

Changing the Paradigm—Effectively Engaging Stakeholders in Forest Policy Issues



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In 2001, the Oregon Department of Forestry adopted new forest management plans for 3% of Oregon's forestlands. It was decided, after a 7-year dialogue with the public, that state forestlands would be managed to achieve greatest permanent value—economic, environmental, and social values for Oregonians over time and across the landscape. The cornerstone of these plans was not, as many believe, structure-based management or active management—although these concepts are certainly important to plan implementation. The foundation for the success of the plans is adaptive management, or as Gene Wood pointed out in the January/February 2006 *Journal of Forestry* perspective column, “Collaborative Adaptive Management.”

Unfortunately, the methodology government agencies traditionally have used to work with stakeholders has resulted rarely in collaboration. In Oregon, the level of frustration with natural resource management policy has led to combative ballot box measures as the favored tool to achieve policy goals, despite a public, which in a recent Oregon Forest Resources Institute survey, indicated it was weary of the environmentalist versus industry battle over Pacific Northwest forests.

How do we change this paradigm that has developed in the Pacific Northwest and elsewhere relative to management of forestlands and what must foresters have to successfully provide for a range of values the public expects?

- Productive engagement by our stakeholders. A combination of good science, meaningful public processes, great communication, and a desire to truly understand the underlying values and beliefs that drive our citizenry lead to successful forest policy. It is no longer effective or meaningful to check the box, “we held public meetings,” and credit ourselves with due diligence to public participation.

- Seek improved ways to work together across federal, state, and local jurisdictions. We are in the midst of renegotiating a 50-year Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) with the federal services on one of our state forests—after only 10 years into plan implementation. Natural resource organizations cannot effectively practice adaptive management under the construct of 50-year HCPs without excessive costs and process to renegotiate. We need to develop innovative ways to provide long-term wildlife and environmental protections within a truly adaptive framework that allows landowners to integrate social, environmental, and economic values in a changing, dynamic, political, social, and environmental landscape.

- Science needs to be a product of active stakeholder involvement. We are launching a long-term study to evaluate the effectiveness of aquatic and riparian strategies in a watershed in northwest Oregon and are involving private landowners, educational institutions, nonprofit organizations, and federal, state and local agencies in the project. Without this level of “investment” from these groups, our science would not be readily accepted. Going solo does not cut it anymore, no matter how good the science or the scientists.

- Involve communities. The most successful forest management plans are community based and involve those who work, live, and recreate on these lands. Community-based forestry strives to achieve a common set of goals aimed at ensuring that ecosystem and resource management is ecologically, economically, and socially sound (National Forest Foundation).

- Develop forest policy that is considered by society to be in its best interests. There is a tendency for individuals with scientific training to believe that good science translates into good policy and that integration of human values or politics into a discussion of policy somehow corrupts the integrity of science. A recognition that science

serves to inform a broader policy discussion that advances the common interest of society is imperative.

- Ensure meaningful participation. The public no longer has time for public meetings and lengthy multiyear processes to work through difficult, complex natural resource issues. Use of technology and more efficient citizen dialogue processes will improve communication. We need to be clear about the goals, objectives, and outcomes of any public meeting—or any interaction with the public—to ensure we have meaningful participation; and then we need to be willing to ask the public to evaluate our effectiveness so that we can continually improve.

- Seek informed consent, not public input. Public input is giving the opportunity for the public to tell you what they think. Public involvement is an ongoing, active, engaging dialogue. It is inherently and increasingly difficult to be effective in public sector environments. We have to be willing to roll up our sleeves and spend time to improve participation with the people we serve.

- Change the paradigm. The spotted owl controversy in the Pacific Northwest began in the early 1980s, a mere quarter of a century ago. Small rural communities that lost their livelihoods when federal timber harvests slowed retain their collective memories and scars. We must lead the effort to change the paradigm from the “environmentalist versus industry” fight to a shared understanding that forestlands can productively and responsibly provide integrated social, environmental, and economic outputs for the benefits of all sectors of society. We can do this by valuing the role that the mosaic of federal, private industrial, small woodland, and state-managed forestlands offer to the economy, communities, citizens, and wildlife, to name a few.

- We must ground ourselves. Despite the difficulties of working in the public service arena these days, we must retain a collective faith that our dedication to serve will

protect and advance the common interests of society as a whole.

In the short 100 years our profession has been in existence, we have seen perspectives on forests change. Forests are no longer valued solely for timber receipts—ecosystem services such as watershed health, carbon, recreation, and wildlife habitat are increasingly seen as valuable forest commodities. There is greater ac-

ceptance that active forest management can restore ecological functions of forests and ultimately reduce the potential for catastrophic fires in the urban/wildland interface; and there is increased interest by the public to see forestlands achieve a better balance of social, economic, and environmental outputs.

The future of forestlands in Oregon and the throughout the country is un-

known. The only certainty lies in our continued need to actively engage the public in a shared vision for the management of these lands and, ultimately, change a dysfunctional paradigm.

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Books

■ MOUNTAIN MAN

Toiyabe Patrol: Five U.S. Forest Service Summers East of the High Sierra in the 1960s. Les Joslin.

Bend, OR: Wilderness Associates, 2006 Revised Edition. \$14.95. 121 pages. ISBN 0-9647-167-5-5.

It was not the money that lured college freshman Les Joslin to the Toiyabe National Forest in the summer of 1962; as a GS-3, fire-control aide, he earned \$1.83 an hour. Nor was it the pine-scented, rugged landscape that attracted him to Bridgeport, California, site of the ranger station from which he would fight fires, repair trails, and corral wayward tourists; he had never been there before. No, what impelled him to work for the Forest Service was the opportunity to serve the American people. The magnificent National Forests the agency managed were “*not* Forest Service land,” he emphasizes: “A small point? Not at all! It’s an important distinction that informs—or should inform—the perceptions of both the public servants and the publics they serve. . . .” Joslin’s dedication framed his deep-seated commitment: all whom he encountered “deserved the best and friendliest service I could provide. I learned then, and believe still, that *public service* means *just that*.”

It helped that he looked the part: the book’s cover is a 1963 photograph of the young firefighter as he leans against the district’s government-green Chevy pickup, equipped with a slip-on tank and pump unit. Rail-thin and open-faced, and with close-cropped hair, Joslin is draped in the agency’s signature uniform; exuding an idealistic eagerness, his is the perfect mien for this can-do organization.

Each summer he did all he could to advance the agency’s multiple-use mission. At spring-semester’s end, he headed upcountry to dig out snow-encased garbage cans, pick up flipped picnic benches, spruce up campsites, and rehab outhouses; Joslin fancied himself “the fastest staple gun in the west,” so rapidly did he post the latest Smoky Bear posters. As “mountain muscle replaced campus flab,” he also expanded his mind, gaining a deeper appreciation for the complex ecosystems in which he labored—the district’s sprawling half-a-million acres rose from Nevada’s “Great Basin sagebrush scrub” to the “lofty serrated summits of the Sawtooth Ridge and other peaks in the eleven-to twelve-thousand foot range” bordering on Yosemite; from chilled Alpine lakes to the saline Walker Lake, this was the variegated terrain over which he daily hiked, rode, or drove.

No wonder he reflects fondly on his experiences—who would not want to recall time so well spent? Yet this nostalgic undertone does not make for a saccharine read. Joslin remembers no more than the record allows, in part because he became the district clerk (he could type!), a job that trained him to write with clarity and control; as the office’s public face, he also contributed squibs to local newspapers about recreational opportunities and fire dangers. These clippings, reinforced through research in agency documents and local archives, make for an unpretentious and straightforward narrative.

That’s why its firefighting focus is so intriguing. Joslin encountered no big blow-ups during his five Sierran summers; no great epiphanies came to him as he beat back flames or doused smoldering embers. Still, he constantly scanned the horizon for a puff of smoke and sometimes was trumped by his vigilant enthusiasm. Glimpsing a large volume of it billowing over a ridge, he raced to the scene only to discover a father-and-son

team admiring the campfire they had ignited within a trunk hollow; returning from town one evening he caught sight of an expanding orange glow over Bodie Hills, and then to his chagrin realized he had spotted the moonrise. There were plenty of real flames, though, and his matter-of-fact discussion of his response to them provides ample evidence of the Forest Service’s robust fire-suppression infrastructure.

The requisite smokechaser pack Joslin would sling over his back contained a Pulaski, shovel, hardhat, map, and rations; the water tanks he humped up and down steep hills; and the Chevy that could morph into a small fire truck were among the technology he wielded. If the terrain was difficult or the size of blaze outstripped the Bridgeport district’s capabilities, radio communications could mobilize weather-forecasting stations and hot-shot teams from across the west, an army bolstered by soldiers from regional bases, and tanker planes capable of dumping hundreds of gallons of slurry. The vocabulary Joslin uses to describe these battles, like the tactics the agency used to fight them, are militaristic. This combative language ran contrary to the already well-established scientific insight that fire was essential to the creation of many types of healthy forests, suggesting how powerful politics and culture were in setting the agency’s agenda.

However, like Joslin’s earlier *Uncle Sam’s Cabins*, and his edition of Ranger Walt Perry’s memoirs, *Toiyabe Patrol* also reminds us just how important human agency is in defining the past that gives shape to individual lives: “those five Toiyabe summers,” Joslin attests, “were both inspiration for and confirmation of the person and public servant I strove to be. . . .”

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