Production, Preservation and Politics Facets of Wildland Management

DeWitt Nelson
Iowa State University

Follow this and additional works at: https://lib.dr.iastate.edu/amesforester

Part of the Forest Sciences Commons

Recommended Citation
Available at: https://lib.dr.iastate.edu/amesforester/vol55/iss1/7
Production, Preservation and Politics

Facets of Wildland Management

By DEWITT NELSON

In this paper I will deal in part with the who, what, why, when and where of special interest groups, and some of the concepts, problems and issues confronting us in the areas of resource use and preservation. The forces that motivate them, the conflicts of interest that create them, and the responsibilities of the opposing forces to deal realistically with them.

Technological changes are broadening our resource base and also causing greater demands for commodity production. These same changes provide a growing population with more time, money and mobility to wander far and wide. Because of these opportunities the public's interest in the world about them has taken on new dimensions. They are all-seeing, if not all-understanding.

The user groups and the protector groups deal at arms-length. Often there is an unwillingness or failure to solve problems at the local level which forces the issues into the political arena. There is a lack of communications and mutual understanding of objectives and of what the ultimate impact of various groups desires will be on the resource users.

Special interest groups, both pro and con, are a vital part of our democratic process. It is essential that a reasonable balance of power be maintained between special interest groups in order to maintain a reasonable balance of resource use.

Business, industry, public agencies and other special interest groups have a responsibility to serve the public interest to the best of their ability—socially, economically and politically.

With these opening remarks I would like each of you to identify for yourself which special interest group you belong to. We are each, directly or indirectly, passively or artifically members of one or more such groups. It may be the organization for which you work that stimulates your orientation or it may be an organization to which you belong for outside and extra-curricular activities which you enjoy.

Even though this is a somewhat homogenous group with Forestry as our professional interest I venture a guess that there are at least a half dozen interest groups represented here. Most of these groups, whether they be oriented to industry, public services or lay preservationists organizations have clearly defined objectives for which they crusade. Most of them endeavor to present their objectives under the banner of "in the public interest."

This in itself raises questions, not easily identified. What is the public interest? Who is the public? And which public are we serving? In some issues these questions can be rather easily answered, particularly in cases like air and water pollution control. In others it is more difficult, for instance the dedication of large blocks of land and resource for a single purpose such as recreation at the expense of pay rolls, tax base and community stability. Even in these cases the issue is seldom clear-cut on black and white alternatives.

During this period of population explosion, more leisure time and greater mobility there have developed some real issues between those who believe in harvesting and utilizing many of our resources and those who believe that large areas should be acquired and dedicated to the primary use of recreation.

Most of the "user groups" believe and recognize the need for many such dedications. The question then becomes where and how much, and its "O.K. if it doesn't hit my property and operations."

On the other hand the preservation groups pinpoint their targets and militantly take the political route to reach their goals.

Under our system of government whenever these two opposing forces fail to reach agreement by negotiation the issues wind up in the political arena.

The legislative halls, both state and federal are loaded with these problems. To keep it on a broad base I shall refer to a few now before Congress—The Redwood National Park Proposal, the North Cascade controversy, the Central Arizona Water Project which calls for two more dams on the Colorado River, the Voyageurs National Park and the Apostle Islands in our own region. Then, of course, there are the Wild Rivers and National Scenic Trails systems, not to mention a number of Wilderness proposals. There are many more you can add to the list—the ones in which you are particularly interested.

Every one of these proposals has their militant protagonists. Every one of them will impinge on one or more interests and every one is proposed for and will serve the public interest.

The problem as I see it is in the area of "reasonableness" on the part of both the proponents and the opponents. Each issue generates charges and counter-charges from both extremes of the spectrum—the dependent industries, businesses and local governments on one hand and the preservationists on the other. Thus, dealing at arms-length it becomes im-
There needs to be reasonableness in demands and a development of a National Land Use Plan, according to a recent speech urging the base that makes tourism possible and provides prosperity to our industries, our payrolls and our tax base.

Glenn C. Brewer, President of U.S. Plywood—Champion Papers, Inc., states in his recent speech that we need to escape to fresh air, sparkling waters and the quiet of the outdoors and away from the pressures and congestion of the city.

He asks, "Will our remaining agricultural land base be sufficient to feed our own population and provide some relief to others in the world who already face starvation?"

"Will our rural population, already diminishing because of limited economic opportunity, further aggravate the problems of teeming cities as people turn in desperation to urban centers as the only source of jobs?"

"Will the reduction in lands available for commercial forestry, grazing, mining and other income producing activities impose upon our people the necessity to lower their standard of living as demand exceeds supply and prices of land-based industries absorb an appropriate number of the hundreds of thousands of new workers impose additional tax and welfare burdens upon the entire population?"

"What should the role of Congress be in establishing a national land policy to meet the many and varying requirements of the nation and its people?"

"Can a national land policy sponsor a return to rural areas and relieve social and economic pressures in our cities?"

"Can the values of economics, community stability, and essential goods be equated with recreation, beauty, and spiritual needs in terms of land use?"

"While we seem as a nation to be able to provide both guns and butter, why can't we also provide jobs and community stability along with recreation?"

These are pertinent questions that need serious consideration.

As Secretary Freeman has said—"We need a sound land policy, one which sorts out the lands best suited for recreational needs, agriculture, commerce, housing and highways; a policy which establishes priorities and makes the best use of a fixed limited natural resource."

Without discounting the importance of assuring an adequate supply of wilderness areas, free flowing streams and scenic areas, I believe we need to take a fresh look at our national priorities for recreation opportunities.

The great bulk of our people are trapped in the metropolitan areas. It is estimated that 75% to 80% of our population will live in these high density areas in the near future. These people have an urge and a need to escape to fresh air, sparkling waters and the quiet of the out-of-doors and away from the pressures and congestion of the city. A high percentage of this need must be satisfied by the availability of close-in, day-use facilities. Most of these city-trapped people have neither the means or the time to take extended recreation trips. We sorely need more recreation facilities in and adjacent to the population centers. These opportunities are not being provided. As the cities spread over the countryside in their unplanned sprawl, opportunities for making needed facilities available are rapidly diminishing and being priced out of existence.

Very little is being done to meet this problem. Consequently we continue to create ghettos, even though many of them are of relatively good quality for every day living. But what about playgrounds, swimming pools, parks and other escape areas? For more remote recreation opportunities the large land owning industries share in the responsibility. Proper acceptance of this responsibility should reduce the need for public acquisition. Both the land owners and the using public, must accept and practice the principle of multiple-use in its true context.

A recent statement by the Bureau of Outdoor Recreation placed their first priorities for acquisition
and development on the remote areas. How do they equate these priorities with the needs of our population in the high density areas?

What has caused this great upsurge in demand for more recreational opportunities and preservation of unique lands and waters?

Some of the answers are obvious—more leisure time, better incomes and greater mobility. With increased travel people are getting back-of-beyond. They are seeing things. They don’t always like what they see and often they don’t understand what they see. For example, they like to see a beautiful untouched virgin forest. They are shocked when they see a freshly logged area. Most of them fail to realize that a beautiful stand of second growth was once untouched virgin forest. They are shocked when they see a freshly logged area. Most of them fail to realize what they see and often they don’t understand what they see.

There was a time when the general public did not care because they did not see what was taking place in the back country. Today we have new dimensions, a new awareness. The public attitudes, often based on emotion and lack of information and knowledge is reacting and like most reactions the pendulum swings far to the side.

Many of these actions and reactions are timely and soundly based, many of them are well justified. Historically, mine and other industrial wastes have fouled our streams. We have a long ways to go to clean up and rehabilitate these polluted waters. In forestry we have not been sensitive to many problems. Logging has messed up streams with silt and debris, roadside strips and other esthetic values were ignored. Our public relations have been lacking or inadequate. The “big silent men of the woods” have been as single minded in seeking their own objectives as the preservationists are today.

True, land and resource managers are changing their attitudes, both from the economic and social point of view in regard to management practices. In other words they are reacting to the reactions of the public. They are developing a sensitivity to public opinion. This is good and it is urgent. The quicker these new attitudes can be reflected in the resource management on the ground the sooner we will find reasonableness and harmony with most of the public.

The time is here when land and resource managing and operating industries and public agencies must practice environmental management if we are to accomplish a rational balance among the various pressure and user groups. The land owners and operators have a responsibility to the public and to the future.

There is a growing need for better interdepartmental harmony. Some of the controversies over interdepartmental land transfers generate unnecessary heat and political battles which confuse worthwhile issues. I place some of these in the “Empire building” category of public agencies and their constituent groups.

The North Cascade controversy falls in this group. Most of the land in question is presently under the Forest Service jurisdiction and dedicated to wilderness and recreational purposes. After all, it was the Forest Service which conceived and who has protected the integrity of the Wilderness Areas long before Congress passed the Wilderness Bill. How many of the preservation groups realize or acknowledge this fact? The Service also pioneered in outdoor recreation facilities many decades before they had specific authority to do so under the Multiple Use Act of 1960. Are they not still capable of redeeming these and even new responsibilities?

On the other hand I believe transfer of lands to other agencies such as the Park Service when such is a realistic and practical solution to better use and management should be accomplished. There is fear of establishing a precedent. But here again is the need for reasonableness, of harmony and statesmanship. If my scanty understanding of the proposed Voyageurs National Park is correct this may be the place to start. Or are the proponents primarily interested in just more land?

Where have we failed that has contributed to the present conflicts? There has always been competition for land. There have always been conflicts of interest. There is always the thrust for power and domination. These factors have taken on new dimensions and they are being dramatically articulated in recent years. Consequently we as resource professionals should look in our own mirror.

Where have we failed? What could we have done to prevent the existing breach? Sixty years ago Foresters were the conservation crusaders. How can we recapture our rightful place in today’s confused and complex world?

As a partial answer I think our training has been too narrowly oriented. We have been tree and market oriented rather than people oriented. We have left the long-range and far-seeing needs of our society to the so called “posey-pickers” and “bird-watchers.” We have been listening to ourselves and not the tumult around us.

It is high time that we recognize the interdisciplinary relationships that go to make up the total environment which must produce the goods and services for our socio-economic welfare.

We have trained and continue to train students in single-minded disciplines. Our educational institutions have a real responsibility to broaden the understanding and to more effectively integrate the land and resource disciplines if we are to properly serve the needs of our growing population.

As Ed Heacox stated in his article in the August issue of American Forests—

“We are living in a period of incredible change. From any standpoint the challenge to all of us in resource management is to keep pushing our horizons forward to remain in step with the rapidly changing pace of our society. We should be placing greater emphasis on the pressures of

(Continued on page 12)
of Forestry. On the other hand, concentration on timber may result in serious loss of influence and loss of opportunity in areas considered to be part of Forestry.

A local example may be helpful. Here at Iowa State, Forestry is just beginning to assume an important role in the operation of a new curriculum in "Resource Development for Outdoor Recreation." Outdoor Recreation and Forestry partially overlap, but only partially. Operation of this curriculum may eventually carry us well beyond Forestry into aspects of recreation not directly part of our current interests. Swede Nelson's point that urban recreation opportunities are most seriously needed is certainly pertinent here. But a decision not to become involved might have raised some question concerning our real interest in recreational aspects of Forestry itself. While specifics may differ a good bit, I doubt that this sort of choice—with little stable middle ground—is at all unique to Iowa State.

Some Responses

Finally, let us consider some of the more specific responses that may be required by a full commitment to both the aesthetic and commodity uses of the forest. One is to undertake programs in subject areas beyond most definitions of Forestry. Specifics will differ from one research and education unit to another. Outdoor Recreation and Regional Planning are two of the more likely possibilities. Such programs will inevitably cause some discomfort. For example, Forestry schools may find themselves graduating an increasing number of alumni who will not be eligible for full membership in the SAF. Liberalization of membership requirements will help, but the point is likely to remain.

Second, we may have to acquire and accommodate increasing numbers of specialists with primary educational and professional backgrounds in fields other than Forestry. This tendency, of course, will be strongest in units that choose to become heavily scientific without reference to resource management. But it applies elsewhere too. Forest Service employment of geographers and botany-trained ecologists in management-oriented forest-recreation-research is just one example. This sort of thing is likely to expand despite some not-entirely-favorable implications. To cite just one example, multiple-use involves some extremely difficult management and policy decisions. Forestry schools, in order to equip foresters to participate effectively in these decisions, may need to consider greatly strengthened instruction and research in resource administration and policy-formulation. Special faculty, often lacking Forestry background, may be needed.

Third, we must bring Forestry's many subject areas more effectively to bear on all major forest products and services. Many of these subject areas grew up around timber. They have been partially expanded to consider other products and services but this expansion is often seriously incomplete. For example, forest mensuration should ultimately deal as much and as directly, with measurement of forest recreation visits and inventory of potential recreation sites as it does with methods for measuring timber inventory and growth. Similarly, silviculture should deal as much and as directly with manipulation of vegetation to create particular kinds of attractive landscape as with manipulation to increase timber quality.

These responses will require great effort by researchers and educators, and understanding by all foresters. They are important to all of us. They are "everyone's business" due to the role of research and education as sources of information and personnel for meeting the challenges of Preservation, Production, and Politics.

According to "Webster".

Wildland Management—
(Continued from page 10)

resource management in technological society, rather than in an industrial environment. Those pressures are readily apparent to any practicing forester. Never in history has there been such an acute need for statesmanship in the area of natural resources."

Gentlemen, the task is before us. Can we measure up to it?