

Communicating the Value and Benefits of Silviculture through Partnerships and Collaborative Stewardship

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Abstract.—Opening comments to this session share observations on the current management climate within the USDA Forest Service. Partnerships and collaborative stewardship as agency philosophy are discussed. Silviculturists roles, as scientists and managers are compared, and the need for internal and external cooperation stressed as we strive to meet forest stewardship goals.

INTRODUCTION

The current management climate affecting the Forest Service is one of great challenge and opportunities. The Forest Service is striving to implement a major shift in management approach towards sustainable resource management. It is doing so under scrutiny of Congressional appropriations committees that are struggling to understand what this change will mean in terms of an agency budget formed largely of timber management funds. The April, 1997 Government Account Office Report "Forest Service Decision-making: A Framework for Improving Performance" reveals an agency wide lack of accountability for decision-making and associated low return on investment of planning dollars. This problem, also known as "analysis paralysis" has created an agency "debt" caused by investment of dollars and expertise without return in the form of positive management action on the ground. Clint Carlson, Team Leader for the Bitterroot Ecosystem Management Research Project, describes this debt as "forests susceptible to fire, disease and insects" that affect both amenity and commodity benefits, and "over 3 billion dollars annually to run an agency whose productivity is declining dramatically." Add to this the increasing demands being placed on limited forest resources worldwide (Carlson, 1997).

It is important to note that although Congressional interest is intense, many members of Congress have very limited awareness of the mission of the Forest Service, which reflects a limited awareness among the Americans they serve.

Meanwhile, Forest Service resource managers are working harder than ever, applying their professional expertise to define and achieve the agency's land stewardship and public service mission. The Forest Service continues to expand its contributions in International Forestry, State and Private Forestry programs, Research, and in National Forest Systems. However, the agency faces difficult times as an agency, with many of us experiencing challenges in forming ecosystem based plans and projects, and equal difficulty in implementing them on the ground. Polarized interests, prolonged analysis, changing techniques, and funding uncertainties all contribute to today's management climate. There is a maxim that states "there is opportunity in chaos."

Applying agency energy to building a stronger constituency and support base for sustainable resource management is one such opportunity to speed achievement of sustainable management goals.

PARTNERSHIPS AND COLLABORATIVE STEWARDSHIP

Webster's II defines a partnership as "an association with another or others in a common activity or interest." If one collaborates, one is "working together in a joint intellectual effort. Stewardship is defined as "the state of managing an others' property, finances, or other affairs." Critically examining these definitions is important to understanding what is meant when Chief Dombeck calls the agency to "Collaborative Stewardship." Collaborative stewardship gives contextual meaning to our responsibility for managing America's forests and supporting sound stewardship throughout the world. Chief Dombeck adds additional context in his definitions of collaborative stewardship as our agency resource management philosophy. It is achieved by "listening to all our constituents and by living within the limits of the land" and through a "commitment to healthy ecosystems and working with people on the land (Dombeck, 1997).

There is no cookbook for collaborative stewardship. It requires scientist and managers to purposefully seek ways to work together with each other, and with the public, in defining limits to the land and defining sustainable uses of the land. This happens most effectively with people getting together on the land in communities where programs are implemented.

ROLES OF SCIENTISTS AND MANAGERS

Effective collaboration begins with an understanding of what each can contribute to developing management objectives for the land. Individuals and interest groups bring their needs, concerns, and expertise. All, regardless of what draws them to the table, have something to contribute. So, too, with scientists and managers. It is important for scientists and managers to know their respective roles. Tom Mills, Pacific Northwest Station Director, lists the following characteristics of **scientists** as they do their jobs in support of managers and decision makers:

- ◆ retain independence
- ◆ quantify risk
- ◆ do not define appropriate levels of risk
- ◆ accomplish quality control
- ◆ conduct consistency checks between decisions and scientific information considered - was science interpreted correctly? were risks associated with decision understood, considered, and revealed?
- ◆ do not take positions

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He also describes the primary roles of **decision makers and managers**:

- ◆ clarify management goals
- ◆ clarify management questions
- ◆ determine levels of risk tolerance
- ◆ understand science findings and their implications for management
- ◆ challenge scientific logic, if faulty
- ◆ do not challenge science because the results are uncomfortable
- ◆ do not ask scientist to take or to support a position (Mills, 1997)

Collaboration based on an understanding of these roles can result in highly effective application of science in decision making. Both scientists and managers need to periodically scrutinize their work processes to determine if their interactions with the "other" are contributing to effective application of science in land management decision-making. It is important for members of the public to understand these ascribed roles to enable them to better work with local Forest Service officials.

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

The Silviculturist as Integrator. In collaborative stewardship, all agency professionals must serve as teachers before they can guide and contribute as scientists and managers. Silviculturists have many challenges and opportunities to conquer during this transitional period in the Forest Service. As experts of the dominating feature of forested landscapes, silviculturists are in a powerful position to be leaders in building internal partnerships and external support. The job of the silviculturist must, now more than ever, go beyond an exclusive interest in growing and harvesting trees. Silviculturists can champion biodiversity and sustainability and define ways to achieve it through their role in managing the structural backbone of these ecosystems. To do this, silviculturists need a understanding of the relationships between vegetative cover and soil stability, water quantity and quality, species diversity, fire risk and air quality. When silviculturists speak beyond the trees, they can demonstrate to the public how vegetation management can positively affect individual ecological components as well as the whole. As public understanding grows, so does increased support for on the ground management.

Aiming for the Middle. About 10 percent of those involved in natural resource management issues are controlling 90 percent of the debate. While it is important to understand the positions and desires of polarized interests it is prudent to quickly realize how impossible it is to satisfy opposite poles. Line officers with support from interdisciplinary teams, must develop public involvement goals that capture the interest of the community members who fill the space between the polar opposites. As more local citizens become aware of the Forest Service mission and how it relates to their communities and lives, there is a greater chance for

management choices and decisions to receive broader support, and greater success in of implementation.

Dealing with Uncertainty and Risk. "We don't know enough." This is a statement frequently heard both inside and outside of the agency. As we manage landscapes for biological diversity and long-term sustainability of ecosystems, we do so without the extensive benefit of past experience. Forestry and silviculture have a long history of on the ground management and research, when compared with other resource areas. Once again, silviculturists have an opportunity to ease uncertainty and risk by examining past activities in the context of landscapes and other resource effects.

The antidote to uncertainty lies in identifying acceptable levels of risk with existing information and developing monitoring processes to closely track effects of implementation over time. Through the relationships developed with collaborative stewardship, Forest Service scientists and decision-makers can describe uncertainty and commit to monitoring after decisions are made. We then can demonstrate to the public that conscientious thought has gone into decisions, and that risks are not ignored. This approach must become standardized because it, too, will lead to increased understanding and support of management decisions and result in implementation. The unfavorable alternative is an extended analysis process that consumes resources with delayed or non-existent results.

Measuring Results

Here are a few indicators for identifying goals for and evaluating collaborative relationships:

- ◆ **Attentive listening** - is everyone involved given the chance to be heard?
- ◆ **Shared values** - have individuals identified shared values enable them to commit to the relationship?
- ◆ **Responsiveness** - have participants made adjustments and trade-offs to accommodate shared values and important requirements?
- ◆ **Celebrate accomplishments** - are there issues that were successfully resolved or activities successfully accomplished?

Collaborative stewardship provides an important opportunity for promoting the values and benefits of silviculture. Scientists and managers can use it as the basis for effective working relationships with each other, decision-makers, interdisciplinary teams, and communities. Just as there is no cookbook for designing collaborative stewardship, there is set process for measuring results. It is a journey, it is about relationships, and it is about action on the ground. Collaborative stewardship is not a quick-fix management initiative. It takes time to develop, as with any lasting relationship.

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