The Forest Service is in transition. Change is everywhere. The agency knows where it has been but has a much less clear vision of where it is going. Just before leaving the Forest Service in late 1996, then-Chief Jack Ward Thomas stated, “The Forest Service needs a revision, or at least, a clarified mission” (Thomas 1997, 182).

Historically, the Forest Service mission has been fairly well defined. The 1897 Organic Act gave three purposes to the forest reserves: (1) to preserve and protect the forest within the reservation, (2) to secure favorable conditions of water flows, and (3) to furnish a continuous supply of timber for the use and necessities of the people of the United States. In the intervening years, the mandate was gradually expanded to include other of the forest’s multiple uses. The most recent comprehensive forest legislation, the National Forest Management Act (NFMA) of 1976, mandates the Forest Service to “provide for multiple use and sustained yield of the products and services obtained therefrom ... and, in particular include coordination of outdoor recreation, range, timber, watershed, wildlife and fish, and wilderness.”

The legislation appears unequivocal: The Forest Service is to provide for the sustainable production of the seven products and services explicitly mentioned. The outputs are clearly identified, as is the requirement
that they be produced on a sustainable basis. If this legislation is so clear, then what is the rationale for Thomas’ lament?

Thomas went on to explain some of his concerns: “It is not yet widely recognized—much less openly acknowledged—but public land managers now have one overriding objective (or constraint) for management—the preservation of biodiversity.” He gave his view of the inadequacy of the legislative support for these activities: “The law does not clearly say [the Forest Service should manage for the preservation of biodiversity]. Nobody seems to openly recognize it.” Additionally, he stated, “I don’t personally have an objection to [managing for the preservation of biodiversity]—if that is what society wants. The Congress and the President need to examine the situation that has evolved and ask, ‘is that what we intend?’ If so, so be it. If not, then clarification is required as to what is expected of federal land management agencies in regard to achieving ‘multiple-use’ management” (Thomas 1997, 161).

Many of these activities have been driven by the Endangered Species Act (ESA), which requires the protection of habitat for threatened or endangered species as well as other environmental legislation. The courts and recent federal policy held that the requirements of the ESA are clear and overriding. If conflicts occur between ESA and an agency’s other governmental statutes, ESA must dominate. The stress on biological considerations, however, has been made even stronger than that of the ESA by the “viability clause” in the Forest Service regulations. Developed to support the NFMA, these regulations require the Forest Service to ensure the widespread maintenance of viable populations of plants and animals.1 Many recent court decisions hinge on the viability clause.

The result of these conflicting signals, Thomas suggested, is that in recent years, there has been a serious disconnect between the directives of the Forest Service’s statutory mandate and the nature of the activities and management being practiced by the Forest Service. This disconnect is due, in no small part, to a host of intervening litigation and court rulings, and Thomas believes that clarification is required by Congress and the administration. In fact, no legislative clarification has been forthcoming in the period since Thomas stepped down as chief in late 1996. The most recent authorization statutory legislation is still the NFMA of 1976, which calls for management for sustainable production of a set of multiple outputs, whereas the de facto practice of the Forest Service, according to Thomas (1997), has been to manage for the preservation of biodiversity.

Recently, the Secretary of Agriculture assembled a Committee of Scientists (COS) to “provide scientific and technical advice to the Secretary of Agriculture and the Chief of the Forest Service on improvement that can be made in the NFS [National Forest System] Land and Resource planning process.” In its report (USDA 1999), the committee decided to provide the
new mission statement that the Forest Service has lacked. Casting aside concerns about whether it was appropriate for the committee to dictate a mission for the Forest Service, the committee boldly declared that the binding charge has been sustainability and recommended, in essence, that the Forest Service manage for sustainability. Apparently, the committee was less concerned about the necessity of having a legislative directive to provide mission clarification from Congress and the President than was Chief Thomas. Furthermore, an articulation of what ought to be the focus of management clearly is not a scientific question but a reflection of personal values. Thus, in addressing the issue of what “ought” to be the objective of management, the committee went well beyond what its scientific credentials could justify. In fact, some members of the committee asserted that the manager’s obligation to provide for species viability and ecological integrity is “morally” appropriate.

Having asserted a mission for the Forest Service that Congress and the administration were reluctant to state, the committee then suggested ways that this objective might be accomplished. The COS report (USDA 1999) argues that sustainability is paramount and, in essence, that the legislative multiple-use mandate ought to be replaced de facto with this alternative objective: maintaining ecological sustainability.

One can argue the appropriateness of COS in establishing social objectives and attempting to tie personal preferences to morality. However, the fact that the COS recommendations are at such variance with the Forest Service’s statutory multiple-use mandate highlights the environment in which the Forest Service has been forced to operate and the potential contentiousness that might occur in the absence of an effective, well-defined mission. In today’s society, land-use decisions have become “moral” issues, even among presumably objective scientists.

In this chapter, I examine the past and current situation of the Forest Service and try to provide a contemporary perspective. First, I briefly cover the history of the Forest Service, most of which is well known. Next, I describe and characterize the recent and current situation in which the Forest Service finds itself, with a discussion of the major problems and challenges. Finally, I outline a number of alternative possible future scenarios for the Forest Service, highlighting some of their strengths and weaknesses.

BACKGROUND

In response to public concern over water conditions and future timber supplies in the latter part of the nineteenth century, large areas of public lands were designated as part of the nation’s “forest reserves,” later to
be called the National Forest System (NFS). However, even then, people held alternative perspectives and philosophies regarding the objectives of forest maintenance. The pragmatism of the conservationists, as represented by Pinchot, was reflected in their concept of the “wise use” of resources. The philosophy of wise resource use was pitted against the views of preservationists, such as Muir and perhaps Thoreau. Both views had followings. The American people wanted water and timber, but they also were concerned about preserving naturalness, wildness, and wilderness—which even then were recognized as part of the American heritage.

Although these two philosophies struggled for dominance over the years, the on-the-ground conflicts between these two perspectives were small—largely because the forest land managers assumed primarily a custodial role. The public forest provided only modest amounts of timber, allowing the vast majority of public forest to remain largely unaffected. The wise-use philosophy prevailed in the early twentieth century, as Pinchot and his conservationist successors dominated the institution of the Forest Service.

Using Clawson’s characterizations (1983), one can perhaps view the first fifty years of the Forest Service history, from its inception to about World War II, as a period of custodial management and forest protection; however, it also was active in rehabilitation in some locations. During and after World War II, the national forests took on a new importance as a source of timber. They produced substantial amounts of timber, first to meet the needs of the war and then for the post-war housing boom; in fact, high levels of output would continue into the late 1980s.

As the 1950s gave way to the 1960s, however, public environmental concerns were growing. Among these concerns was a fear that the NFS emphasis on timber was too great and that focus should also include other forest outputs. The Multiple Use Sustained Yield Act of 1960 emphasized nontimber goods and service outputs provided by the forest as well as the sustainability of these outputs. Production of multiple outputs, however, generated concerns over the level and mix of the various outputs. As the rancor among the various interests grew, Congress passed the Resources Planning Act (RPA) in 1974 and the NFMA in 1976.

The RPA, particularly as amended by the NFMA, was crafted to address the source of the contentiousness. The NFMA legislation tried to do at least three things. First, it tried to articulate a multiple-use vision. Specifically, this vision called for the production of multiple outputs, including timber, range, wildlife, recreation, water, and (less explicitly) wilderness. The “trick” was to produce these outputs jointly and to produce the mix that would satisfy the various publics. In addition, the laws required that these outputs be produced in a sustainable manner.
Given this general mandate, a forest-planning process was created that was intended to allow all of the interested parties to participate in management and output decisions. The assumption was that the planning process would provide a vehicle for the various interests to work out their differences and converge on a consensus forest plan with a broadly acceptable mix of actions and outputs. Also, it was implicitly assumed that if consensus were reached on the forest plan (that is, the goals of forest management in a particular forest), then Congress would provide the budget to implement those objectives. In addition, the importance of monitoring these resources on a continuing basis had earlier been addressed by a provision in the 1974 act for the periodic renewable resources assessment.

In the more than two decades since the NFMA, little of what was envisioned has become reality. Although periodic resource assessment has been undertaken, the planning process can, in many respects, be viewed as a failure. For example, it has not generated the desired consensus. In the first 125 forest management plans were about 1,200 appeals and more than 100 subsequent lawsuits. Some appeals have been in process for almost a decade without resolution.

Furthermore, when plans were created, budgets generally were not forthcoming to allow faithful implementation. Little or no relationship has developed between most of the plans and the budget. In fact, two largely independent planning processes now exist: one, the “forest planning process” is called for in the NFMA and involves protracted “public participation” by the various interested “publics”; the other is that undertaken by the administration and Congress in their deliberations regarding the budget to be provided to the Forest Service. There is little connection between the budget that emerges from the political process to provide funds on an aggregate programmatic basis and the various forest plans developed through the decentralized planning process (Sample 1990).

NO LONGER AN ELITE AGENCY

Traditionally, the Forest Service had been viewed as an elite agency. This perspective emerged out of the ties between Pinchot and President Teddy Roosevelt and the prevailing progressive philosophy (see Nelson 1998) that placed confidence in technocratic solutions. This was a new agency with a new mandate supported by the President. Gifford Pinchot, who later became governor of Pennsylvania, had the power of the President behind him and was able to craft an agency relatively insulated from the usual bureaucratic and political pressures commonly directed at agencies.
such as the Forest Service. The new agency would reside not in the Department of the Interior, which was viewed as highly political, but in the Department of Agriculture. There, the agency could have both a high degree of power and maximum autonomy.

This organizational location reflected the Forest Service responsibility for not only protection but also the active promotion of tree growing, restoration, and research. Consistent with the positive view of progressivism and scientific management, the Forest Service was able to recruit the best and the brightest foresters trained in new European techniques. This new agency sported a highly trained and committed professional staff. The view of professionalism was maintained for many years. Until the early 1990s, the chief of the Forest Service was still essentially a non-political position, held by someone drawn from the ranks of the agency’s senior professionals.

The Forest Service made the most of its positive image. As recently as the early 1950s, the agency was commended in an article in *Newsweek* (1952) for its professionalism, effectiveness in dealing with forest concerns, and ability to work with local people to help achieve local objectives. The Forest Service had a storehouse of goodwill both in Congress and in the hinterlands where it operated.

However, as a member of the COS, my experience suggests that little goodwill currently exists, especially in the various local regions. The committee held almost a dozen meetings in various regions of the country. One of the most memorable and perhaps most pitiful observations I made from those meetings was the high degree of frustration and disillusionment on the part of local forest users. It was local people—those who raised issues of local use of timber, forage, and summer home permits—who felt the most betrayed by the Forest Service and the process. They had believed that by participating in the process, they could contribute to the final outcome. Ultimately, they found that their hard-fought positions and compromises meant nothing, because the forest plan frequently was tied up in appeals and litigation. Or, perhaps worse, they found that the plan and compromises they worked so hard to achieve were never implemented for lack of budget or because of an overriding executive decision.

In contrast, our COS meetings were regularly attended by—and we received substantial numbers of comments from—representatives of national timber and environmental interests. Often, the same people met with us each week in a different region of the country as they monitored the process while providing both visibility and comment. These people, usually on a payroll, recognized how the political game is played and knew not to take these processes (the COS and earlier planning meetings) too seriously. Nor were they inclined to count to heavily on any promises being kept.
In Kaufman’s famous *The Forest Ranger* (1960), the Forest Service was used as an example of how a large public government organization ought to function. He argued that, unique among large organizations, the Forest Service had been able to maintain its focus, discipline, and esprit de corps. The high esteem in which the Forest Service was held was not limited to the public; it carried over to Congress. The Forest Service’s rapport with Congress was rewarded by generous budgets. In return, the Forest Service fostered a “can do” attitude. It provided Congress with what Congress wanted. In fact, some experts believe that this very can-do attitude led the Forest Service to press its harvest levels to the limit in order to meet the high harvest desires of its champions in Congress. Ultimately, however, these high harvests appear to have backfired, resulting in increasing numbers of citizens who became concerned that harvest levels were “too high” and an erosion of the balance that had been achieved in its constituencies.

In *Public Land Politics* (Culhane 1980), Paul Culhane argued that the Forest Service had successfully been able to maintain a high degree of autonomy as the various interest groups competed against each other. The groups he examined—timber interests, environmentalists, and recreationists—all provided the Forest Service with constituencies that supported its budget requests and programs. In return, the Forest Service provided the outputs desired by each group. Because the interests were so diverse but relatively evenly balanced, the Forest Service had autonomy in decisionmaking in that it could justify an action undesired by one of the groups by arguing that it was necessary to pacify one of its other constituencies, who wanted even more. Furthermore, when the time for budget decisions arrived, these groups still could be relied on to support the various facets of the Forest Service budget with Congress.

Today, few would view the Forest Service as an elite agency. Local users of national forest lands are highly disenchanted and discouraged. Recreationists, environmentalists, range users, and timber users also voice major complaints. It seems that nobody is happy with the Forest Service.

A quintessential example of the general disillusionment is the experience of the Quincy Library Group, a small, informal group that met in the library in Quincy, California, to discuss issues relating to the management of the several national forests in the region. This group, having given up on “the process,” has undertaken direct political action with what appears to be great success so far. Bypassing the Forest Service entirely, it has appealed directly to the California delegation in Congress for a separate management charter and separate funding. Legislation to this end recently passed. With the help of the new legislation, the Quincy Library Group hopes to attain two goals: greater control over what is
done on local Forest Service lands and a larger budget with which to manage these lands, according to local desires and objectives. The ultimate success of this endeavor remains to be determined.

THE CURRENT SITUATION

As I suggested earlier, the happy situation of the early Forest Service has seriously eroded over recent decades. My own hypothesis is that the system has broken down because the fine balance among the various competing constituencies gradually disappeared. Battles among these groups—particularly the environmentalists and timber interests, together with the recreationists—compelled Congress to pass the NFMA to try to restore order and balance. However, this was not to be. In addition to increasing rancor over the management of the NFS, a host of environmental laws and their evolving interpretation by the courts forced both a reduction in harvest levels and a rethinking of policy. Timber harvest levels, which peaked in the late 1980s under the still-existing NFMA legislation, have declined since to less than one-quarter of their peak levels.

Whatever its past “sins,” the Forest Service has truly been given a “mission impossible” in recent decades. It is being asked to reflect the will of the people when in fact the people in this country are deeply divided. We share no vision of the role of public forest lands, even though the recent American Forest Congress attempted to define a shared perspective for forestry (Bentley and Langhein 1996). Attempts to “reinvent” the role of the Forest Service continue to be frustrated by a lack of consensus. Apparently, according to the picture painted by former Chief Thomas, the Forest Service has reinvented itself.

With the national forests now providing only about 3% of the U.S. industrial wood supply, the nation obtains wood from other sources to meet demand. Harvests on private lands have filled some of the gap, as private owners increase their management intensity. Also, timber imports have risen from foreign suppliers, especially Canada, and today would be even higher were it not for the recent imposition of trade restrictions on certain wood products.

The culture of the Forest Service has changed from the inside, as staff trained in traditional forestry has been supplemented with those trained in wildlife, ecology, and the biological sciences. Although this kind of change may be inevitable and indeed desirable, it also contributes to confusion regarding the appropriate mission for the agency.

Changes also have taken place at the top. Historically, Forest Service career professionals have followed a civil service career path, which allowed them to rise through the ranks to the top position of chief. In
recent years, however, the nature of the selection process for the chief has changed. The days that the highest civil service appointment in the U.S. government was the chief of the Forest Service have passed, and the senior positions are now more political in nature.\textsuperscript{2} Today, contacts between the professional civil service staff and their politically appointed leaders—including the chief—are more limited than in earlier eras, and many of the agency’s resource managers feel that their professional decisionmaking is “micromanaged” by political appointees.

In many respects, the Forest Service is probably more politically vulnerable today than at any time before in its history. The public’s former trust in scientific management, which was a major driving force in the creation of the Forest Service under Pinchot and Teddy Roosevelt, is highly eroded, if not in total disarray. The Forest Service also is essentially naked to various political forces because of its lack of any serious constituency.

Last year, several groups came to the defense of the NFS when Republican congressmen fired a shot across the Forest Service’s bow by raising the prospect of returning to custodial management (Murkowski and others 1998). If the Forest Service cannot provide outputs for constituents, they argued, then why should we spend large amounts of resources on management? It became clear that the groups that came to the defense of the NFS were defending not the Forest Service but the federal forests. Furthermore, some have opined that if the proposal had come from the Democrats, rather than the Republicans, it probably would have been more warmly received.

The Forest Service has lost many of its traditional supporters. For example, although the timber industry has been a traditional Forest Service constituency, in recent congressional hearings, the American Forest and Paper Association supported only a very modest budget for the Forest Service, noting that it viewed the recent activities and outputs of the Forest Service as of only limited interest to the members of the association. In addition, the industry has been stressing the need for salvage logging to remedy forest health problems found in the excessive timber and under-story buildup, which pose various disease, pest, and, especially fire hazards. Remedial management would provide some timber for local operations.

Environmental organizations that might have been expected to support the new policy direction at the Forest Service have not appeared. National environmental organizations are not interested in active forest management. The split between national and local environmentalists over the nature of the desired management of public lands in the region of the Quincy Library Group reveals deep divisions, even within the environmental community, regarding appropriate forest management.
Similarly, recreational interests are largely absent in defending the Forest Service. Finally, with few exceptions, local forest users appear to be largely frustrated and disillusioned with the Forest Service, and asking a local member of Congress to support overall Forest Service budgets that are seen as only minimally—if at all—responsive to local concerns likely would spark little interest. None of these events bodes well for the future of the agency.

Thus, the Forest Service now stands largely exposed, without public constituencies willing to advocate its cause. Given this lack of power, it is difficult to see how the Forest Service could resist an attempt—such as was made under the Carter administration in the late 1970s—to reorganize the agency, perhaps out of existence. It is doubtful that the Forest Service could find champions to defend it, as it has done so successfully in the past. Indeed, given the absence of a mandate that has broad support, one might ask whether there are any reasons to try to maintain a Forest Service separate from other federal land management agencies.

WHERE FROM HERE?

Clearly, if it is to move beyond its current malaise, operate efficiently, and even survive, the Forest Service needs a well-defined mission and a powerful political constituency. But what do the American people want from their national forests? A host of things.

It probably is accurate to say that Americans want naturalness and an element of wildness. They surely want many of the ecological services provided by forests, including watershed protection, erosion control, and wildlife habitats. The American people might even support a program that identifies the primary responsibility of the NFS as maintaining a sustainable ecosystem and shifts the responsibility for timber production to private producers and foreign lands. Let me examine three potential candidates for a Forest Service mission and constituency: biological preservation, recreation, and local management.

Within the COS was the strong belief that the national forests ought to be managed for biological preservation and ecological sustainability. Furthermore, another objective of managing the forests was to keep the forest condition within the “historic range of variability” that predated Europeans and maintain the objective of returning them to pre-European forest processes and functions. Managing for this objective clearly involves a “mission shift” away from a focus on multiple outputs and would involve dramatically reducing certain outputs from levels of the recent past. These reductions would affect timber as well as other outputs, such as certain kinds of recreation.
In my view, such an approach is, in effect, an obituary for the Forest Service as we know it. It is doubtful that, in the absence of significant tangible outputs, there is sufficient public support to generate serious budgets for a program focused primarily on maintaining ecological sustainability. Although many people may support such an approach in concept, this support probably could not bring together a constituency with the power to generate substantial and continuing budgets for these management activities. The services generated by the activities would be difficult for the public to perceive on a regular basis, and the major direct financial beneficiaries would be the biologists and ecologists employed in the process. Although major environmental groups support facets of an ecological mission, many of the major national groups oppose timber harvesting of any type, including that necessary to meet other objectives (for example, wildlife habitat). Indeed, many favor an essentially hands-off approach to “management.”

A “hands off” approach today may result in long-term fundamental changes in the nature of the forest because of the absence of traditional predators, changes in natural disturbances because of human intervention in the recent past, and other changes (such as the influx of exotic species) that have occurred. Because of their persistent distrust of the motives of the Forest Service and separate objectives of their own, many national environmental groups would not enthusiastically support the large budget necessary for the active management for ecological sustainability. More likely outcomes of a focus on management for ecological sustainability would be the erosion of the Forest Service budget and the substitution of benign neglect for active management.

Perhaps the major constituency that could emerge to take leadership in supporting the Forest Service and its management is that of the recreationists. The NFS provides various kinds of outdoor recreation. Even though these groups are far from monolithic in their interests and services desired from the Forest Service, their numbers are substantial. Perhaps most intriguing is the possibility of generating a significant portion of the budget for the forests from recreational user fees. Certainly, many forests have the potential to raise funding from such fees, as some forests located near urban centers currently demonstrate. Such fees often are difficult and costly to collect. Nevertheless, it has been argued that for many national forests, the recreational benefits far exceed the timber and other traditional output benefits. If this is true, then user fees could provide major revenue sources for many, but surely not all, national forests. In this context, Forest Service budgets could be substantially financed out of recreational receipts and supplemented by more modest allocations from Congress. Of course, such an approach would require that the Forest Service have some control over the user fees it generates.
If funding were dependent on recreational use, the Forest Service would have a powerful incentive to provide the kinds of outputs that recreationists desire. Furthermore, the role of federal funding and the ability of a constituency to support the Forest Service budget in Congress become less important if the Forest Service covers a large portion of its costs with user fees. Finally, recreational uses may be in conflict or lead to conflicts with other desired outputs and services, such as biodiversity. Thus, whereas this approach appears to have many commendable characteristics, we are not guaranteed that future conflicts between the various user groups could be avoided.

A third option would be to move in the direction of more localized input into the management of the national forests in different localities, in the spirit of the Quincy Library Group. Perhaps Congress should consider budgeting national forests or groups of national forests individually, by using a manner akin to the budgeting of the national parks. This method could allow management to be customized—to a degree not seen previously—to the needs and desires of the local communities. Some combination of user fees and customized management could provide for both adequate funding and the emergence of powerful local constituencies, which could allow for local participation in a way not experienced in decades. However, many national environmental groups are opposed to this approach. Shifting power to the local community implies reducing the influence of national groups on local situations. Perhaps, more fundamentally, the issue relates to the appropriate division of decisionmaking power over a local resource between the local community and citizens living in other sections of the country. Even though this kind of solution offers promise in that it addresses the budget and constituency challenges facing the Forest Service in a way other approaches do not, it seems unlikely that all forests can expect the financial support likely to be received by the Quincy Library Group.

Perhaps the most fundamental question is whether to retain a separate Forest Service at all. Arguments for the coordination of land management are louder than ever. This recommendation recurred in the COS report (USDA 1999), which suggested improved coordination with not only private forest land but also the various federal agencies. To date, the coordination among federal agencies leaves much to be desired.

The arguments at the beginning of the twentieth century called for a Forest Service focused the creation of an elite organization that had technocratic prowess and a degree of independence from the bureaucratic and political processes so that it could “do the right thing” based on its professional judgment. A primary argument that has been used in the past to fight reorganization efforts is that the Forest Service is more akin to an agricultural agency, focused on producing crops of trees, providing
protection, and so forth. Clearly, the production issue is less relevant now. On the cusp of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries—given the recent behavioral objectives of the Forest Service—these motivations are largely absent.

The Forest Service can no longer claim to be an elite organization. Although the agency has retained many highly trained and competent people, it is no longer unique and probably is more wracked with confusion than most agencies because its mission has lacked clarity (or has been highly ambiguous) for many years. Neither is it any longer insulated from the ravages of the bureaucratic process or from crass politics. In fact, former Chief Thomas (1997) stated that “the entire process is becoming increasingly politicized through orders which originate above the chief’s level,” and where the “exact source of those instructions is sometimes not clear.” The fine balance among constituencies, which Culhane (1980) saw as the core of the Forest Service’s ability to fend off crass political pressures, no longer exists. Furthermore, its ability, or willingness, to supply services to various constituencies is minimal. It now is beholden to a single group in society rather than a host of groups.

Finally, we may have a compelling reason to integrate federal land management agencies. Although agencies have been directed to coordinate management, many people believe that coordination is inherently more difficult across organizations than within an organization. It has been argued that cross-agency coordination of federal lands has been grossly inadequate. Perhaps it is time to reconsider the proposals of the Carter administration, two decades ago, which called for a unified department of natural resources that would include the Forest Service. Perhaps it is time to merge the Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management into a single agency. Surely, the rationale for such integration becomes more compelling as the agency loses both its unique mission and its unique ability to perform any mission in an outstanding manner.

**FINAL THOUGHTS**

The material I have presented here is intended to be provocative, of thought and discussion about what we want and how we can get it—innovative ways to meet current challenges and smart planning to create the future that we envision. Perhaps it is time to “think the unthinkable.” The Forest Service has been an unusually successful organization for much of its history, but that is no longer the case. Today, the agency finds itself with legislation that gives it a multiple-use statutory mandate while being covered by the single-purpose ESA statute. This problem is exacer-
bated by the lack of a public consensus. Until this deadlock is broken, the Forest Service will be in the limbo that Thomas described (1997).

However, if the Forest Service is converted into a biological reserve, it may no longer be politically viable as a separate institution. At a minimum, it is clearly time to rethink the role and mission of the Forest Service. A doable mission needs to reflect the views of a cross section of Americans rather than the values of a single interest group or a small group with a unique set of values. The American people need to enter into a major dialogue, and Congress and the administration must provide clear direction. Furthermore, this dialogue should be expanded to seriously consider whether the federal land management problems of the twenty-first century might require the creation of new streamlined integrated organizations to replace outmoded agencies.

ENDNOTES

1 The term “viability” does not appear in the 1976 law, which made passing reference to maintaining biological diversity. The viability provision was added and broadened in the process of developing the regulations that support the law.

2 Historically, the chief was appointed from among the small group of long-term Forest Service employees who were qualified as Career Senior Executives. However, in recent years, chiefs have been either not qualified as Career Senior Executives or not drawn from the ranks of long-term Forest Service employees.

REFERENCES


