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H. R. Glascock Jr.
Iowa State University

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A Forester Views His Profession*
by H. R. GLASCOCK, JR.

The forestry profession in America is young—less than half as old as America itself. Although borrowing some roots from European forestry, it has largely developed in its own way to enable forests in the widely differing climates, soils and topographies of our huge country to serve a different and ever-changing clientele, which collectively is the American people themselves. Despite its relative youth, this forestry profession is in many ways more advanced than any in the world. The Society of American Foresters defines forestry as the science, the art and the practice of managing and using for human benefit the natural resources that occur on and in association with forest lands. Currently, such lands comprise one third of the nation's land area. The resources include trees, other plants, animals of all descriptions, the climate, the soil, and related air and water.

Thus forestry, by the diverse nature of its many resources and clientele is an exceedingly broad profession—certainly broader than agriculture, horticulture or medicine with which it shares much knowledge. In this broadness, it seems to me, lies both forestry's unique opportunity for service to people as well as its largest problem, over-specialization. The scope of the forestry profession was well noted by William D. Ruckelshaus, Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency, in keynoting the 1971 National Convention of the Society of American Foresters. He said:

"I have been struck by the depth and breadth of the concerns of foresters: hydrology, wildlife, pesticides, erosion, recreation, landscaping, silviculture, systems planning, conservation, and research. But these are not just professional responsibilities—formed laymen are tatalized by their implications for better management of our total heritage as a people. Forestry is no mere backwoods operation; it is going to occupy the front lines of controversy for a long time to come... The job is not going to get easier; the public will not lower its demands. Foresters are in the national spotlight and the glare is getting stronger. That means controversy, but it also means great opportunity for professional service. . . ."

As I see it, throughout most of the first half of this century, professional foresters were "ahead of the game" so to speak—that is, they could usually and easily make available from forest lands in their trust more goods and services than the public desired to purchase or enjoy. Supplies of wood, water, wildlife, recreation and wilderness were in most instances far in excess of demand. Foresters were looked to primarily for their protective, custodial role which they performed with great distinction. At the same time, foresters became the nation's first ecologists.

The early role of the forestry profession as founder and leader of the conservation movement in America, which revolved around forester-politician Gifford Pinchot, became diffused and overshadowed from the 1920's on by the forestry profession's appropriate preoccupation with the science and practice of forestry and the education of foresters. We became so preoccupied with these important matters that communication with the public and its leaders was slighted and remained so even as the public's interest in the forest grew. While forestry knowledge advanced at a remarkable rate, and forest practices began to reflect this body of knowledge, the public's notion of forestry and the forestry profession remained dim and vague. Proliferation of forest sciences, broadening and fragmentation of the subject matter of forestry, and increasing specialization of forestry professionals have further confused the public about foresters and forestry. Because of this unfamiliarity and confusion due to lack of enlightenment, recent public policies relating to forestry have developed without adequately benefiting from the inputs of foresters.

The forestry profession, which invented the wilderness concept, is now under attack for trying to hold the line on wilderness reservation by spokesmen of groups interested in maximizing the roadless acreage in the Wilderness and National Park Systems. It is under attack by certain politicians and writers, and even some foresters, interested in obtaining a moratorium on clearcutting. And by others. The charge has been made that foresters are "narrow in their training, limited in their contacts and reading, and sheltered by the syndromes of their profession." The very weakness of the profession's identity, it seems, has prompted attacks upon it, and attempts to label it with employer orientation. Of course, such attacks are also symptomatic of our times. The danger is that these refutable charges may blind the forestry profession to its real shortcomings.

Thomas L. Kimball, Executive Director of the National Wildlife Federation, recently warned:

"Professionalism is under attack. In a democracy the people need to know the facts to make sound decisions about their environment. But whom do they hear the loudest? The militants—the emotionalists—the eco-freaks when they should be hearing the true professionals."

Ironically, America's forestry profession, which borrowed so much from abroad at the start, is now looked to for expertise throughout the world. If the identity of American foresters were half as strong and favorable here as is it throughout the rest of the forestry world, we would not need to be so concerned. But it is good that we are concerned because the public's knowledge of forestry and the profession is both a mirror of how we perform in the public interest and a reflection on the effectiveness of communication of forestry principles and performance. I am not one of those who feels that all you have to do is to perform well in the public interest and it will be widely recognized. Nor do I subscribe to the idea that all you have to do to gain a good reputation is to tell your story. Performance in the public interest and effective communication of that performance are essential to the continuous public understanding and appreciation of any profession. In my view, great improvements can and must be made by our profession in both performance and communication of that performance. Only then can we fulfill the great national destiny which President Theodore Roosevelt foresaw for the profession in 1903 when he told the fledgling Society of American Foresters:

"... You foresters have created a new profession of the highest importance, of the highest usefulness to the Nation, and you are honor bound to yourselves and the people to make that profession stand as high as any other profession..."

**Improvement of Performance**

To meet the long-term objectives of public or private ownership, a forest should be treated as a whole system—a complex community of plants, animals and inorganic resources. The forest land manager has opportunity for improved performance by providing himself with the many inputs having to do with all of the forest resources and their interaction, and considering alternative schemes of management geared to meeting the owner's objectives. These inputs are disciplinary, sub-disciplinary and interdisciplinary. And only if the state-of-the-art in these related specialties is brought to bear on decisions can the forest manager expect to solve his central problem: that is, providing increasing outputs from forest lands, within acceptable cost limits including adverse environmental impacts.

Society expects an awful lot from today's forest manager and, I ask, where are the educational and on-the-job training grounds to produce this Solomon? The lack of such training grounds is a very serious problem and leads to the strong temptation to specialize in one of the related aspects of this broad profession and not be concerned with the forest as a whole. Foresters have ample opportunities to specialize and there are powerful inducements for them to do so. Compartmentalized undergraduate and graduate programs in the forestry schools, coupled with associated teaching and research assignments, seem to move budding forest specialists into a position of employability, though the supply often as not exceeds or underruns the demand in a given specialty at a given time. But if you are an employer who needs a competent forest land manager with decision-making abilities, managerial skills and environmental orientation, you may have to train your own.

True, as shown by the annual Markworth statistics published in the *Journal of Forestry*, slightly over half of the bachelor degrees in forestry are in "general forestry." But, understandably, this amount and kind of exposure is not synonomous with forest land administration in the eyes of most employers. It promises to be enhanced soon by new course material on decision making in forest resources management now under review by the forestry schools. Nevertheless, I doubt that adequate academic exposure to the process of forest land decision making can be obtained in less than 5 or 6 years, and it may necessitate a master's degree in business administration. An internship system, involving a partnership between the forestry schools and the employers of foresters whom they produce, would be most helpful.

It is a shame that the growing numbers of BS graduates in "general forestry" are having increasing difficulty in obtaining employment while at the same time so many foresters are unable to meet the employment needs of some employers. Of course, much of the reason for the present employment difficulties of foresters has to do with the condition of the Nation's overall economy and regional recessions. reflecting this factor and perhaps others, the American Chemical Society reported this week that 75 percent of university chemistry graduates in 1971 failed to find fulltime employment and those who did accepted salaries 7 percent below 1970 levels.

There are important analogies between forestry and other professions. A book review entitled "Good Doctors and Bad Medicine" in the Sunday magazine *Book World* of October 24th spoke of "a crisis—overtrained physicians who cannot provide basic care to those who need it most, too many hospitals in some areas, not enough in others, an oversupply of some specialists (most notoriously surgeons) and an undersupply of others, a growing shortage of family physicians. The crisis now is recognized even by the President, and any number of solutions are being proposed. . . ."

There seems to be an analogy here between forestry and medicine. We might speak of "good foresters and bad forestry," implying an ample
supply of capable, specialized inputers and a shortage of general-practice evaluators and decision makers. It may be that some of the decision makers we have do not see the whole picture and tend to ignore pertinent inputs. At any rate, there is in my view a major opportunity and need for strengthening the managerial performance of the forestry profession in the public interest. There are other associated opportunities for improvement of performance, of course, including increasing the forester's social awareness and sensitivity, his communicative skills, and his organizational abilities. But putting into practice the combined expertise of forest-related specialists to meet expanding goals of forest landowners and the public is paramount. Continuous self-education and an open mind are the keys. I hope and expect that the Society of American Foresters, which is the authorized agency for forestry schools in the nation, will play an ever increasing role in shaping the kind of education needed to fill this need.

Improvement of Communication

It is hard to find a forester who doesn't think his profession spends too much time talking to itself. Well, I'm a forester who thinks we don't talk among ourselves nearly enough. Neither do we talk enough with our various publics. It is one thing to blow the forestry profession's horn in a self-serving way, and quite another to inform the public on the principles of forest ecology and the role of the forester as ecologist, problem solver and prescriber of management practices to meet the varied goals of forest owners. The latter kind of communication, done with accuracy and objectivity, is badly needed at a time of instant ecologists and distorted journalism on environmental subjects. It is needed with the business, scientific, educational, social and political communities at all levels. People need to know the facts about the forest so they can help bring about and maintain economic, social and political climates favorable to the practice of a kind of forestry which will benefit them most.

Telling the story of the forest is not a simple matter. What makes up a forest? How does it work? What happens when man does or does not do certain things to it? What can it do for man under different schemes of management? Are forest resources renewable? Which forest uses are compatible? And what professional competence is needed and available?

Answering such questions takes time and money; yet the story must be told—over and over again! Who can do it as well as the forestry profession itself? With members employed half publicly and half privately, who, through consensus, has more potential credibility with the American people? I am convinced that this great profession has the confidence and is anxious to meet its responsibility in improved communication. This confidence is based on improving performance and knowledge of the increasing role foresters must play in maintaining an optimum human environment. And I am glad to report that a big start has been made through the profession's own organization which I am proud to represent.

And so, while many other points could be made about the forestry profession in America, in my view its increasing breadth is its salient characteristic. When the difficulties this broadness presents are overcome, unparalleled, exciting opportunities for greater service in the public interest lie ahead.

Again, Mr. Ruckelshaus:

"In the evolution of modern forestry SAF members lead the movement away from custodialism to the more sophisticated concept of multiple use. If there is truth in the claim that forests are too important to be left solely to the foresters, then it is equally true that there can be no progress without their expert knowledge. Professional foresters are called upon by society to provide a complex of management skills in a time of great ferment, abrasive demands, and protean shifts of values on behalf of policies that will more and more often be determined by public law.

"This fact does not diminish their calling, but rather enhances it. Indeed, the critical role of the foresters will be to evaluate alternate goals and recommend optimum approaches to reach objectives once they have been decided upon in the public forum. There can be no greater challenge for any profession, no more sobering responsibility."

These are my views better said. Perhaps they are your views as well.