

# Opening Remarks

Chip Cartwright<sup>1</sup>

Good morning and welcome to the Sacramento Mountains of New Mexico. For those of you who drove up, the trip from Alamogordo to Cloudcroft gives a good example of the nature of our Southwestern forests. They tend to be isolated on the tops of mountains rising out of arid regions. We like to believe that the forests here in the Southwest are such treasures that we keep them well-hidden!

That being the case, I really want to thank the people of the Mescalero Apache Tribe, Lincoln National Forest, and Sacramento Ranger District for sharing their forest with us for a few days. I also want to thank all the people from the Forest Service, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, the Mescalero Tribe, and the Secretaria de Agricultura y Recursos Hidraulicos of Mexico for all the work they have put into bringing this meeting about.

If any of you have ever been involved in putting together a meeting like this one, you know very well that it doesn't just happen. It takes months of planning and more than a few anxious moments to get this far. The fact that we are all here in this beautiful setting shows that all of these folks did a fine job and deserve a round of applause for their work.

The theme of this meeting is "forest health through silviculture." What do we mean when we talk about forest health? That is one of the things that will be discussed at length at this session. It's also an interest of mine because of my background in ecosystem management, so I'm sure you will allow me to give you some of my perspective on this issue.

Jay O'Laughlin at the University of Idaho defined forest health as "a condition of forests reflecting the complexity of their ecosystems while providing for human needs." Note that one of the major parts of this definition deals with maintaining the complexity of the forests.

Traditionally, many silvicultural practices have led to a reduction in complexity because it was felt that this would result in producing more of what were considered to be the desirable outputs available from forests. We have come to a point where we value all potential outputs of the forest, including the spiritual and noncommercial outputs much more than we did in the past.

We have also come to realize that simplifying the forest will result in less of all outputs in the long run. When the forest is simplified too much, we have an unhealthy forest. It is unhealthy because it is less able to absorb and recover from disturbances and because it is less able to meet the needs of us humans who depend on it in so many ways.

Silviculturists have also come a long way in moving from "timber growers" to people who manage for multiple values, including forest health. However, there are still challenges to be met. One of these is to be sure that you complete the transition from timber management to ecosystem management and to insure that you are recognized as ecosystem managers. You need to bring to interdisciplinary teams, line officers, and our many publics an in-depth knowledge of how forest ecosystems function, what is outside the historic range of variability, what is not sustainable, and how these systems can provide for human needs without damage to the ecosystem itself.

To accomplish this will require close cooperation between managers and scientists to insure application of the latest research findings and adequate monitoring of management results to allow adaptive management. "Adaptive management" means changing management practices where necessary to achieve desired results.

Considering these challenges, I would like to express some of my views on how I think we will need to change our silvicultural practices. First, I think that we must find ways to provide for human needs while maintaining the complexity of the forests. That complexity must include all the

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<sup>1</sup> Regional Forester, Southwestern Region, USDA Forest Service, Albuquerque, NM.

conditions that would be found within the historic range of variability of the forests. This will not be easy, but it is essential to maintaining forest health and to meeting the expectations of the owners of the forests.

Fortunately, we do have some help in meeting this challenge. In looking at the agenda for this session, I see that there are several presentations on natural disturbance factors in forested ecosystems. Understanding the functions of the ecosystem, including disturbance events, will be key to maintaining forest health. Understanding the forces that shape the forest will lead to understanding the forest's structure. Our job will be to devise treatments that will result in the same structures while removing products from the forest for human use.

This brings me to my second point. I believe that we must move beyond the old silviculture, which was mostly based on individual stands. We must consider forest structure on a landscape basis and a small-group basis as well as a stand basis. This will be necessary if we are to mimic the overall structure of the forest within the historic range of variability.

The more a forest moves outside its historic range of variability, the more powerful are the forces that are trying to bring it back. Another way of looking at forest health is to say that we have an unhealthy forest when these forces become so great that we can no longer manage them, or we can't accept the consequences that result when these forces are released. My third point is that we must go beyond just developing treatments that will maintain forest health and must convince skeptical members of the public that these treatments are appropriate.

As an example of why this is necessary, let me quote a recent survey conducted by "American Forests" magazine. It asked if people believe that

timber should be harvested on public lands, excluding national parks. The response was 47 percent "yes" and 44 percent "no."

This is so close that you might as well say that half of the people of this country think that trees should not be cut on national forests or other public lands. However, the multiple-use mandate of the Forest Service has not changed. The production of wood products is a part of that mandate. We must make it compatible with maintaining forest health.

The same survey found that 72 percent of the people think that forests in their area of the country are either somewhat healthy or very healthy. This being the case, it is easy to see why they do not think we need to manage these forests.

Our job will be to continue to point out forest health problems where they exist without overstating the case. From a global perspective, this will include managing forests of the United States in ways that reduce environmental pressures on other parts of the world. Then, we must prove that any treatments we propose will make the situation better, not worse. If people do not believe there is a problem, they do not believe there is a need for a solution.

Adjusting our management to meet these needs should be enough to keep everyone busy for a long time. For this week, though, let's make the most of an opportunity for some calm reflection and debate on the issue of forest health. We have a number of very knowledgeable speakers scheduled, so let's learn all we can from them. We also have many years of experience represented by the people in this room. Let's take the opportunity provided by this session to talk to each other and share these experiences. We can learn a lot from each other.

Above all, let's relax, learn all we can, and have a pleasant week in a beautiful setting.