



# Points of View

## The Myth of the Omnipotent Forester

Our profession is concerned, and properly, with the role of the forester, his function in a democratic society, and the beneficiary of his efforts. These are matters we consider from time to time in the *Journal of Forestry*, at our professional conferences, and certainly at forestry school faculty meetings when curriculum revision is discussed.

But we have in the profession a fairly well-developed ethic that covers all these points. A forester of considerable professional status expounded that ethic to my class of freshman foresters recently when he said: "We must have enough guts to stand up and tell the public how their (*sic*) land should be managed. As professional foresters, we know what's best for the land."

And thus is perpetuated the Myth of the Omnipotent Forester.

The first forester in America was B. E. Fernow of German origin. The second was American born Gifford Pinchot. Both got their forestry training in Europe. Both were instrumental in shaping (1) the U. S. Forest Service, (2) the forestry profession in America, (3) American forestry education, and (4) the Society of American Foresters.

The influence of these men and their contributions are not to be taken lightly, nor are the men themselves to be diminished in stature. There is no need or intent here to do either, but let us keep in mind the European origins of American forestry, for there were found the elements of our Myth. (Let us by no means, either, diminish European forestry per se. There are frequently differences in *kind* that have nothing at all to do with differences in *quality*.)

An outgrowth of the Myth, implicit in the professional forester's statement above, is that politics and pressure groups are institutions clearly alien to the practice of good forestry.

We feel frequently we could be much more effective in our efforts to "intensify management" if only the pressure groups would leave us alone. For it is widely held—and grossly inaccurate—that these organizations seek to further the cause of some raucous minority inevitably at the expense of a greater public interest. And since we as foresters "know what's best for the land" we are in the best position to determine that greater public interest. The clamor of this or that pressure group simply impedes our progress.

We feel too that politics is a rather grimy game of give and take, of expedient over principle, of immediate gain at the expense of future good. On these premises we conclude that forestry should be removed from politics; political interference in the management of a forest is far too great a risk. Foresters, not politicians, should make the vital decisions in regard to forests. These are restatements of the Myth.

But let's go back to Europe. The ratio of European people to European trees has been high enough long enough to make those trees pretty valuable as compared, certainly, to the American case. Stated another way, European forests have been the relatively scarce element in the production complex of labor, capital, and natural resources, and hence have been used and managed intensively for generations.

There is, though, another European condition we might think about. When Fernow and Pinchot were there, European society was accurately characterized by more or less rigid class lines. Royalty was highly esteemed, of course, and so was *Herr Doktor*, the professional engineer, and *Herr Professor*. And so, too, was the professional forester.

If European society was characterized by well-defined areas of expertise

and well-defined class distinctions, then European politics had to be too. The word of royalty was not questioned or debated, nor was the word of the professor, the doctor, or the forester. When the forester was arbitrary, he was so with what we might call the sociological and political consent of the people his decisions affected.

Just as the intensive character of European forestry was appropriate for the biological and economic situation in Europe, so was the arbitrary and expert demeanor of the European forester appropriate for the sociological and political situation there.

The ideology of class distinctions was transplanted to American shores in colonial times, in spite of the motivation of many colonists, we are told, to escape its consequences. It was only with the writing of the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and the Bill of Rights that the peculiar form and flavor of American democracy was crystallized; there was created a society in which class distinction was vigorously denied and in which the "common man" was the basic unit of the social structure. This was, of course, a radical departure from the European tradition, and a crucial contrast it was: a professional attitude appropriate to the one society may not have been—and may not be—at all appropriate to the other.

The ideology lingered, though, and led to the great political debate between Hamilton, who maintained the notion of class superiority, and Jefferson, who did not. A few years later Jackson settled the question for a while, firmly establishing with his "rotation system" that all men are created politically equal and that any reasonably intelligent person could adequately fulfill any government job.

Jackson's democratization of federal service no doubt reflected a consensus in the body politic, but it did lead to

some messy administration in later years as the idea evolved into the political spoils system. This was dealt with by the passage of the Pendleton Act in 1883, which set up the merit system of civil service and recognized the need for securing professional tenure. There were some jobs that called for special skills in addition to a "reasonable intelligence" and the professionals who filled them (be they patent attorneys or veterinarians) needed to be protected from partisan removal. Thus the Pendleton Act filled what had become a desperate need, but its intent was *not* to restructure American sociology, or American politics, or even American public administration in a European pattern of professionalism. The effect of the Act reflected its intent: we still cherished, and do today, the notions of rugged individualism, of social and political freedom, and of a more or less classless society, and we don't much care to be told by any public servant, professional or no.

In 1886, three years after the Pendleton Act was passed, the professional forester Fernow took over the Division of Forestry in the Agriculture Department. He replaced Dr. Nathaniel H. Egleston, a Congregational minister, described in later years by Pinchot as "one of those . . . whom the spoils system is constantly catapulting into responsible positions" (7). It seemed that the Pendleton Act was proving out and professionalism (and with it, of course, capable administration) was ascending.

But Fernow's ideas of professionalism, and of forestry, and of the forester's role could be only those he had learned at his Prussian forestry school. It is scarcely surprising that his 1895 speech to the American Association for the Advancement of Science sanctified the forest resource as one that "calls preeminently for the exercise of the providential functions of the state to counteract the destructive tendencies of private exploitation" (3). Fernow called here for public ownership of an almost holy resource (which it was in Europe) to be managed by an almost holy man, the forester.

Pinchot, for all his subsequent disagreements with Fernow, stood squarely with him on this issue; private enterprise and the profit motive could not be trusted with so valuable a commodity as the forest resource, and no one but a professional forester could be entrusted with its care. What we heard from these two men was an echo from the days of Hamilton: there *was* a ruling class, at least in regard to forests and forestry. Recalling that

Pinchot's forestry training was also European his agreement with Fernow on these points is not surprising.

European notions of forestry and the role of the forester, we have seen, were based on a relatively scarce resource and a fairly rigid social stratification; we suspect that Fernow and Pinchot transplanted these notions to the United States *intact*.

American forests, though, were abundant, relative, that is, to capital and labor, and American society was not so stratified. We must conclude that we imported an applied science inconsistent with our forest biology and our forest economy. More significantly, we imported a professional ethic inconsistent with our sociology and an attitude inconsistent with our politics, which denied professional arbitration.

If the adoption of professional arbitration was inconsistent, Pinchot's brilliance as a political tactician made it palatable. In an era of social readjustment that produced the Pendleton Act just mentioned, the Sherman Antitrust Act, and a wave of administrative, economic, and social reforms, Pinchot was a virtuoso synthesizer of political impulses.

The crusade for Forestry (as G. P. was fond of capitalizing it) was popular and well attended by all, we suspect at this distance, but the true cut-out-and-get-out timber barons. If it was an era of reform, so was it an era of simplicity, when a soft word and a big stick served well for a foreign policy, and William B. Greeley was defining forestry as ". . . every method of logging timbered lands under which some adequate provision is made for future growth of trees . . . Forestry is therefore simply a specialized form of lumbering" (4).

Pinchot synthesized the Forest Service, the American forestry profession, the foundations for American forestry training, and our Society. The stuff of all these, the separate strands, were waiting to be braided into a single, strong cord, and Pinchot did so admirably. The Forest Service was the central strand, the profession reinforced it, the universities created trade schools to supply and support it, and the Society whipped the ends to keep the cord from fraying.

And so American forestry began, presuming an expertise and a righteousness that were momentarily popular but not altogether consistent with American politics and society. The inconsistency was submerged in the idealism and the simplicity of the crusade, in the overwhelming job at

hand, and in the ignorance and apathy of most Americans toward both the forest and the forester.

The inconsistency was submerged, all right, but it was assured a persistent place in the profession as Fernow in New York and Pinchot at Yale turned their attention toward the training of young foresters. The early forestry curricula had largely to do with the protection, harvesting, and regeneration of timber crops—they could be little else until forestry evolved beyond Greeley's "specialized form of lumbering." Devoid of intellectual content, forestry "training" could scarcely be called "education," depending on your definition of terms, of course. As the Gospel of Forestry according to Pinchot was preached, there can be little doubt that a stout lacing of professional omnipotence accompanied the lectures. There was probably some argument as to *which* adequate provision to make for future growth of trees; there was probably none that Forestry was Right. (A case can be made, and a good one, that Pinchot's crusade was both necessary and sufficient, given the real—and imagined—timber exploitation going on at the time. But what is true at one time may not be true 10 years, or 25 years, or 50 years later.) Fernow and Pinchot both, we learn from their biographies, had completed rather vigorous years of *education* before they went on to their forestry *training*. But in the press and rush of the new forestry schools to turn out graduates that the Forest Service (and the Crusade) so desperately needed, there is little doubt where the emphasis was. Thus the Myth of the Omnipotent Forester was maintained, and so was the intrinsic value of the forest stressed as a thing transcending its value to mankind. Both of these leftover ideas from the transposition of European forestry to America went unchallenged by the profession and unnoticed by the public.

But not for long. The public, we will see, took notice in due time. The profession perked up sooner.

It was in 1924 that Greeley and Pinchot polarized opposing professional ideas in arguing the merits of the Capper Bill versus the Clark-McNary Act. Testifying in support of the Capper Bill, which provided for federal regulation of private timber cutting—and sustained the Myth—Pinchot kept intact his allegiance to Fernow's philosophy. As David T. Mason noted in his diary, "Pinchot stated that he knew of no western companies which had yet adopted a reforestation policy" (5).

Greeley, by then chief forester, seems to have seen more clearly some real and significant developments after two decades of American forestry. One was the unravelling of the cord that Pinchot had braided. The profession was diverging from a strict Forest Service image and orientation, and so was the Society divorcing itself from the stewardship of the Service (6). Whether or not Greeley saw a proper relationship between a professional class of foresters and a classless society must remain speculation: we know he supported the Clark-McNary Act. This Act, embodying principles of federal cooperation and persuasion instead of coercion, was passed and signed into law; we must interpret its political success as consonant with American sociology. The people would welcome suggestions and professional help, but not a neo-Prussian type of professional arbitration.

Another development was the broadening format of forestry itself beyond a simple emphasis on timber production. By 1928 Chief Forester Stuart was directing his regional foresters to consider that "The importance of recreational use as a social force must be recognized and its requirements must be met" (3). Chief Stuart may have been a little premature; he certainly wasn't wrong.

But in spite of the passage of the Clark-McNary Act, federal regulation of private timber cutting was not yet a dead idea. Stuart's successor, F. A. Silcox, once more proposed it. Two subsequent chief foresters supported the idea until 1952 when ". . . 'regulation' became a taboo word, seldom mentioned by Forest Service officers and all but forgotten as a national issue" (1).

The same period saw an ingenious compromise between classical European forestry and an American interpretation: the Sustained Yield Forest Management Act of 1944. This act, providing for cooperative federal-private sustained-yield units, got by Congress, all right. But it promptly fell on its nose nine years later when the legal initiative to form the units was taken from the Forest Service (the professional class of foresters) and granted to the benefiting communities (the classless public).

In both cases—federal regulation and cooperative sustained yield—American sociology, working through American politics, overrode the imported ideas of what professional forestry should be and do.

And so as the nation struggled in the thirties to comprehend and solve the sickness of the depression and in the

forties to wage, win, and recover from the war, our profession was slowly evolving, shifting, assimilating new ideas and philosophies. A new forestry was emerging, a forestry unique, and more importantly, *appropriate* to our American traditions and institutions.

But the evolution and the emergence were too slow for the decade that followed. The fifties generated the spending power, the leisure, the mobility, and the population that combined to form the Outdoor Recreation Deluge. The public surged into the forest with camping trailers, fishing rods, rifles, and skis, and there encountered a little-known and long-ignored dweller in the woods, the professional forester. Never again would forestry and foresters go unnoticed, but the attention carried with it a warning: the respect and confidence of the public from forestry's days of obscure custodianship would not develop and project automatically into the new age of conspicuous management. There was an intense need for the evolution and the emergence to accelerate.

Just as the public discovered forestry and foresters, so did the forester discover the public, and in the sixties, the profession seeks to reestablish its identity, its objectives, and very likely its destiny.

There have been some notable probes:

The present chief of the Forest Service, Edward P. Cliff, challenges the profession in his *Journal* article, "Forestry in the Years Ahead" (2). "We should work vigorously to establish our role in that future," Mr. Cliff admonishes, validly claiming that the profession is "not fully attuned to the external forces" in a great sweep of national and international events.

This being out of tune, it seems to me, is both a cause and an effect of perpetuating the Myth; the inherent danger is simply one of losing our public's confidence in us as land managers. Chief Cliff touches on this when he says, "We must redouble our efforts to regain our share of leadership in natural resources conservation."

The most important contribution of Mr. Cliff's article, I think, is its insistence on the dynamic nature of our world and the need for our profession to reflect this dynamism. Mr. Cliff defines the crucial objectives accurately when he writes, "I believe that our profession is capable of . . . achieving a leadership that is responsive to the needs and wishes of the American people."

John Zivnuska's articles "The Multiple Problems of Multiple Use" and "Forestry: A Profession or a Field of Work?" both are superb examples

of the sort of cerebration so sorely needed and so rarely exhibited by our profession.

Dr. Zivnuska says in the second article all that need be said if we will take the time and expend the effort to consider it thoughtfully: "The practice of forestry involves the management of forests and related wild lands for the various ends of society. A forester is a manager of forests and wild lands for these ends" (9).

It is when the professional forester arbitrarily *determines* those ends (or even clumsily tries to) that he most seriously violates our classless sociology and our democratic politics. Then is displayed the Omnipotent Forester: at his best he's an amusing anachronism; at his worst he can be dangerous. For the "various ends of society," in our unique society, are and will be set only *by* that society, and not by a professional class of foresters. It is when we as professional foresters either can't or won't understand this that we get the most rapidly into the hottest water. (And our forestry school training helps us very little in sensibly avoiding getting there or capably getting out.) It is when we attempt to determine ends that "pressure groups" become the most hostile, challenging our leadership in resource conservation, and they do so quickly and properly.

They will do so properly so long as we foresters misinterpret the connection between "what's good for the land" and the "various ends of society." We have assumed, and still do, I think, a syllogistic relationship that is no longer sensible. Certainly, social good suffered when the Cedars of Lebanon were slashed away. But we have learned a great deal about land treatment since then, and *so has our public*. We can no longer claim to be the valiant defenders of the land against the cut-out-and-get-out breed; that beast is extinct, and everybody knows it—or should. Today the norm has shifted: the "good of the land" can be, usually, an assumed constant, and the "various ends of society" are variables almost (but not quite, granted) independent of land considerations. Thus the rationale of good-for-the-land ergo good-for-society today is less invalid than moot.

It is when we invoke this rationale by judging, in its terms, "goodness" and "badness" that pressure groups properly challenge our leadership. "Goodness" and "badness" in our society are collective value judgments, and land expertise is no better a qualification than many others for making them.

The judgments may or may not reflect "what's best for the land," because we use as a standard the welfare of mankind, and not the insensate earth and/or its resources. For this reason, I suppose, we decided in our country not to draw and quarter the man who shoots the king's (state's) stag (out of season). There are circumstances—a national military emergency, for example—when allowable cuts and pathological rotations, "best for the land," are clearly inappropriate. But even under normal circumstances the "good of the land" must always defer to human welfare as the basis for judging "goodness" and "badness." For these are simply some implications of a democracy in which the worth and dignity of the individual are held to be the basic units in our scheme of social values, and we as foresters could do well to acknowledge them. (There will be few, if any, real cases of human welfare requiring what's *bad* for the land: a comforting thought.)

The ends of society are most commonly arranged for by the workings of pressure groups. The more excitable may wish to call them "interest groups." In any case, various organizations, e.g., the Sierra Club, the National Forest Products Association, and the Society of American Foresters, participate almost daily in the process of ends-setting when they seek to influence the attitude and behavior of other groups and individuals.

(I don't think I've contradicted myself here. It can be politically improper or economically unfortunate, or both, it seems to me, for a district ranger or a company forester to deny public participation in his decisions that affect that public, bellowing, mean-

while, "This is best for the land." On the other hand, I think it is right and proper for the Society of American Foresters to testify for, or against, as the Society may see fit, a bill being considered by Congress.)

So what is the role of the professional forester, what is his function in a democratic society, and what is the beneficiary of his efforts?

Once again Zivnuska gives us a good lead: "The public forest administrator appropriately is responsive to political stimuli as well as to economic stimuli" (8). (And Zivnuska goes on to show that this holds true as well for the private forester.)

In responding to these dual stimuli, the forester will fulfill his role of perceiving the socially determined ends (that is, determined politically and economically) and applying the technological means to achieve them at least cost. This will mirror his function in society: one of sensing and advising, not one of ignoring or dictating. And the beneficiary of his efforts must always be "the public," whether that be a group of wilderness hikers or purchasers of two-by-fours, and not simply and blindly "the land." As we seek to understand this—and in the meantime argue about it—our profession will, I think, progress toward that leadership in resource conservation that Mr. Cliff spoke about "... a leadership that is responsive to the needs and wishes of the American people."

A myth dies hard. Maintaining one is a comfortable alternative, sometimes, to painfully compensating for changed circumstances. But we need not demolish the accomplishment or the heritage of Fernow and Pinchot as we continue and as we succeed in evolving

a uniquely appropriate American forestry profession. We can accurately credit these men with our existence as a profession as we adjust our attitudes for today's—and tomorrow's—dynamism.

And we can tell our freshman foresters, "We must have enough sense to stand up and listen to the public, and to work with it in setting forest land objectives. Then as professional foresters we can supply the technological means to these sociological ends, and not confuse the one with the other."

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### Has The Society Lost Direction?

It is becoming painfully evident that the Society of American Foresters and professional foresters in general have failed to meet the challenge of changing times. This is not a sudden dereliction of duties, but involves the insidious erosion of the quality and image of the profession over the past two decades.

Its most manifest failure has been the allowing of nonforestry interests to take over the development of preforestry training, job training, classification, testing, and the setting of professional standards. While our Society leaders, and low are embroiled in debates officers, and members both high

on how to elect Councilmen, fighting the ghost of Rachael Carson, and the soul-searing Sierra Club propaganda movie "The Wasted Woods," our stature and prestige continue to drain down the proverbial rat hole.

This inattention to the fundamental problems of the profession has allowed such nonresource agencies and offices as the General Accounting Office, Bureau of the Budget, Civil Service Commission, Labor, and Health, Education, and Welfare Departments, and the business offices of resource agencies themselves to take over the functions of setting professional requirements to take and pass civil service examinations, the number and grades of positions needed to

run a ranger district or other field office, curricula for the training of forestry aides and technicians, and the standards and methods of such details as how to conduct timber sales, tree planting contracts, etc. The present stringent ceiling on personnel imposed on our forest and land managing agencies is a striking example of this "take-over."

There is an almost total lack of any competent requirements for gaining civil service status in forestry examinations for the federal government. The proliferation of nonaccredited forestry schools is saturating the profession with so-called professional foresters who can qualify for federal positions just as readily as those from ac-

credited schools. Some forestry schools, both accredited as well as nonaccredited, apparently have found that they can enhance their reputations by increasing the number of credits for some courses or by adding forestry prefixes to such supplemental courses as pathology, entomology, soils, and wildlife to increase the civil service examination scores of their graduates. The majority of grades on such "examinations" are so high as to make them meaningless. The applicant only has to show that he has completed 24 semester hours in four aspects of forestry on his transcript to receive a passing grade. The only measure of competence is the fact that the applicant was able to secure a B.S. or B.A. degree from a four-year college or university, plus those 24 semester hours of forestry courses.

How did all this come about? Not through any acquiescence of the leaders of our Society but possibly through their neglect. It started "way back when" in elimination of the written technical entrance examination for foresters. The next step was the elimination of the so-called P grades for graduate foresters who were capable of passing the written test in contrast to the SP grades (subprofessional) for aides and technicians. All personnel are classified now under the GS (general schedule) grades and nonprofessional aides and technicians and even temporary laborers drive government cars, and, for all the public can ascertain, represent scientific and professional forestry. Practically every resource agency as well as the Civil Service Commission has its classification section which prepares the job descriptions and standards for professional positions; these "experts" rarely have had resource training and experience.

Now the nonresource agency officials dictate to forestry and land management resource bureaus and organizations the qualifications of their employees, how many they can have, and the average grade level to be achieved within the organization to carry out forest management of our nation's forests. Through curtailment of funds, hampering legislation, and their own unlimited funds and

administrative authority, these agencies have caused forestry programs to pass largely from the hands of the foresters.

That they have been highly successful is indicated by E. J. Johnson's article in the June 1965 issue of the *Journal*.<sup>1</sup> Not the Society, not the forestry schools, not foresters, but nonforestry personnel of the Labor, Health, Education, and Welfare Departments and the Agriculture Extension Service are initiating, designing, and carrying out training of forestry aides and technicians. In a footnote to the above article an editorial comment stated: "SAF members expressed concern over the possible proliferation of poorly conceived and supported programs of teaching at the aide, and technician level." One cannot help but wonder if the time is almost past to merely express concern over so vital a problem.

Seven community colleges have established forestry aide-technician training programs in Oregon. Fortunately, most have obtained the services of well qualified professional foresters to assist in setting up the curricula and providing the instruction. Some have availed themselves of advisory committees composed of local professional foresters (most of whom are members of the SAF) from industry and governmental agencies, as reported in *Western Forester* in January 1965. Unfortunately, the Oregon State Board of Education and the State Board of Higher Education are so constituted and operate so that the school of forestry has had no direct authority, control, or influence in the development of these programs.

Suddenly, it became evident to Chapter and Section leaders in the Northwest that the forestry training below the college level was in full swing with no coordination or guidance from the SAF, per se. A bit belatedly perhaps, the Columbia River and Puget Sound Sections have coordinated their efforts by appointing joint educational committees to study the problem and hopefully find some professionally sound and practical solutions. The first step was organizing a

forum of some 60 interested people from industry, governmental agencies, state boards of education from Oregon and Washington, community colleges, and the schools of forestry of the University of Washington and Oregon State University, to delineate the problems and seek avenues of approach to their solution. This represents the most positive action of any professional problem that SAF members have seen in the Northwest and goes well beyond only expressing concern about the problem.

Perhaps the aide-technician problem can be solved best on a regional basis since forestry workers in these categories normally spend their working careers in local employment. It then follows that Sections should provide accreditation of the programs as well as guidance in their development.

The problem of professional standards for civil service examinations and position classifications and grades is nationwide and should receive the most urgent attention of the Council and national office. Professional foresters should insist that such decisions be made by the profession. It is my feeling that the lack of support for a dues increase largely stems from inaction on such urgent problems.

Unless and until some notable success is achieved on some such problem of immediate concern to a large segment of the Society, the charge will continue to be made that the Society is little more than a debating society with action supplied by power politics to the detriment of the profession and its image. It will take the concerted effort of the entire Society and all professional foresters to retrieve the prerogatives that rightfully belong to us. The first step will be to sell ourselves to our immediate constituents wherever or wherever they may be, then with their support to start action to return decision making in forestry matters to professionally trained men, from the nonresource administrators and others who have usurped these prerogatives.

<sup>1</sup>Forestry training of less than college level. 63:433-436.