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People, their values, and forest management – An American experience

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ABSTRACT: "A public official is there to serve the public and not run them." These words spoken by Gifford Pinchot, the first Chief of the United States Forest Service, and Dean of the Yale School of Forestry from 1910-20 hold true today. America has a rich history of public involvement in forest policy development, with many lessons learned along the way. Many of these experiences, both good and bad, may be of value to Australia as forest managers and public officials adapt practices and programs to changing public values. Forests and communities are dynamic. Sustainability of programs as well as ecosystems requires an ever-changing balance of environmental health, economic reality, and social acceptance and benefits. This discussion will focus on public involvement in forest policy and management. Changing public values, the evolution of an industry rooted in conflict, and elements of an effective public involvement strategy are explored. The importance of relationships and how they can productively lay the foundation for involvement and policy development are examined. The author is a Forest Supervisor of one of America's National Forests, bringing experiences from local community problem solving to national policy development. The health of the land is our basis for community wealth and quality of life. As forest managers, we are entrusted with the humbling responsibility of managing these lands to sustain life today, and provide choices for future generations. We will only be allowed to lead these efforts if we provide value to the people and communities interested in these lands. Finding practical and effective ways of engaging people, their values and their interests is critical to the long-term sustainability of these treasured resources.

1 INTRODUCTION

To effectively manage National Forests, we must understand the public as much as we understand the land and resources. In the United States Forest Service, we often find that effective and enduring public land policy is grounded in three foundational concepts. It must be scientifically sound, legally implementable, and socially acceptable. Being trained natural resource professionals, we understand science based environmental management quite well. Through constant exposure and interaction with our judicial system, we are learning how to effectively withstand many legal confrontations. One of our largest challenges, however, is understanding our dynamic public values, and effectively dealing with the diversity of public attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors. To understand our experiences, it is helpful to know of our past.

2 HISTORY

The concept of public lands and conservation in the United States began over 130 years ago with the publishing of *Man and Nature*, by George Perkins Marsh (1864). In his book, Marsh introduced the need for public policy change by developing the notion that if natural resources disappear, so goes a nation. It was the first modern discussion of national ecological problems. At the time, public lands were primarily considered for disposal. Resources were thought to be limitless and extraction was the norm. Over the next 25 years, public debate swelled, supporting the creation of the first Forest Reserves in 1891. Conflicts and tensions were high as western Senators angrily looked at growing Forest Reserves as a threat to their power, constituents, and values. Political battles raged over who should control and manage these newly designated lands. In 1905, the Forest Reserves were transferred from the United States Department of the Interior to the Department of Agriculture, and re-named National Forests under the newly created United States Forest Service.

Gifford Pinchot was named as the first Chief of the Forest Service. He was also the first professionally trained forester in the country. Pinchot went on to become the Dean of the Yale School of Forestry and Governor of the State of Pennsylvania. He had a designing hand in the Forest Service, and combined with the conservation ethic of President Theodore Roosevelt, established guiding principles of conservation that are still valued today. One of these guiding principles is that "where conflicting interests must be reconciled the question will always be decided from the standpoint of the greatest good of the greatest number in the long run," Pinchot (1905). In his early leadership of the Forest Service, Pinchot pioneered the concepts that integrally linked people, land, and service. As Dean of the Yale School of Forestry, Pinchot established several principles for his students, including "A public official is there to serve the public, and not run them," Pinchot (1947). These basic values have been an essential part of the culture of the United States Forest Service since its beginning.

As time passed, the National Forest System grew to over 190 million acres as it is today. In the early years, challenges for managers were many. There were few trained foresters. Budgets were lean. Time was spent establishing boundaries, dealing with trespassers, regulating grazing, and fighting forest fires. During the Great Depression of the early 1930s, thousands of young men were hired into the newly created Civilian Conservation Corps. This workforce built roads, campgrounds, fought wildfires, and created the basic infrastructure for the public lands. Custodial management of the lands and resources guided public policy and management activities.

After World War II, soldiers returned to a different country. Houses were needed, the West was being developed, and the country was becoming a world leader. Expectations for the contributions of the National Forests changed. Timber harvest on National Forest lands began in earnest, increasing tenfold over the next few decades. The public lands were developed by road systems, organizations grew, and rural America grew in concert with change.

By the 1960s, many citizens were becoming concerned with the rate of development of the National Forests. Roads were penetrating deep into the woods. Landscapes were rapidly changing as timber harvest accelerated. Programs were not well integrated, and often politically driven. The beginning of significant change was on the horizon. In 1962, the United States Congress passed the Multiple Use-Sustained Yield Act. This was the first significant natural resource legislation in many years. It affirmed the role of the Forest Service as a multiple use agency, and emphasized the need to manage programs on a sustainable basis. In 1964, the Wilderness Act was passed which recognized the value of wild country "untrammeled by man" and created the foundation for a growing system of lands managed without development where people are visitors leaving no traces behind.

Subsequent legislation over the next 10 years included the National Environmental Policy Act (1969) requiring public disclosure of effects of decisions made on public lands and resources. The Act included Section 101 (c), which states "The Congress recognizes that each person should enjoy

a healthful environment and that each person has a responsibility to contribute to the preservation and enhancement of the environment." Other legislation included the Clean Air, Clean Water, Endangered Species, and National Forest Management Acts. This legislation arose primarily around the publics' concerns over how these lands were to be managed, based on changing public values and concerns over sustainability. An ever-increasing desire to improve citizen involvement in public land issues was evolving.

In the 1970s and 80s, our forest planning, accountability, and expectations revolved around the latest optimization model of trying to provide balanced programs while sustaining traditional services and goods from the National Forests. There was heavy emphasis from the agency and the federal government on maintaining resource and product flows while mitigating adverse effects to other resources. Emphasis in forest plans was on outputs, particularly timber volumes. The concept of conservation biology was developing. Along with this, the courts were interpreting the laws passed in the 60s and 70s. Social and economic science related to natural resource management was just beginning to be understood and applied. Social and economic effects of land management actions and policies were treated as consequences of actions rather than objectives of strategies. Our focus was on the land and what it produced, mostly within our own boundaries. Some of this was due to a lack of certain authorities to operate within a larger community, while some was agency and national emphasis, based on the values of the times.

In the late 1980s, things began to rapidly change. Shortly after the agency developed its first integrated forest plans, two significant events occurred that would forever change the Forest Services' approach to public land management, especially in the Pacific Northwest. The first relates to concerns over threatened and endangered species – specifically the emergence and listing of the Northern Spotted Owl as "Threatened" under the Endangered Species Act of 1973. This cemented the concepts of conservation biology, and tilted the scales away from traditional industries to the protection of habitat. The second was the increase of large-scale landscape disturbance in drier parts of the country as a result of decades of fire exclusion, certain past grazing and timber harvest practices, and drought. The results were significant insect and disease outbreaks, accelerated invasive species spread, and large destructive wildland fires burning with uncharacteristic intensities. These two factors alone changed our approach to planning. The regulated Euro-American approach to forestry would come to an end on public lands.

Change came with a heavy price. Jobs were lost. Tried and true concepts and practices were challenged. Court battles intensified. People became far less certain of public land managers' abilities to meet programs of work. Reliability in the goods and services expected from the public lands waned.

To some, however, change was welcomed. Adaptive management gained growing support, while concepts of ecosystem restoration and disturbance ecology began to develop. External collaboration intensified. The Forest Service began to implement new authorities and engage with communities for the social, economic and ecologic benefits of watersheds. As an agency, our values began to shift from an emphasis on outputs to integrated outcomes, and from activities within our boundaries to actions within the larger watersheds. In addition, the Forest Service began shifting from a forest management philosophy of traditional forest regulation based on growth and yield to an adaptive management approach based on working with natural disturbance regimes. The Forest Service planning model of plan-propose-defend has also been slowly shifting to one where agreement on vision and desired outcome is developed collaboratively prior to projects being designed.

As laws were passed, and public interest and involvement intensified, concerns began to grow over the patchwork of laws and regulations guiding forest management. Tension was growing between goals and objectives of the various laws, especially when narrowly defined through litigation. As wildland fires grew in intensity, losses increased and communities were more threatened, the Western Governors joined with federal agencies and others to develop a National Fire Plan in 2001.

This brought energy, resources, and emphasis to reducing hazardous fuels that threaten communities, while increasing capabilities of fire fighting forces. This was not enough, however. Federal planning and implementation processes continued to take precious time. Outcomes were often challenged in court by interests generally opposed to commercial harvest activities on federal lands. Between the Healthy Forest Initiative signed by the President, and the Healthy Forest Restoration Act passed by a strong bi-partisan vote in Congress in 2003, new authorities and streamlined processes were granted to federal agencies. The intent of these was to accelerate on-the-ground activities aimed at reducing hazardous fuels and the threat of destructive wildland fires. Built into these efforts is a strong emphasis on public involvement and local collaboration. In order to utilize streamlined processes, federal agencies must involve the public.

3 CONFLICTS AND PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

Throughout conservation history in the United States, emerging policies reflect changing public values. The American experience is one of deeply felt public interest in public lands. This is substantiated by a number of national laws that allow or even specify public input and involvement, such as the National Environmental Policy Act (1969), the National Forest Management Act (1976) and the Healthy Forest Restoration Act (2003). Behind much of this is the increasing understanding and acceptance of the concept of sustainability. The laws and implementing regulations that form the basis for our management (such as the National Forest Management Act of 1976) continue to influence us in developing more sustainable policies and actions, and reflect a deep appreciation of preserving options for future generations.

Conflict accompanies public involvement. Americans are sincerely devoted to their public lands, which include over 600 million acres of some of the best scenery and productive capabilities in the country. There has long been a split in outlook between urban and rural communities. Those that value the lands for refreshment, relaxation, and rejuvenation, often have differing values than those who make their livelihood from the land. This continues to change as urban areas encroach on wildlands, and people become more mobile in their work and move to attractive rural settings. As described in the *Atlas of the New West*, Riebsame (1999), the portrait of western United States is changing, and with those changes, people are bringing new values.

In the United States, conflict can be a business of itself as described by Thomas (2004). There are as many demanding change as there are resisting it. Kent and Preister (1999) describe advocates as sometimes being "disrupters" – people or organizations we need to listen to and acknowledge, but not devote all our time and energies toward. Many advocates serve a valuable need in society, and bring balance to otherwise narrowly focused outcomes. As public land managers, however, we must be able to recognize when they are advocating for the public good, or just for their particular interest. Public policy questions are often complex, requiring integrated solutions. Advocates and representatives of our conflict industry often are only interested in their more singular solutions which often have long term unintended consequences to the land and society. In managing national forest lands in the United States, one of our larger challenges is to sort out the noise. Through a long history of conflict and litigation, we are quite good at responding to advocates through appeals, litigations, and arguments. We are less skilled at understanding mainstream public values, subtle shifts, and tapping into the community and the people we do not hear from on a regular basis.

Often conflicts over forest policy in the United States are simplified by the media, politicians, and interests in pitting extraction against preservation, jobs vs. the environment, log it or lock it up. In reality, issues are far more complex. Outcomes do not need to be win-lose situations, or mutually exclusive. Multiple objectives can be met. In the Enlibra Doctrine (Western Governors' Association 1999) developed by Governors from 11 western states, some basic principles are articulated that are a symbol for a balanced approach to successful environmental and natural resource

management, heavily based on local collaborative efforts. These principles include, among others, national standards with neighborhood solutions, and using collaborative processes to break down barriers and find solutions. In many ways, our challenge is to understand and deal with the internal conflicts shared by many of our citizens where views and actions are not consistent. This requires an educational effort to help people understand the environment in which they live. We must find more sustainable ways to live within the built environment, while living more in harmony with the natural environment.

Americans can be fickle. Often, our attitudes differ from our behavior. We want to live in log cabins and wooden houses, but many think that commercial harvest on public lands is inappropriate. We want a secure and reliable drinking water source and flood protection, but we do not want to build dams and reservoirs. We enjoy the richest food source in the world, but farming practices continue to be under heavy scrutiny. We are content to go to the grocery store for food or the lumber yard for boards, but we do not want to be associated with their production. We want to protect our environment, but we do little to curb our consumption. As suggested by Patricia Limerick, (2004) we want the cause of our comfort out of sight.

So how do we deal with these nagging problems? What is "good governance of public lands?" How can public servants, elected officials, and responsible citizens develop and influence good and enduring public policy for management of diverse interests in public lands? Why do we struggle so deeply, and often so contentiously? These are questions we face every day as public land managers.

While not credentialed in public policy or public affairs, I have over 30 years of experience and learning through personal interactions with these questions and issues. At the national level, I have worked on roadless area, old growth, and endangered species issues – all highly contentious. More locally, most of the project work we achieve is based on some degree of public involvement. I also served as Project Manager, along with Dr. Thomas Quigley, for the Columbia Basin Ecosystem Management Project, which assessed the social, economic, biological, and biophysical conditions within parts of four states. We then examined trends, risks and opportunities, developing new knowledge into management applications. All of these actions included strong public interest, conflict, and diverse values. This has helped me form ideas and opinions about successful public involvement. I have found that successful public involvement includes the recognition of diverse interests and values, the timely use of this information in policy development, and support from the communities of interest associated with a particular policy or activity.

4 PRINCIPLES OF SUCCESS

My experience has lead me to believe there are at least three general principles of successful public involvement that can lead to sound, enduring decisions. These are

1) establishing clear expectations,
2) offering opportunities for early and frequent interactions,
3) maintaining integrity in the involvement process.

Clear expectations are essential for all who choose to participate. People need to know about the issue, why it is being addressed, the timeframes, how decisions will be made, who will make decisions, what is the value in their being involved, and what role they will play in the process. People want to know how a decision or policy will affect them, their interests, and their values. They also want to know why change is needed, and if there is equity in changes being proposed.

Expectations need to be realistic and attainable within desired timeframes. Nothing destroys credibility faster than another promise that cannot be kept. Often there are issues of scale, that is, people tend to want to deal with broad scale issues with fine scale solutions. Terms such as ecosystem management restoration, ecological integrity, and forest health are vague and often broadly defined. People tend to have their own perspective of what these terms mean, based on their

experiences and confidence in players and programs. If people cannot understand the terms or concepts we use, we cannot expect them to support decisions resulting from these processes. Gifford Pinchot also wrote 100 years ago "find out in advance what the public will stand for; if it is right and they won't stand for it, postpone action and educate them." Agreeing on definitions, concepts, and needs are part of establishing clear expectations.

People want to know "what is in it for me?" To effectively address this, public land managers need to ask what is important to people? What are their perspectives of the values of public lands? There are so many diverse views on how public lands should be managed, and what they should contribute to society that single, simplified responses are often inadequate. In the United States, our traditional response has been to do more analysis and scientific review. The problem is, however, that these are often not scientific or technical questions. Even if they were, John Freemoth (2004) of the Andrus Center recently indicated that the use of science as we know it is waning. There are many dueling experts and what is referred to as advocacy science. With so many conflicting scientific findings, the public is not deferring to the experts as they used to. At the heart of conflict is not necessarily science, it is values. These are questions of values and expectations. We are often challenged to effectively deal with the social side of these concerns. As managers, we are well trained and well versed in environmental science. We struggle with the human and community aspects of public land management. Understanding values and clearly outlining expectations are foundational in effective involvement and policy development.

Early and often involvement opportunities are critical. People feel compromised when proposals are laid on their doorstep that are in final draft form, especially if there is little time to react. It is essential to identify those who may be affected by a decision early, and offer opportunities for involvement throughout the process. Successful involvement also requires openness for mutual learning by all parties throughout policy development and decision making processes. We are finding that there is a capacity issue that has to be acknowledged and managed. There is just so much we can ask of our citizens and communities. There are finite limits on their time, and people want to assure their efforts are meaningful. It is difficult for public land managers to manage public resources if they do not understand their publics' interests, capabilities, and capacity for engagement.

People can often accept a product if they know there has been **integrity in the involvement process**. There is not enough time in the day to be involved in everything of interest to ourselves, so often we defer to others, if we trust the process. To some, the process is as important as the product. To most, a product or policy is what counts, and it can be best supported over time if people feel there has been integrity in the pathway leading to desired outcomes. Success is heavily influenced by the quality of the partners, and the ability of the players to respect values of others.

When citizens look at public policy or activity proposals, they look at the players and the integrity of processes. If they have little confidence in the players, or see that processes are being coopted for whatever reason, they will often find other things to do with their valuable time. Finding ways of listening to and acknowledging the advocates, while also engaging the larger community helps maintain the integrity of processes. Clearly defining decision processes, and visibly following through with the process is essential.

So, where does the pathway lead? With natural resource issues, and public land and policy concerns, we continue to live in a contentious and litigious environment. We are seeing change, however, and there are reasons to believe these will lead to more successful outcomes. People are looking for more certainty, durability, and public support. Many people are growing weary of conflict and the unpredictability of the court process in settling disputes. Our citizens are looking for civility in resolving issues and improving landscapes, and are tired of the fight. In western United States where public lands dominate many landscapes, there is an emergence of local groups wanting to solve local problems. These include watershed councils, Soil and Water Conservation Districts, non-governmental, non-profit organizations, citizen based advisory councils, and ad hoc groups of diverse citizens more interested in solutions than the fight. People that live within watersheds have

a stake in the outcomes of projects and policy decisions. These grassroots organizations understand national and regional needs and constraints, but recognize the need and take the initiative to solve problems locally. This approach is strongly supported by the Western Governors' Association through their development and endorsement of the Enlibra Doctrine (Western Governors' Association 1999). It is also strongly supported by Congress and the current and past Presidents.

Working through collaborative approaches rather than adversarial means has proven to be more productive and engaging. Local processes tap into the good will of the communities, and although they take time and patience, often result in win-win outcomes. In these processes, natural resource managers facilitate dialog and solutions rather than drive them. Some national organizations feel threatened by these mechanisms, as local collaboration challenges traditional processes of working through the courts and politicians to secure their interests. The outcomes, however, generally speak for themselves, while building community ownership and pride in outcomes. Local collaboratively based approaches are more successful when there are clear expectations, opportunities for early involvement, and integrity in processes.

5 CONCLUSION

Americans relish and enjoy their National Forests and other public lands. It is a heritage we are proud of and will not relinquish. To effectively manage these lands, natural resource professionals must also understand and effectively work with public attitudes, values and behaviors, which often do not neatly align. Understanding and fostering productive relationships with our citizens is as important in our work as understanding complex ecological inter-dependencies. The greatest gift we can give to the land and people is our humility and professionalism in managing our cherished National Forests today, while maintaining choices for tomorrow. Our success will be based on relationships. By linking the land, service, and people, we as public land managers will remain relevant and useful to our publics and future generations. Finding practical and effective ways of engaging people, their values, and their interests is critical to the long-term sustainability of these treasured resources.

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