

New Perspectives for National Forest Managers

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More environmentally sensitive approaches to managing America's National Forests are becoming "business as usual" for the Forest Service. This means that plans and projects are beginning to reflect a renewed sense of environmental stewardship and commitment to managing public resources according to ecosystem principles. Some of the trends impacting the Forest Service have far-reaching implications for other protected-lands managers.

PLANNING CHANGE

Strategic direction for managing the National Forests is set by 5-year strategic plans, called "RPA Programs." RPA Programs are issued under the Forest and Rangelands Renewable Resources Planning Act of 1974.

The 1990 RPA Program identifies four themes. These include:

- enhancement of recreation, wildlife, and fisheries resources,
- increased environmental sensitivity in commodity production,
- improved scientific knowledge about natural resources, and
- response to global resource issues.

Each theme emphasizes management to sustain the long-term health, diversity, and productivity of the land. Together with the rest of the Program, the themes provide strategic national direction to the National Forests.

In addition to this programmatic national direction, each National Forest has an integrated land and resource management plan which addresses further issues and needs, many of them local or regional. The plans are developed through an open public involvement process. They guide overall National Forest System management.

CHANGING MANAGEMENT— NEW PERSPECTIVES

To carry out the direction in the RPA Program and forest plans, teams of land managers, scientists, academics, and citizens

are developing "on-the-ground" projects. These projects vary greatly in their content and context, covering the full range of possible production, restoration, and preservation activities.

Many of the recent projects display practical applications of new scientific information, technology, and partnerships with the public. They are called "New Perspectives" projects. The purposes of New Perspectives projects are to learn how to better manage forested ecosystems for a richer set of values, uses, and services and to improve public involvement in resource management and decision-making.



Illustration 1.

By the end of 1992, each of the 156 National Forests will have at least one New Perspectives project. Some National Forests will have several projects that demonstrate the New Perspectives concepts of renewed stewardship commitments and man-

agement according to ecosystem principles.

MANAGING CHANGE—NEW APPROACHES TO LEADERSHIP

Conservation leaders both inside and outside the Forest Ser-

vice are finding that the changing approach to management calls for a new set of knowledge, skills, and actions. Many people are struggling to gain necessary knowledge, practice and perfect their skills, and develop new models for leadership.

One element in the changing approach towards protected lands is a renewed sense of land and resource stewardship. Stewardship

of resources demands a careful balancing of today's resource uses and conditions. However, the goal of stewardship must be to assure that future generations receive the full measure of resources and choices they will need to sustain development and ecological systems. This concept is frequently referred to as "sustainable development."



Photo 1. Prescribed fire is a part of this New Perspectives project.

NEW SCIENCE

Today's protected lands stewardship demands improved resource knowledge. To do this, we must be able to assess resource conditions ecologically, over many geographic and time scales.

Analysis of potential long-term effects of management must be performed for the large geographic and long time scales that will most affect future generations. This may mean consideration of conditions in many owner-

ships across landscapes and bioregions, beyond national boundaries, or even across oceans and continents.

Frankly, today we lack the scientific understanding of many of these potential effects. We lack the ability to quantifiably model and analyze them. For now, global science and management is largely a matter of educated guesswork, although there are many promising initiatives in remote sensing, ecological classification, Geographic Information Systems, and international science cooperation and policy coordination.

However, the absence of global scientific knowledge does not give us license to postpone active protected-lands stewardship. We had far less knowledge to guide us when we embarked on the great global experiment we call the Industrial Revolution. We had even less when European civilization expanded into the Americas. We knew very little about ecological dynamics when we began our many successful conservation efforts in the U.S. about 100 years ago. Social and ecological forces propelled us along those paths just as they do today.

Today, the effects of population growth and related worldwide human demands for health and prosperity leave us far less choice per person than we had even 100 years ago. The future will offer people even fewer choices unless we manage wisely. To be successful stewards, our management requires skillful applications of existing technology and global science as well as persistent scientific inquiry into the

elements and dynamics of regional and global ecological systems.

A NEW FORM OF ADVOCACY

To be effective in this global arena, leaders must adopt strategies that integrate human social and economic systems into ecological thinking. To do this, leaders must abandon ideological positions that prioritize human uses and land status. In other words, they must stop serving as advocates for one use over another, such as logging over recreation. And, they must stop advocating one protected-land status over another, such as parks and wilderness as a "higher and better" status than urban areas.

The traditional "either/or" approach forces science and decision-making into competing camps to the detriment of rigorous ecological science and wise stewardship choices. Instead, today's leader has to adopt the ideology of integrated people-nature science and decision-making.

The fulfillment of each human need and desire has the potential to affect ecological conditions. Each ecological condition has a human connection.

The new basis for advocacy must reflect this understanding that people and ecological systems are inextricably bound. Dense, urbanized populations require substantial ecological services in the form of food, energy, water, and air. So, people must be considered in terms of their ecological support systems. Equally, ecological systems must be viewed in terms of their hu-

man dimensions, both positive and negative. People are an enormous, beneficial force for the kinds of ingenuity and action that can help sustain ecological systems, their dynamics, and their evolution.

We can study people and ecological systems separately, but we must plan and manage them together. We can then adopt effective strategies that acknowledge the ecological services required by expanding human populations. The same strategies must guarantee that ecological improvements and investments are made to ensure continuing ecological vitality, diversity, and resilience.

Many of today's issues are couched in terms of "people and jobs versus resource quality and environmental security." This must end.

Regional, national, and global resource issues cannot be resolved unless jobs are seen as part of ecosystems, and people are viewed as contributors to worldwide environmental security.

Therefore, progressive leaders are adopting a new model for advocacy: one that frames choices and sets priorities in integrated human-nature terms. This point of view describes desired future ecological conditions—what is to be removed from the land for human use and what is to remain "invested" in the land for environmental health and security. Once a conservation strategy is selected, all forms of management are focused on attaining that future condition, beneficial for both people and land.

Leaders are becoming advocates for integrated, human-nature conditions, not competing human uses or land status. Protected lands are starting to be seen as part of a complex land mosaic that serves both people and nature.

NEW FORMS OF PEOPLE AND INFORMATION MANAGEMENT

New strategies and advocacy demand new approaches to involving people and managing information. Emerging conservation leaders are finding it necessary to involve men and women from a wide array of professional disciplines, cultures, races, and religions. Effective strategies require that all viewpoints be incorporated in fair and sensitive ways.

These emerging leaders are finding that their work entails considerable attention to cultural similarities and contrasts. They are required to develop effective listening skills, engage in thorough cultural study and immersion, and practice conflict mediation and resolution. Natural resource experts are re-educating themselves in social science disciplines so they can step forward as leading conservationists.

These leaders are also finding that the work that they direct must be performed in a "fishbowl." They are constantly subject to public scrutiny, often by people who raise objections to their proposals. Managing culturally diverse participants in the "fishbowl" complicates activities even further, often imposing stress on teams already experienc-

ing miscommunication and interdisciplinary challenges.

The antidote to the "fishbowl" situation seems to be that, with experience and team-building exercises, leaders and participants become more confident and relaxed under scrutiny. Humor, frequent public interactions, flexible schedules or timetables, and careful attention to quickly settling interdisciplinary disagreements contribute to successful management of the situation. Teams are able to function in a non-defensive manner with immediate public access to decisions and information.

Information was once confined to a set of resource maps, photos, and data stored on a personal computer disk. Information management meant walking to a file drawer or computer and getting directly involved.

Newer regional and global information sources are available only through national and international networks. Emerging conservation leaders are accessing and sharing data from hundreds

of sources in dozens of nations. Communication has become "trans-national." Global information flows have transcended sovereign national boundaries. New conservation leaders must become a part of this transcendent international community.

CONCLUSION

The new approaches are building a new, more comprehensive context for protected lands in America. Protected lands are being viewed as key components of larger, multi-ownership ecosystems. The context is expanding to global scale.

New conservation leaders are becoming familiar with managing for desired future ecological conditions. They are abandoning old models for people and information management and adopting ones that are multi-ownership, multi-cultural, and international in scope.

Are you?



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