists; however, I wonder whether they really understand what science is and who scientists are. It should be recognized that many who express such faith have little knowledge of what science is and is not. This last bastion of faith in the continuing struggles over appropriate resource management must be protected and reinforced.

**Esprit de Corps Is Essential and No Accident**

The Forest Service has long been recognized as an elite organization with high levels of professional competence and esprit de corps unparalleled in government. This spirit has largely been a result of recruiting profes-
sionals of the highest quality and then investing in their careers. Leaders were identified and cultivated by training and service in positions of increasing responsibility. Essentially, qualified professionals from within the organization filled all leadership positions.

The down side to such an organization is that unless carefully guarded against, too much conditioning precludes new ideas and approaches. The total absence of new ideas, new approaches, new experiences, and new views that would accompany the infusion of talent from the outside should be recognized and tempered by astute recruitment from the outside. Balance is everything. This dark side has been diffused somewhat as a problem as the Forest Service workforce became more and more diversified by profession, gender, and ethnic status after the catalyst of the NFMA and the National Environmental Policy Act.

The up side—cohesiveness, loyalty, esprit de corps, and the feeling of being part of something greater than oneself—has been a significant part of what has set the Forest Service apart. It has allowed an evolutionary process to deal with changing times. But now it seems that times they are a-changin’ faster than evolutionary processes can absorb. Conditioning the Forest Service organization to deal with the rapidly shifting technical, legal, and social circumstances is critical and may require departure from time-honored and tested ways of operation.

When political appointees above the level of the chief meddle with appointments in the Forest Service, the rank and file’s respect and confidence is eroded and diminished, even destroyed. The chief should receive policy direction and be held accountable for achievement. For best results, the chief should pick his or her own team. When the chief is perceived to be surrounded by staff that are outsiders, the rank and file can jump to the conclusion that they, collectively, are either distrusted or considered incompetent. These perceptions, if not countered with explanations to the employees, can breed distrust. The advantages and the necessity of such appointments should be explained—and that should be possible.

When the rank and file know that political appointees are placed in the Forest Service, they cringe. Why? Because they don’t know these people and have no way to judge their competence. Because they know their tenure is both doubtful and limited. Because, most of all, they know that it is likely a harbinger of the future. Is this what is to be expected when a new administration takes over? Where is the steady hand on the rudder? Is their icon of the chief still a valid investment of loyalty and faith? Esprit de corps is built and maintained on these intangible values: vision, loyalty, and continuity.

Is the Forest Service, then, to be just one more collection of bureaucrats carrying out politically assigned tasks? This is not the future that
most Forest Service people envisioned, and they contemplate it with foreboding. They signed up to be part of the best agency in government. They wanted a career where the best of the best had the chance to rise through the ranks and/or through professional achievement to direct the outfit. The people of the United States deserve at least one agency in which those traditions of service and achievement are held high. It is a tradition that is too important to be cast aside.

With rare exceptions, the Forest Service should be staffed—particularly at the highest levels—with the best employees that the agency can produce. Stability is better established or maintained. Pride in the outfit is enhanced. Confidence in the leadership is preserved. Loyalty is instilled. And the critical esprit de corps lives and passes from generation to generation of the outfit.

To do otherwise diminishes those almost magical attributes that produced an effective organization that has sustained performance of the highest caliber over time. The management of natural resources with a vision that spans centuries requires this kind of an organization.

**SOME POSITIVE SUGGESTIONS**

**Zoning for Timber Production?**

If the national forests intend to produce a significant amount of wood for the American people, a clear direction from Congress and instructions from the administration to do so are required. The best means of producing wood on a predictable schedule and at a particular rate depends on reducing or managing the variables that impinge on management action. Such factors as markets, insect outbreaks, droughts, and fire cannot be fully mitigated. “Nondeclining even flow of timber to market” no longer seems a viable objective.

Timber should be sold when the price is right, not offered on a set schedule. No other owner of timber would market wood on a regular schedule regardless of demand and price. Forest Service timber is put on the market on a regular schedule (that is, oblivious to market demand) and allows leeway to buyers as to when the timber is cut. This practice encourages speculation among buyers, who may delay timber cutting until an economically advantageous time. And history shows that Congress has been willing to shield speculators with buybacks when things go sour. Instead, sales could be prepared and put on the shelf until an appropriate marketing time. Cutting can be required by a certain time. For the sake of workforce stability and efficiency, sales can be prepared on an even-flow basis and more opportunistically marketed.
Insect and disease outbreaks in forest stands managed for timber production can be mitigated through appropriate stand management and temporary control, by using chemical and biological control agents, until the stand composition can be altered to achieve desired conditions through fire or mechanical means. Droughts cannot be controlled, but the fire danger that increases during such periods can be anticipated and addressed through stand management, including the use of thinning and controlled fire.

Below-cost sales can be addressed by concentrating resources in areas where economical growth is most probable: high-site lands with relatively low elevation, gentle topography, second-growth managed stands, an extant road system, easy access to recreation, and minimal environmental risks. But given the time cost of money, it is a ludicrous gamble to invest the money necessary to achieve high levels of productivity of wood if there is no reasonable certainty that the trees will ever be harvested. For example, an initial investment of $500/acre at 7.2% interest would have to return $128,000 at the end of an eighty-year rotation to break even.

If the national forests are to be expected to produce timber, a “Hobson’s choice” must be addressed: The best areas to economically grow timber also are apt to be the most biologically productive of both biomass and biodiversity. The alternative is to practice more extensive, or opportunistic, timber extraction from lower site lands at higher elevations that are more difficult to access; have steeper topography, higher environmental risks to disturbance, and lesser capability to produce biomass and biodiversity; and are likely to produce below-cost sales. Which way should we go? If we don’t make this decision now, it makes little sense to make such investments and then accept the natural course of events.

The only way that I can see to make that choice is to zone the highest site lands with the lowest potential for environmental damage from stand treatments and roads for emphasis on timber production. Zoning has been applied to wildernesses, wild and scenic rivers, recreation areas, and so forth with some success. Why not zone timber production areas? It does not mean that multiple uses would not take place on those lands. It means that such lands would be managed primarily for the growing and harvesting of trees in a sustainable manner. These lands could be identified through planning and then established by law or some other mechanism to ensure ability to capture a return on investment.

If this change were to take place, the issue becomes whether these timber-emphasis lands should remain in public ownership. Would it be better to trade those lands to the private sector in exchange for more acreage with lower timber values but with higher values for watershed, recreation, aesthetic beauty, and fish and wildlife?
The primary argument for public ownership and agency management in today’s circumstances lies in the concept and practice of multiple-use forestry. In such an approach, it is not only acceptable but expected that forests be managed in such a way that multiple uses are the focus. This practice allows—and perhaps mandates—management decisions that will not be maximally efficient in the economic sense. However, if timber and maximum economic return were the criteria for success, then it would be difficult to rationalize why the forests should remain under government management. These lands, if offered in trade on a value-for-value exchange, would likely yield a dramatic enhancement of federal land holdings for other values.

Fees for Noncommodity Uses of National Forests

It seems both reasonable and increasingly necessary for the national forests to be managed in such a fashion that revenues come as close as possible to covering costs of management. As revenues and associated economic activities related to timber, grazing, and mining decline, the gap between revenues and expenditures will expand, and the reduction in revenues to county governments will become more pronounced. This prediction assumes that revenue sharing with counties is substituted with payments in lieu of taxes.

Why should we be so concerned about below-cost timber management programs while we ignore a similar circumstance related to recreation? If current trends continue—and it seems likely—to deemphasize timber, grazing, and mineral extraction while increasing the emphasis on recreation, water, and fish and wildlife, then who pays the tab? Should those who benefit disproportionately—that is, the users—pay some significant portion of associated costs (which, of course, include both direct and opportunity costs)? I think so. But several issues must be addressed.

What about, “I already pay taxes; aren’t my uses of the national forests already covered?” My answer is that those who benefit more should pay more. An analogy exists in the public university system wherein the taxpayers subsidize the system, but students who use the system pay a fraction of that cost.

The difficulty in collecting such fees is presented as a huge barrier to such an approach. Entrance fees to use national forests, analogous to those charged for national parks, are of limited use because of differences in ease of access. Why not charge a federal land use fee good for entry to federal lands—all federal lands—and then charge additional fees for special uses such as hunting, fishing, campgrounds, and so forth?
In addition, any opportunity costs associated with maintaining pristine watersheds that provide high-quality water for municipal uses have not been appropriately considered. For example, the city of Portland, Oregon, gets water from the Bull Run watershed—which is maintained in pristine condition—that is of such high quality that no water treatment (that is, filtration) is required. This watershed is made up of some of the most potentially productive timberlands in the world. The economic returns from timber management are forgone in the interest of sustaining a high-quality water supply for Portland. Likewise, recreational uses—including hunting, fishing, boating, hiking, and camping—are precluded. Given the proximity to the Portland metropolitan area, this decision represents a dramatic opportunity cost.

Why should the people of Portland, who are the sole beneficiaries of maintenance of the status quo, not pay these opportunity costs? Perhaps they should pay at least the initial, maintenance, and operational costs of the water treatment facilities that would be required in the case of management and use of the watershed? At the very least, the national forest that contains the Bull Run watershed should be credited with such revenues. Why should the taxpayers at large subsidize the citizens of a single city?

Of late, great emphasis has been placed on the value of recreation over timber harvest. A recent Forest Service assessment reported that recreational uses (including hunting and fishing) of the national forests produce thirty-two times the revenue of the timber program. Two points are involved with the use of this startling statistic. The first is the assumption that the timber program is antithetical to recreational use—that the two outputs are incompatible. Is that so? If so, to what extent? Clearly, the significant use of the national forests for recreation is linked inextricably to the road systems that resulted largely from the timber program. The second point is that this huge economic activity returns an insignificant amount of money to the land on which the recreational activity occurs.

The associated below-cost concerns with other forest uses beyond timber, grazing, and mining are significant and should be clearly addressed—the sooner the better. Clearly, I play the role of devil’s advocate in this case. My point is that we need to rethink the questions of who benefits, who loses, and who pays for what. Should the user pay at least the additional costs associated with the use in question? I think the answer is, inevitably, yes.

Should the user be concerned as this trend evolves? The answer is, again, in the affirmative. I believe in the golden rule—that is, “He who has the gold rules.” In other words, those that pay even a portion of the
costs associated with their particular use of the public’s lands have increased influence and increased political interests. The people who pay become true stakeholders, deserving of a place at the management table. This evolution may well be the genesis of the constituencies that supported the direction taken by past Forest Service management.

Consolidation

The possibility of reducing the number of Forest Service administrative units should be considered for the sake of efficiency and in the interest of directing more resources to the ground. I do not believe that this task can reasonably be accomplished by removing a layer of administration (Washington office, regions, national forests, or ranger districts). However, it is quite reasonable to combine some regions, forests, and districts. My personal preference would be to combine regions and forests and leave the customer service centers (that is, the ranger districts) largely in place.

Under present circumstances, combining any significant numbers of administrative units is highly unlikely, no matter how well justified in terms of efficiency. Congress simply will not allow many such actions. Micromanagement by Congress in this regard is so pronounced that permission of six—I repeat, six—congressional committees is required before the Forest Service can close a single ranger district office. So, in reality, if a single member of Congress objects to the action, the Forest Service will not receive approval. Objections and failures to carry out proposed closures are the rule rather than the exception. So why even try? The cost—monetary and political—is simply too high. No other agency that I know of is under such a constraint.

This relationship results because the Forest Service offices and their personnel are significant parts of the economy and social structure in hundreds of small towns. And Forest Service employees ensconced at local levels are adept at heading off any such actions that would cause them personal inconvenience or damage.

Under present circumstances, it is highly unlikely that any significant action can be taken in this regard. Two solutions seem possible. The first is to take Congress out of the issue via the initial suggestion of the agency being managed under a board. The second, which might gain support, is to follow the example of the Department of Defense and have Congress name a base closure board to recommend a well-thought-out package of closures—that is, combined offices—to be accepted or rejected en masse. It would be the height of hypocrisy for Congress to jab the Forest Service on matters of efficiency and then steadfastly prevent actions that would improve the situation in order to play to a local constituency. Too many
members of Congress are all for government efficiency, as long as the efficiencies are recognized in someone else’s district or state.

**CONCLUSIONS**

**Shifts in Emphasis**

As the emphasis for the management of the national forests shifts from traditional areas of commodity production (timber, grazing, and mining) to the preservation of biodiversity, enhancement for fish and wildlife, recreation, and watershed protection and enhancement, the budget will likely decrease. This result seems probable because it will be perceived (perhaps for reasons of political leverage) that it should cost less to handle a program of management that includes reduced commodity programs.

The Forest Service already has been threatened by powerful committee chairs in Congress that a reduction in timber production will lead to a budget predicated on custodial management. Dealing with the accumulated and previously ignored externalities of unmaintained road systems, the restoration of ecosystems damaged by past management actions may provide more economic opportunity and stimulus than building false hopes for a return to the good old days of a twelve billion board feet/year timber program. Ecosystem restoration efforts will place emphasis on riparian zones and repair existing recreational infrastructure, create additional recreational facilities, bring trail systems up to standard, and regulate human use.

As commodities production continues to decrease and as population and resource consumption continue to increase, it is clear that the difference in timber and livestock production will be made up by state and private lands in the United States and abroad. If it proves to be so, then we should increase emphasis on efforts by Forest Service units in the arena of state and private forestry, research, and international forestry programs and offer proportionately less on management of national forests for timber and grazing. Such shifts are not only pragmatic in that pressure on those private lands will be increased to produce more commodities from an ever-decreasing land base. Given the ramifications of such a shift in forest policy, it is an equally necessary policy to provide the science, extension of information, and incentive programs to encourage both industrial and nonindustrial forest land holders to provide an increased share of the timber and livestock production in the United States in a sustainable, acceptable fashion.
It clearly follows that existing and developing knowledge and technology be extended to private land holders on a stepped-up and continuing basis. The Forest Service’s State and Private Forestry Division is well-experienced and well-positioned to accelerate efforts in that regard. The Forest Service’s close and long relationships with state foresters provide an opportunity to maximize the probability that private lands can take up some of the slack and practice sustainable forestry.

After a good start, the Forest Service’s International Forestry Programs were slashed—in my opinion, unconscionably—by Congress in the mid-1990s. I submit that if we decide, or are compelled by circumstances, to significantly reduce production of forest products in the United States and obtain our wood more and more from imports, then we are pragmatically and morally obligated to provide technical assistance and training for the natural resource management professionals in other countries. We should assume some significant responsibility for the environmental consequences of our de facto decision to obtain our wood elsewhere. How can we, in good conscience, escape that responsibility? Too often, “elsewhere” will be relatively poor nations that have few regulations to protect the environment and ensure sustainable forestry practices, and their desperate need for American dollars will far outweigh any environmental concerns. I believe that the United States has moral, ethical, and pragmatic reasons to provide aid to those nations. The Forest Service is well-staged to organize and direct that effort.

Research is key to achieving a vision of sustainable forestry and ecosystem management. No other nation has the research capability in the arena of natural resources that the United States does, when the talents and resources of the Forest Service, universities, and private industry are combined. All the research that has gone before is but a good start on the foundation on which sustainable natural resources management will be constructed and reconstructed.

We truly are in a race between achieving sustainable management or renewable natural resources and experiencing disaster. Constant improvement in both knowledge and the application of that knowledge and evolving understanding is essential. Fortunately, the Forest Service research arm is, in my opinion, the finest research organization in the world dealing with issues of natural resources. In cooperation with universities (where strong partnerships already exist), stepped-up research can provide sorely needed knowledge to enhance the probabilities of sustainable forestry on federal, state, and private lands.

The biggest challenge that lies ahead is the cultivation of our individual and collective abilities to not only produce new insights and understanding but also synthesize information from myriad fields of interest into useful and applicable forms. If additional funds become available
from any source, including reductions in funding for the NFS, then research—particularly cooperative research efforts—should be enhanced.

Who Should Manage Public Lands?

The validity of returning the federal lands to the states is under discussion. First, we should be clear that the states never owned those lands in the western part of the United States; the territories surrendered those lands to the federal government on achieving statehood. The Forest Service lands in the east were purchased by the federal government.

The concept in such a suggestion is that the states are more efficient land managers and that the federal lands in state ownership would be more efficiently managed. This comparison is predicated on a false premise: that the objectives of state and federal management are the same. But two totally different management objectives are in place. The state lands are, by and large, managed under trust responsibility, the objective of which is the maximization of revenue to the state. The federal lands are managed under the mandate of multiple use, with a new overriding mandate for preservation of biodiversity. To compare management for efficiency is to compare apples with oranges.

The appropriate test is to direct the national forests to be managed under applicable state laws. I doubt that the results in terms of efficiency would be much different, but a different signature would appear on the ground. Is that a signature that the people of the United States would agree with? I doubt it.

I once engaged a state forester colleague in conversation regarding the state’s assuming management of the national forests. He allowed that he would like to give the idea a try under state law. When asked how he thought he might operate under extant federal laws and regulations, he just laughed and walked away. His parting statement was, “No way.”

What would have happened to the present national forests if they had been placed in state custody from the beginning? Would much, or any, of these lands remain in public ownership? How would they have been treated over the last century? I do not like the picture that comes to mind—how about you?

I don’t believe for a moment that the people of the United States will tolerate a diminution of their public land heritage. In fact, I believe that they will insist on a select increase in those holdings.

As long as those lands remain in public ownership we can and should debate their management. The question, then, is the appropriate course of action for the Forest Service, which I have already described as the best conservation organization in the world. Given a clear mandate and support, the Forest Service is the best way to get the job done.
The predictable conditions of the transitional decade of the 1990s, including the unpredictability of events, will require more fundamental change efforts involving large organizations than at any time in the past. We live at a time in history when the basic institutions of society and the relationships between them are being reevaluated and redesigned. The role of wealth production in the society and the allocation of wealth between rich and poor, the First and Third Worlds, and north and south are taking new forms. The relationships between governments, the so-called nongovernmental sector composed of groups of volunteers and citizens, and the producers of goods and services—the private sector—are in constant change. Anyone in a leadership position in a large organization has to be acutely aware of these changes and the challenges that result from them.

—Beckhard and Pritchard (1992, 93)
requires operating in a learning mode in which both learning and doing are equally valid. The first requirement for so doing is the “absolute essentiality of a fundamental change effort being vision-driven.” Several elements must focus the change effort: changes in the mission or “reason to be,” identity or outside image, relationships to key stakeholders, the way of work, and the culture (Beckhard and Pritchard 1992, 35 and 37).

As we consider the Forest Service in the context of fundamental change efforts, it is important to solicit the perspectives of former leaders of the agency regarding the forces that are pushing for change, the issues that need consideration in choosing a change strategy, and the leadership implications of moving the organization to a learning mode. Jack Ward Thomas recently was in the hot seat as chief of the Forest Service. In Chapter 2, he describes the changed circumstances under which the agency operates and presents many specific suggestions for dealing with those problems, from convening a new Public Land Law Review Commission to rethinking how science and agency scientists relate to National Forest System management. Certainly, solving many of the problems that Jack cites (for example, the veto power of the Fish and Wildlife Service over proposed Forest Service actions, micromanagement by Congress and administration appointees, the swamp of litigation, functionally based line-item budgeting, and below-cost management) depends on first defining a mission or a reason to be. Jack maintains that the agency does have a mission: to preserve biodiversity. The problem is that this mission is not stated in law; rather, it has evolved largely in response to the Endangered Species Act and the agency’s own planning regulations. Whether or not he believes biodiversity should be the primary mission for the future is not clear, but he insists that the mission be clarified.

Elsewhere, Jack has written eloquently of the need to keep the national forests in public ownership (Thomas 1997). However, what he feels distinguishes the Forest Service from other federal land management agencies and private suppliers of natural resource goods and services is not clear in Chapter 2. Unlike a private corporation, the Forest Service and its leadership alone cannot define its mission or reason to be. In addition to the agency and Congress, the American people will need to be actively engaged in conversation about the vision for the national forests.

The conversation should not be relegated to a committee of experts or the professional forest policy community alone. This community has been too insular for too long. One of its principal downfalls has been its tendency to define fundamental political problems as technical problems best addressed by professional experts. We seem amazed when ordinary political processes get in the way and when political rationality is not congruent with technical rationality.
In moving toward fundamental organizational change, some necessary elements are more or less within control of the agency itself; these include changes in culture, the way of work, and relationships with key stakeholders. Agency leadership can work to ensure that the agency culture fosters a spirit of cooperation and a willingness to share power with other agencies, nongovernmental organizations, and private citizens. Once a clear, publicly sanctioned vision is in place, the agency can address gaps between the current situation and the vision, then identify pockets of resistance to change. It can organize itself so that the actions of people in the organization are aligned with the vision. It can change how the agency relates to key stakeholders. Incentives and rewards systems can be adjusted to ensure that they encourage and reward behaviors consistent with agency’s vision. There must be not only vision but also commitment to the vision.

The challenges that the Forest Service currently faces also stem from society’s reevaluation of its basic institutions and the relationships between them. Although some of us wish to see the Forest Service more firmly embrace ecological approaches to management that emphasize the goal of long-term ecological sustainability, we must realize that moving toward such a goal will require fundamental change in many political institutions, not only within the Forest Service (Cortner and Moote 1999). Accomplishing this task will require examining how power and authority are distributed, how social institutions shape the character of the citizenry, and how collective responsibilities are balanced with individual rights and interests. It will require building social capital through more publicly open and collaborative decision processes. It will require reexamining a range of environmental laws and policies, and—as Jack and others have indicated—the approach to this task should not be piecemeal (Thomas 1995; Cawley and Freemuth 1997). Private landowners and the producers of goods and services in the private sector can do much more than they have done to address their stewardship responsibilities. We must better link the economic and political marketplaces, rethink many traditional economic conventions and assumptions, and consider how best to mix the use of market and regulatory policy tools.

The roles of wealth production and wealth allocation (between rich and poor, the first and third worlds, and north and south) are indeed taking new forms. We are increasingly tied to a global economy and a global politic. How we approach the question of income inequalities, at home and abroad, will affect why we manage forest resources and for whom. Events in distant lands affect our nation’s ability to both preserve biodiversity and satisfy our voracious consumer appetites. Similarly, as Jack points out, the choices that we make regarding our nation’s national forests have moral consequences for people and resources in other nations.
The Forest Service has to be one of the most studied federal agencies in the scholarly literature. It has spawned classic studies in public administration and has been the subject of comparative studies with other natural resource organizations and policies. The attitudes of agency employees in a time of change have been the subject of countless studies. The Forest Service has undergone major agency and congressional assessments of its performance of some of its major statutory obligations. A legacy of writings and remarks by former chiefs reflect on the problems and opportunities they encountered during their tenures, and others have written a wealth of information about the history of the agency. Numerous policy suggestions have been made for effecting organizational change in the field of natural resource management in general and in the Forest Service in particular. These suggestions involve fundamentally different political choices that define the relationships among humans, ecosystems, science, and democratic governance.

Unfortunately, the resilience and integrity of many of the political institutions through which we must act to make collective decisions are increasingly in question. Public trust of government has declined markedly over the past twenty-five years. Although several innovative community-based collaborations have emerged, forms of political participation such as voting are down, and there is serious debate about whether an overall decrease in civic participation in nongovernmental associations is eroding social capital. Traditional mediating structures such as political parties have been weakened. The strong presidency is gone and the institution damaged; Congress is polarized and characterized by gridlock. Have key democratic governance structures become so debilitated that they lack the capacity for timely innovation?

We don’t lack ideas about what needs to be done with the Forest Service; we lack the political will to deal interactively with questions of democratic governance and a vision-driven change strategy.

REFERENCES


