

# Has the Myth of the Omnipotent Forester Become the Reality of the Impotent Forester?

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ABSTRACT

Almost 40 years ago, Behan's (1966) article (Behan, R.W. 1966. The myth of the omnipotent forester. *J. For.* 64:398–407) stressed that the role of professional foresters in the United States was not to tell the public how to manage their forests, but to manage according to society's goals. This article considers whether foresters have heeded this advice or neglected it, thereby creating the reality of the impotent forester. Some disturbing trends suggest the latter case may be occurring.

**Keywords:** forestry profession, professional licensing, forestry accreditation, forestry professional ethics

**Omnipotent:** "Having virtually unlimited authority or influence" **Impotent:** "Lacking in power strength or vigor: helpless" Webster's Seventh New Collegiate Dictionary (1976)

In 1966, R.W. Behan published "The myth of the omnipotent forester" in the *Journal of Forestry* (Behan 1966). One of the main messages of the article was that the role of foresters, given society's values of forests, was not what many in the profession perceived.<sup>1</sup> Although many foresters perceived themselves as being in control of forests, the public had other ideas, seeing foresters as public representatives for managing a public resource.

Behan describes how the European roots of forestry established foresters as an esteemed profession managing, "... an almost holy resource (which it was in Europe) to be managed by an almost holy man, the forester." However, Behan goes on to describe how this view of forestry didn't fit well

in the United States: "... we imported a professional ethic inconsistent with our sociology and an attitude inconsistent with our politics, which denied professional arbitration." Behan continues, "The inconsistency was submerged in the idealism and the simplicity of the crusade. . . ." (Behan 1966).

The issues that the crusade needed to address turned out to be anything but simple. Americans began to discover increasingly their forests: "The public surged in 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." As the American public became more active in forests, "... 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."

A fundamental point of Behan's article is that the role of professional foresters in the United States was not to tell the public how

to manage their forests, but to manage according to society's goals, and that these goals, "... will be set only *by* that society, and not by a professional class of foresters." But foresters were not accustomed to this Brave New World. They were used to managing according to what was "good for the land," which was viewed as "an assumed constant," rather than the goals of society, which are "variables."

Behan was not alone in his concern for the forestry profession. Shortly before Behan wrote his article, Cliff (1963), then chief of the US Forest Service, stated that the profession was "not fully attuned to the external forces," and that "We must redouble our efforts to regain our share of leadership in natural resources conservation."

Nearly 40 years later, these seminal works strike a chord that in many ways rings true today. The forestry profession once again finds itself with a potential identity crisis, similar to that described by Behan and Cliff. Recent editorials by the leadership of the Society of Foresters (SAF; Banzhaf [2002], Coufal [2003], and Beuter [2004]) suggest that it may be time for lively discussions about the nature of the forestry profession; i.e., the forestry landscape seems to be changing significantly, and the role of foresters, or their professional organizations, is no longer clear. Has the forestry profession been adapting as society's values for forest resources are changing, or have we reverted to the attractive simplicity and guised professionalism of managing forests for "what is best for the land"? In short, have we

<sup>1</sup> I embark reluctantly on summarizing Behan's work. His is a seminal piece that I think should be read in its entirety by all foresters. I hope that my copious use of quotes inspires people to go back and read the original.

heeded the advice of Behan and recognized the myth of the omnipotent forester, or are we neglecting this advice thereby creating the reality of the impotent forester?

This article will address these questions by investigating current roles of US and Canadian foresters as perceived by the profession and the public, given present social demands in public forests. The next section begins by describing signs that suggest that the forestry profession is in trouble. Then, I consider what may be some of the causes for this situation. Next, I describe some ways in which the forestry profession has responded to this trend and point out some potential problems with these responses. I conclude by assessing potential future directions and speculate on whether they are likely to promote importance or impotence of the profession.

In the opinions that follow, I take a decidedly critical look at the forestry profession and where it is headed. It is hoped that this critique will stir further debate regarding future directions for the forestry profession. This critical approach is not, in any way, meant to diminish the many accomplishments of foresters over the past decades or to imply that they should not play an important role in the future management of forests.

## Signs of Trouble

An important indicator of the strength of the forestry profession is how its size is changing over time. Presumably, growing professions are providing services found useful by society and have a supply of willing and able new recruits to sustain the profession. In the following paragraphs, I consider two important indicators of the status of the forestry profession: trends in numbers of existing foresters as measured by membership in forestry organizations and the trends in numbers of foresters being trained.

A past president of the SAF points out that the number of SAF members has dropped approximately 30% over the past 10 years (Coufal 2003). In Canada, the situation is somewhat different. According to Roxanne Comeau (personal communications, June 6, 2003), executive director of the Canadian Institute of Forestry (CIF), "Our membership has been increasing 5–10%/year for the last 5 years." However, she goes on to explain that this is not necessarily because the number of foresters is getting larger, but because they have been more

successful in recruiting members, "We have joint dues agreements with many of the RPFs [Registered Professional Foresters] and a professional forest technologist association, and this has helped us in bringing in new members to the Institute." Comeau continues, "Of more concern for us in Canada is the declining enrollment at the forestry schools (university and colleges), I'm sure it is going to have an impact on us soon as well."

Enrollments in Canadian forestry schools generally have been falling. From a peak in 1998/1999, enrollments have dropped by approximately one-third in 2002/2003 (Luckert 2004). A similar trend is occurring in the United States, where Wakefield (2003) reports that there are "... declining enrollments in forestry programs nationwide." From a peak in 1998, enrollments dropped by approximately one-half in 2002 (Food and Agriculture Education Information System, undated). Similarly, over a sample of 24 institutions, Sharik (2004) finds enrollments drop from approximately 3,500 forestry students in 1995/1996 to approximately 2000 students in 2003. Stories at individual universities punctuate these problems. At the University of Washington, we hear, "Today, as the UW's population soars, the College of Forest Resources attracts only 250 undergraduates—down from a high of 800 in the early 1970s" (Welch 2002). Moreover, Oregon State University (undated) reports that "College of Forestry enrollment has declined substantially since 1998, despite overall increases in OSU over the same time period." The report also notes that "... this declining trend is common across forestry programs in many parts of the world." Along these lines, Dalyell (2003) reports that in the United Kingdom, there has been a 55% decline over the past 5 years in the number of undergraduate, graduate, and advanced forestry students.

## Potential Causes

Concepts of supply and demand may be useful in considering potential causes for these drops in professional memberships and student enrollments. Ultimately, the demand for foresters comes from society, whether it is from private firms or public management agencies, producing goods and services for the general public. The supply of foresters also comes from the general public as they enroll for training in forestry schools or, in some cases, are trained on the job. A

number of factors could influence the supply of and/or the demand for foresters, including available forestry jobs, changing concepts of forestry, and perceptions of the forestry profession.

**Declining Forestry Jobs.** It is common to think that the demand for foresters is linked with supply, in that increases in demands for forest goods and services can cause increases in the number of forestry jobs, which in turn can cause more members of the public to pursue forestry training. Accordingly, the availability of forestry jobs may be a key determinant of forestry school enrollments. However, job availability appears to be a problem. In a survey of 55 forestry students at the SAF/CIF International Convention, Sharik (2004) finds that the two largest hesitations about majoring in forestry are job availability and low wages. Moreover, while forestry enrollments in the United States have been falling, enrollments in other fields such as Environmental Science and Recreation have been increasing (Sharik 2004). As such, it seems as though jobs previously held by foresters are now being taken by other resource professions.

The link between forestry enrollments and jobs also is evident in Canada. Luckert (2004) found enrollments in Canadian forestry schools were highly correlated to jobs (lagged 2–4 years) available in forestry. This correlation holds in years where enrollments were increasing (1995/1996 to 1998/1999) and during years when enrollments were declining (1999/2000 to 2002/2003).

The tight relationship between jobs and enrollments in Canada is in a way encouraging. It suggests that current woes are being influenced by the current business cycle where forestry jobs happen to be low, and that forestry jobs and enrollments will likely rise again. However, there may be something else at work besides a normal business cycle to cause such drastic declines in both enrollments and memberships in professional organizations. As Lewis and Hawkins (2004) state, "What is new is the magnitude of the decline and the reason behind it."

**Changing Concepts of Forestry.** Forestry is at a crossroads. This statement seems cliché because people have been saying it for some time, but it is, nonetheless, likely true. The rate of change in the social circumstances that forestry has been experiencing and the current changing state of the profession suggest that something is amiss.

A number of authors (e.g., Burton et al. [2003]) have identified a major paradigm

shift underway in forestry, where concepts of sustained yield management are being replaced by concepts such as ecosystem management and sustainable forest management. Although there are a number of differences between sustained yield and these new approaches, a common theme is that while sustained yield assumed that perpetuating trees would perpetuate other forest resources, sustainable forest management recognizes the need to explicitly consider the management of nontimber resources. For example, citing the case of wildlife management, Thomas (2002) explains,

... the forester's mantra was, far too often, that "good forestry is good wildlife management." That chant—repeated over and over—was widely accepted. Foresters clung to that adage long after the emerging science clearly showed otherwise. . . .

Concurrent with this paradigm shift has been a change in expertise needed to address the broader array of social concerns regarding forests. Universities generally have responded by altering the types of expertise they hired to address emerging issues of forests. Accordingly, Coufal (2003) questions whether declining SAF membership is characteristic of "... forestry programs where many of the faculty members are no longer foresters but specialists in related fields?"<sup>2</sup> Along these lines, Thomas (2002) following Behan's (1966) phrasing concludes, "The myth of the omniscient forester as the complete natural resources manager is obsolete."

Despite these changes, some of the fundamental underlying purposes of foresters seem to be constant. Beuter (2004) questions whether forestry definitions actually have changed much over the last two centuries, arguing that in its most basic form, forestry then as now is about uniting science with practice to meet social objectives regarding roles of forests. Along these lines, Behan (1966) maintains that "... all that needs to be said" was written by Zivnuska (1963) when he stated that "The practice of Forestry involves the management of forests and related wild lands for the various ends of society." In other words, forestry is about answering two basic questions: What will happen to forests in response to different

management options? and What does society want from forests? Unfortunately, we don't seem to know enough about either of these questions relative to the expectations that society has regarding how their resources should be managed. The dynamics of ecological systems and social values, evolving over long forestry planning periods, have proven difficult to understand.

**Changing Perceptions of the Forestry Profession.** The forces driving changes in forest management indicate that society is demanding forests to be managed differently than in the past, but how the forestry profession supplying these management services has performed in response to these demands Thomas (2002) states, "Twenty or so years ago, foresters were among the most respected and trusted professionals in the United States. Sadly that is no longer so. . . . Twenty or so years ago, the U.S. Forest Service, staffed primarily by foresters and engineers, was widely acclaimed as the best in the United States government's stable of agencies. Sadly, this is no longer so." Thomas goes on to explain that "Foresters' reputations have declined as a result of hanging on too long to models of management predicated on the application of industrial strength forestry. . . ."

The decline of foresters' reputations also may be occurring in Canada. A report commissioned by the association of British Columbia Professional Foresters has investigated public perceptions of foresters over time (Market Facts Market Trend 2002). Although the report suggests relatively constant public support for the importance of having the practice of forestry restricted to registered professional foresters, there are some worrisome trends. Between 1997 and 2002, the percent of the public that believed it was "very important" to have forestry restricted to registered professional foresters declined in every year, from 66% in 1997 to 40% in 2002. Furthermore, the credibility ratings of "other resource professionals" (e.g., biologists, geoscientists, and agrologists) is consistently higher than for those of registered professional foresters. This credibility problem may be a result of increasing dissatisfaction with the quality of forest management in British Columbia (from 53% "somewhat" or "very satisfied" in 1999 to only 35% in 2002). Alternatively, the problem of credibility may be a result of public beliefs that professional foresters are most likely to favor their employer's interests when making forest management deci-

sions (52% of respondents in 2002), rather than the public's interests (10% of respondents in 2002).

Perceptions that potential recruits have of the forestry profession seem to mirror these concerns. John Shane, chair of the University of Vermont's Forestry Department, speaks of student interests in "... land management as a whole, not just timber extraction" (Wakefield 2003). Similarly, in lamenting difficulties in recruiting for forestry students in British Columbia, Yanciw (2004) states that "Forestry is not a term many grade 12 students associate with an attractive career." Along these lines, Saddler (2003) reports that a recent phone survey of prospective forestry recruits "... expressed surprise that a forestry program could include such science-based disciplines as botany, zoology, conservation biology and chemistry." This narrow perception of the forestry profession has been accompanied by negative images. Six of the 55 forestry students who responded to the survey at the 2004 SAF/CIF International Convention cited "low/negative image of foresters/forestry" as a factor causing them to be hesitant about majoring in forestry (Sharik 2004).<sup>3</sup>

In addition to problematic perceptions of the forestry profession found among potential recruits, the profession also has been struggling with negative perceptions from within. As Coufal (2003) questions, "Is SAF seen as a closed, narrow minded, and unwelcoming group so that new groups, such as the Forest Stewards Guild, have arisen?" Judging from selected quotes by members of this organization compiled by Zorzin (undated), the answer seems to be a resounding yes. For example,

It appears that the rapid pace of cultural evolution may have isolated foresters. The profession may be occupying an evolutionary backwater created by our inability to articulate a vision of forest management that is acceptable to an uneasy public. The Society of American Foresters is currently in a state of denial.

<sup>2</sup> In support of this hypothesis, a quick count from the web page of the largest forestry faculty in Canada (61 people) at the University of British Columbia undated disclosed that only 23% are registered professional foresters.

<sup>3</sup> Although slightly over 10% of the sample may not sound like a lot, note that these are people who were concerned about the image of the profession but, nonetheless, chose to major in forestry. As such, the sample does not represent those students who did not become forestry majors because of similar concerns.

## Responses of the Profession and Problems

The forestry profession in North America has responded to these issues in a number of ways. Organizations such as the SAF and CIF have increased their policy efforts and encouraged debate by providing forums to discuss the future of the profession. Moreover, these organizations have been involved in reviewing accreditation requirements of forestry schools, encouraging professional licensing of foresters, and developing ethics to regulate the practice of forestry.

### *Accreditation of Forestry Programs.*

It is difficult to overemphasize the importance of accreditation requirements for forestry programs in defining the future of the profession. For many of us, the imprint from our college training is profound. During formative years when students are introduced to the promise and challenges of forestry, they are rapidly forming skills and attitudes that will endure throughout their careers. As such, it is vital that the curricula that universities develop within the guidelines of accreditation reflect the current social demands for forests and foresters. However, accreditation processes in the United States and Canada are sometimes constraining.

As universities struggle to attract more students, they face a number of constraints. From within universities there are pressures to reduce forestry degree requirements to make room for more electives or for general education requirements. At the same time, universities also may be squeezed by curriculum requirements set by forestry accreditation organizations.<sup>4</sup> For example, Wakefield (2003) reports that the University of Vermont is considering forgoing accreditation to retain flexibility to meet changing forestry demands. Again, quoting John Shane, "Forestry has been conspicuously inflexible. . . . SAF hasn't grown with the boundaries" of the evolving profession (Wakefield 2003).<sup>5</sup>

The story is similar in Canada, where Lewis and Hawkins (2004) state,

Universities are limited in their response to the changing needs of the profession and in making changes to curriculum that would make forestry a more attractive choice, because subject area requirements are dictated by a profession stuck in time with regard to academic preparation.

Again, happenings outside of North America seem to be mirroring this trend. In explaining declining enrollments in the United Kingdom, Dalyell (2003) laments that, historically, the Department for International Development was a major supporter of forestry but has shifted its focus to research in the social sciences. The fact that social sciences were not seen as being an integral part of forestry may be telling.

***Professional Licensing of Foresters.*** A common trend among professional foresters' organizations in many parts of North America has been to seek improved professional status by more clearly defining and regulating their professional members. For example, the SAF recently implemented its Certified Forester program (SAF 2003). In Canada, recent professional forester legislation also has been introduced or updated in all the major forestry provinces: Bill 5, Foresters Act (2003), Regulated Forestry Profession Act, R.S.A. 2000, C. R-13 (2000), Ontario (2000), Quebec (2004), and New Brunswick Foresters Act (2001).

Although the conditions of these varying professional designations vary, all seek, at the most basic level, to distinguish foresters from nonforesters. Titled foresters are distinguished from nonforesters by their qualifications (in many cases, largely based on an accredited forestry education) and, subsequently, by the activities that the professional organization deems they are qualified to engage in. In some cases, defined forestry activities are legislatively reserved to be the exclusive domain of registered foresters. As such, these licensing arrangements seek to define foresters and, by default, exclude nonforesters by defining rights to the title of professional forester and/or rights to practice forestry.

Although the logic behind the merits of professional accreditation is multifaceted,<sup>6</sup> in response to the issues raised in this article, a key objective is, "To enhance the credibility of the forestry profession" (SAF 2003). The line of thinking seems to be as follows:

Other respected professions, such as doctors and mechanical engineers, have professional designation. Why should foresters be any different? The problem is that the issues facing the discipline have become so complex as to transcend the capabilities of a single discipline. However, in the face of the increasing need to multidisciplinary approaches, professional forestry associations frequently have taken the exact opposite tact in trying to maintain their tenuous grip on forests by commonly excluding other disciplines in professional licensing programs.

There have been efforts by professional forestry organizations to be more inclusive. For example, in the mid-1990s, the SAF changed their membership categories, which broadened membership opportunities.<sup>7</sup> However, the professional licensing programs are by design, exclusionary. Attempting to maintain a professional grip on forests in the face of increasingly complex social demands has had predictable consequences. Forest stakeholders have, in many ways, said "no thank you." They have favored a new management paradigm, now termed sustainable forest management, to replace older management approaches.<sup>8</sup> They have demanded that their objectives, rather than the objectives of foresters, be the basis of management plans. They have demanded additional expertise, beyond foresters, in natural and social sciences; and, finally, they have demanded that foresters *not* have exclusive domain over forests.

This final demand is evident in many aspects of professional forester licensing. In most jurisdictions, foresters do not have exclusive control over all aspects of forestry. Rather, the signature of a professional forester may be required only for specific activities, such as certifying that specific forest management prescriptions (such as regeneration efforts) have been performed. In several US states, a licensed or registered professional forester need not possess an accredited forestry degree or, in some states, a forestry degree at all (SAF 2001). An exception to this general trend is the province of Alberta, where professional forester legisla-

<sup>4</sup> In the United States and Canada, these are, respectively, the SAF and the CIF.

<sup>5</sup> A reviewer of this article indicated that in a letter dated Apr. 26, 2002, the University of Vermont notified SAF of its decision to not pursue reaccreditation. Therefore, its accreditation expired as of Dec. 31, 2002. This example is not meant to be indicative of a general situation. A number of universities have found creative ways to remain flexible to meet the requirements of accreditation. However, cases like these are, nonetheless, cause for concern.

<sup>6</sup> For a discussion of some of these issues see a number of articles in Distant Thunder, *Journal of the Forest Stewards Guild*, Spring/Summer 2001.

<sup>7</sup> Thanks to a reviewer for bringing this to my attention.

<sup>8</sup> This statement is not meant to imply that there have not been many members of the forestry profession that have provided leadership in developing sustainable forest management, but rather that society has and will drive the forest management agenda and that the profession does not seem to have always responded effectively.

tion goes so far as to define teaching and research in forestry to lie within the scope of forestry activities governed by the act (Regulated Forestry Profession Act, R.S.A. 2000, C. R-13 2000). However, with the scope of forestry activities defined so broadly, policy makers were apparently unwilling to allow registered foresters to have exclusive domain over all specified forestry activities. In Alberta, nonforesters are not excluded from teaching and researching forestry. However, anybody with the credentials to become a forester must do so if they wish to pursue these same activities.

In summary, foresters have faced some tough choices in trying to secure exclusive professional domain over forests. Frequently, they have garnered exclusive domain over a very small part of the current definitions of forestry or they have sought to capture larger domains and have not been able to exclude nonforesters from practice. However, from a social point of view, the failure of foresters to capture the domain of forests exclusively is likely desirable. Mirroring sentiments quoted previously from Thomas (2002), Lewis and Hawkins (2004) state, "Why is there no room in our exclusive club for graduates of 'unaccredited' programs that address many of the biological and social issues at the heart of forest management. . . ?"

**Professional Ethics.** The proliferation of licensing for professional forester has been driven partly by a demand for accountability and policing of malpractice. The logic seems to be, "who other than a fellow professional can assess whether a forester has acted professionally?" In response to these demands, professional organizations have constructed codes of ethics that foresters must follow.

Given the breadth of issues that foresters find themselves managing, it is understandable that lists of rules found in codes of ethics are quite general, in many ways mirroring universal morals. For example, the SAF Code of Ethics (SAF undated b) states that ". . . behavior must be based on honesty, fairness, goodwill, and respect for the law." At this level of generality, ethics are hardly a property of professional foresters, because other organizations, such as the Boy Scouts of America, also have codes that state similar ideals.<sup>9</sup> However, some professional

forestry organizations have attempted to go beyond such general declarations within the context of forestry. For example, the Code of Ethics for the College of Alberta Professional Foresters (2003) states, "Regulated members have a duty to retain the productivity of forestlands." Given that forestry research lies within the scope of forestry activities that are regulated in Alberta, a forest economist studying land use changes to agricultural production potentially could be in breach of the code, if findings of the study were to show economic gains to agricultural conversions.<sup>10</sup>

In the United States, specificity in forestry codes of ethics also have been problematic. For example, the Forest Stewards Guild (now the Forest Guild) and the SAF have been crafting statements that attempt to maintain a duty to the land while meeting social values.<sup>11</sup> Relying heavily on a land ethic, the Forest Guild states that "The forest has value in its own right, independent of human intentions and needs." and "A forester's first duty is to the forest and its future" (Forest Guild, undated). As was the case in the aforementioned example, a forester operating under such a land ethic could be found to in contravention of the code for suggesting conversion of forests to agricultural land. Contrary to this approach, the SAF seems to have been struggling with the role that a land ethic should play among its members. The mission clearly states that the SAF seeks to ". . . use the knowledge, skills, and conservation ethic of the profession to ensure the continued health and use of forest ecosystems and the present and future availability of forest resources to benefit society." (SAF, undated a) However, the SAF has a code that indicates a forester's first duty is to serve society: "Foresters have a responsibility to manage land for both current and future generations. . . . to provide the variety of materials, uses, and values desired by landowners and society" (SAF, undated b).

The foregoing examples of forestry codes of ethics highlight some fundamental problems associated with trying to regulate foresters and, by extension forestry, with codes of ethics. First, a key problem with these codes of ethics is that to be widely applicable, they are sometimes likely to be too

general to make any real difference in the behavior of members. However, attempts to become more specific, as with the examples of maintaining forest productivity and adhering to a land ethic, could constrain practices that may be necessary to pursue social land management objectives. With the need to have such general ethics, the universality of many statements within these codes may make them seem to be more like self-righteous advertising of a profession rather than a tool to maintain standards of forest management.

Second, it may be inappropriate to regulate foresters with ethics set by professional forestry organizations. Continuing the previous examples, if sectors of the public are able to argue successfully for a switch from forestland to agricultural land, thereby decreasing the productivity of forests, they will likely in the end do it, whether or not it violates foresters' notions of land ethics. It is society's values that will define forestry, not values set by the profession. Alternatively, if society holds a land ethic regarding the forests, then it is the job of foresters to manage accordingly. A point made by Chase (1997) on the role of science also is relevant for the role of professional stewards of public resources:

The proper role of science is: 1) informing the public about the implications of various policy alternatives, and 2) when the public decisionmaking machinery has reached a policy conclusion providing the expertise needed in order for us to know-how to get to that goal that society chooses.

This quote implies that foresters need to be prepared for social values that violate their notions of ethics. However, instead of entering into debates regarding what those goals should be, a forester's professional obligation is to inform the public of various management and policy alternatives and to tell them when things they want will not work and why.

A third point arises from considering the large number of court cases where forestry issues have been considered. A fundamental result of having professional codes of ethics is to make individual foresters accountable for their actions. However, given the complexity of today's forestry issues, generally, it is teams of land managers, rather than an individual forester, who are responsible for all but the most mundane management decisions. Along these lines, Wood (2004) points out a conundrum faced by foresters who are required to consult spe-

<sup>9</sup> That is, a scout is trustworthy, loyal, helpful, friendly, and so on.

<sup>10</sup> I am thankful to Glen Armstrong for providing this example.

<sup>11</sup> Thanks to a reviewer for providing this example.

cialists who are nonforesters, stating that in provinces “. . . with legislated exclusive professional forestry practice, professional foresters are often placed in the awkward position of having to judge the advice of specialists even when these foresters do not possess the expertise to make that judgment.”

Within the context of such complex management decisions, is it wise to make individual foresters responsible? Are foresters being set up for impossible tasks? Alternatively, are we suggesting that foresters are capable of only being responsible for routine management decisions, thereby redefining forestry as being constrained to a small subset of forest management and leaving the more politically charged questions for other disciplines?

## Potential Solutions

To the extent that the foregoing observations are correct, they point toward some specific problems faced by foresters and forestry associations. They also suggest some specific strategies to pursue, as foresters continue their soul searching. In the following paragraphs, I list five suggestions about what to avoid and make suggestions about what to do instead.

**Do Not Manage for “the Good of the Land.”** Historically, and even at times today, foresters and other scientists have tried to simplify the difficult questions facing the profession by claiming to manage forests for “the good of the land.” However, Behan (1966) recognized that “. . . the good of the land must always defer to human welfare as a basis for judging ‘goodness’ and ‘badness.’” More recently, Chase (1997) expressed the same sentiment this way: “If you recognize that there is no health of nature what do we have? What we have are a lot of competing interests.”

The idea that particular natural states of forests may not be inherently good is difficult for many people to accept. For decades, normal forests, presumably achievable through sustained yield, were thought, by large portions of foresters and society, to represent a desirable state.<sup>12</sup> However, one only

need examine the current paradigm shifts toward sustainable forest management to realize that what is good for forests is subjectively determined by society. This means that foresters can not be guardians of forests according to some universal management principal, but instead must respond to changing social forces. However, foresters may take solace in a quote by Behan (1966): “There will be few, if any, real cases of human welfare requiring what’s bad for the land: a comforting thought.”

Basing forest management decisions on human values is not meant to imply that human constructs, such as economies and policy, will inevitably prevent land degradation. Quite to the contrary, a primary concern of foresters should be the analysis of market failures (e.g., Boyd and Hyde [1989]) and government failures (e.g., Wolf [1988]) such that the focus on human values, which include the integrity of sustainable ecosystems, is the basis from which failures of the forestry profession, markets, and public policy will, and should, be judged.

**Never Say or Think, “Trust Me Folks, I’m a Professional.”** To a large extent, forest management issues revolve around values, not around professional judgment. Although having professional knowledge about how forests may respond to alternative uses is important, it is the values associated with those uses that are frequently the causes of conflict. Therefore, forest management is about the values of clients, who belong to diverse groups and carry diverse values. It is not about the values of foresters.

Some may argue that foresters are also a part of society who deserve to have their values heard. Although such an argument is difficult to counter on normative grounds, it is dangerous in practice. Foresters are in a position of power and privilege regarding the management of public resources. If they are seen to impart their own values in this management process, they will appear as a non-neutral facilitator, thereby undermining their potential efficacy. Instead, it will be important for foresters to attempt to manage for social values, whether foresters agree with them or not. In the words of two Nobel Laureates Stigler and Becker (1977), “De Gus-

tibus non est Disputandum.” Loosely translated, tastes are indisputable. Tastes are not right or wrong, they just are, and a forester’s job is to try to manage for them.

Trying to assess what different stakeholder groups in society want and accommodating conflicting desires creates “wicked problems” (Shindler and Cramer 1999). However, such difficulties do not justify simplifications that substitute the values of foresters or land ethics for the values of society. Instead, such problems require careful consideration of social values, inclusive decisionmaking processes, and professional and scientific judgments on alternative forest management approaches.

**Do Not Assume Foresters Can Manage Forests on Their Own.** Because society pays more attention to a greater variety of resources within forest systems, forest management has become more complex. This complexity has attracted the attention of a widening array of disciplines with highly trained specialists that include ecology, botany, zoology, sociology, political science, and economics. To insist that a forester with a BS degree can address the complex natural and social science issues that forests present on their own is a strategy doomed to failure.

Instead, perhaps we should view a forestry education less as a professional degree and more as a liberal arts degree (with healthy infusions of natural science); i.e., instead of creating a professional at the BS level, perhaps a forestry degree should be a foundation on which to build a future specialization (Anderson 2005). An alternative approach would be to design curricula that specialize in some of the things that still are within the domain of foresters (i.e., cruising, measurements, surveys, and others). However, this approach would leave a BS forestry degree looking very much like a tech degree, and likely perpetuate the trend that has taken forestry issues away from foresters.

**Do Not Assume That Foresters Can Legislate or Certify Professionalism to Regain Stature.** Professional stature is earned when society deems that it is receiving a service worthy of its praise. It can not be granted to the profession by the profession, whether it is legislated or certified.

For society to view foresters as professionals, they will have to prove their worth among the complex issues facing forest management and in competition and cooperation with other specialists working on these issues. This is likely to require postgraduate training. Foresters with a broad forestry

<sup>12</sup> The late Charles (Chuck) Minor, past Dean of the School of Forestry at Northern Arizona University, was fond of telling students that a normal forest is something that you will learn much about in forest management, but it is something that rarely, if ever, exists. After decades of the forestry profession pursuing such man-

agement, it now seems that society is telling the profession that it needs to manage forests for what they want, not for some elusive professional ideal.

background and more specialized knowledge may be able to compete and coordinate their efforts with other disciplines to gain society's respect.

**Do Not Assume That Ethics Will Improve Forest Management.** Ethics have been defined as common sets of values or principles (Webster 1976). As discussed previously, forestry issues are created by differing sets of values. Hence, it will be difficult to solve forestry issues with ethics, especially when ethics set by foresters may clash with public values and when professional forestry associations attempt to place the responsibility for forest management on individual foresters.

Instead, responsibilities for forest management could be shared by teams of professionals with diverse skills communicating with stakeholders in well-defined processes. Accountability of forest management teams and processes to the public, not the profession, will be fundamental.

### The Impotent or the Important Forester?

Many foresters are, in my opinion, correctly concerned about their future role in the management of forests. However, in some cases, it seems as though the profession's response has been to anchor their survival strategies on stubborn adherence to their own traditional values. This is an understandable and intuitive response, but dangerous. To be important, future foresters will need the strength to curb their personal values of forests as they manage public resources for public values. In the end, the survival of the forestry profession will depend on its ability to serve the owners of forests. Foresters could do this with advertising and trying to convince the public that they are good, but actions speak louder than words. In the long run, the contribution of foresters has to meet the expectations that their advertising creates. If they do not, there will not be a public demand for their services.

The end of forestry as many of us know it may be near. If foresters do not adapt and become part of a changing future, their influence will continue to decline. The near monopoly position that foresters historically held in forest management has been supplanted by competition from other professionals that are ready and willing to face the natural and social science complexities that forests present. Foresters still may have a comparative advantage in managing forest resources given the wealth of knowledge that

has accumulated in decades of service as forestland managers. Moreover, the profession has repeatedly shown leadership and innovation in responding to ever changing issues. However, this round of issues will require the profession to embrace the newcomer specialists and to redefine their place in a changing forest management landscape that seeks to meet social objectives.

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