

Intelligent Consumption: The Forest Service Role

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The Intelligent Consumption Forum
Madison, WI—July 19, 2000

It's a pleasure today to join such a distinguished and knowledgeable group of Americans for a dialogue about the responsible use of our natural resources. I'd like to thank Mike Strigel for inviting me. I'm delighted to see such diverse representation among you—State and Federal agencies, the forest products industry, private NGOs. You are exactly the kind of forum we need more of in America—where people from diverse backgrounds find a common basis for discussions that will lead to mutual benefits.

We are here today to address one of the most fundamental and difficult of all conservation challenges we face. Americans are using more of their natural resources legacy than ever, yet support for environmental protection and conservation grows every year. The result? We are increasingly exporting our environmental problems elsewhere—to other lands, other States, other countries. It's a complex problem, and I'll go into it a bit more. Then I'll outline ways the Forest Service can help address the problem.

Changing Public Expectations

Gifford Pinchot founded the Forest Service on the principle that “The Conservation of natural resources is the key to the future.” The conservation principle, though not always politically popular, has always served the interests of the land and of future generations of Americans. Through a system of public lands, the fledgling Forest Service protected watersheds in the West. After the Great Depression, we were again called upon to help restore millions of acres of abandoned farmland in the Midwest and East.

Following World War II, we worked with the growing timber industry to help fulfill the national dream of providing families with single-family homes. Our timber harvests escalated for nearly a quarter of a century.

Along the way, social values changed. Eventually, the changing times caught up with and overran us in a flood of controversy, lawsuits, and injunctions. We've learned that we must be responsive to new demands—demands for clean water, healthy habitat for fish and wildlife, recreation opportunities, and ecologically sustainable timber harvests.

Today, we no longer manage public forests primarily for outputs of wood fiber, minerals, or animal unit-months of grazing. In ever-greater numbers, the American people are asking—demanding—that we focus less on what we take from the land and more on what we leave behind. Here are just a few of the many noncommodity benefits the public expects from their lands:

- *Clean water.* The most and the cleanest water in the country comes from our forests. One-third of our Nation is forested, and the forested area produces two-thirds of our runoff. More

than 60 million Americans get their drinking water from watersheds that originate on our national forests and grasslands.

- *Recreation.* In 1946, our national forests and grasslands hosted just 18 million visitor-days; last year, it was nearly 1 billion—that's 50 times more! People are coming from all over the world. They come to enjoy our 7,700 miles of national scenic byways. They come to fish and canoe our 4,348 miles of national wild and scenic rivers. They come to hike our 133,087 miles of trails, to camp in our 4,300 campsites—the list goes on and on.
- *Wildlife and fish habitat.* Our national forests provide 80% of the habitat in the lower 48 States for elk, mountain goat, and bighorn sheep. We maintain 28 million acres of wild turkey habitat and half of the country's blue-ribbon trout streams.

Missing Consumption Ethic

Today, our first and highest priority is living within the limits of the land. Sustainability should be our guiding star. We can fulfill our mission of serving the American people only if we first care for the land on the basis of a sound land ethic. In a nutshell, our land ethic is this: We respect the right of every native species to flourish on the land, from our magnificent salmon, elk, and wolves to “the meanest flower that blows,” as Aldo Leopold put it. We practice our land ethic through ecosystem-based management.

One effect of our ecosystem-based management and our changing social values has been reduced commodity extraction from our national forests and grasslands: Over the last decade, timber harvest has dropped by 70%, oil and gas leasing by about 40%, and livestock grazing by at least 10%. But demand for forest and grassland products has increased. Consider:

- From 1965 to 1999, our annual paper consumption increased overall by 120% and per capita by 90%, from 468 to 750 pounds per person.
- From 1971 to 1996, the average size of homes in the United States grew from 1,520 square feet to 2,120 square feet. Meanwhile, the average family size has dropped by 16% since 1970. Americans require more wood for larger homes than ever before, often in our rapidly diminishing open spaces: Between 1992 and 1997, nearly 16 million acres of forest, farms, and open space were converted to urban or other uses. In less than a decade, we doubled the loss of undeveloped land.

Improvements in paper recycling and more efficient wood use have somewhat offset our rising demand for wood fiber. Still, from 1965 to 1998, our overall demand for wood fiber increased by about 50%, keeping pace with our population growth. Per year, we consume about 65 cubic feet of wood per person in forest and paper products and an additional 10 cubic feet per person in fuelwood. That's the equivalent of three trees 15 to 18 inches in diameter per person per year.

That's an awful lot of trees!

Our ecosystem-based management, coupled with our appetite for forest products, runs the risk of simply shifting our environmental problems to other countries, to rural areas, or to private lands with fewer protections.

- Consider softwood imports from Canada. Between 1991 and 1996, softwood harvest on our national forests fell from about 9 to 3.1 billion board feet per year. Over the same period, U.S. softwood imports from Canada rose from 11.5 to nearly 18 billion board feet per year. Canada now accounts for 34% of the softwood lumber consumption in the United States, up from 26% in 1990. Much of the additional lumber came from old-growth boreal forests in northern Quebec. Old-growth timber harvest is now a public issue in Canada.
- Consider the issue of sustainable forestry in the Southeast. In 1977, the net growth of softwood forests was 6.3 billion cubic feet in the South. About 4.5 billion cubic feet were harvested. In 1997, the net growth of softwood forests was 5.9 billion cubic feet and about 6.5 billion cubic feet were harvested. Although growth levels of hardwood forests still exceed removals, hardwood harvest levels are beginning to approach hardwood forest growth levels. This is not some abstract debate over little known plants, obscure fish, or reclusive owls. This is a question of basic sustainability. Harvest cannot exceed growth if forests are to provide healthy fish and wildlife habitats, clean and pure drinking water, and scenic beauty.

Now, these are not matters that the Forest Service can or will try to regulate. These are largely private matters, issues of international commerce and private land use. But that doesn't mean we should ignore the fundamental problem: the absence of a national consumption ethic.

That's why we're here today. We're here to discuss what we can do to align American consumption with American expectations for healthy watersheds and thriving wildland ecosystems. We're here to discuss how we can help Americans understand an inescapable truth: that our consumption choices drive the way we use and manage the land. We're here to find ways of helping Americans make intelligent consumption choices.

Consumption Strategy

"There are two spiritual dangers in not owning a farm," Aldo Leopold once wrote. "One is the danger of supposing that breakfast comes from the grocery, and the other that heat comes from the furnace." I'd add a third danger: that water comes from the faucet. Aldo Leopold knew that a land ethic must be based on a consumption ethic, and that Americans were losing the basis for a consumption ethic as they lost their agricultural ties to the land. A farmer doesn't waste what takes hours of labor to produce—food to eat, wood to build and warm a home. But for those who shop for food and lumber, the only limiting factor is the pocketbook. Waste, if convenient and affordable, will always be potentially profligate.

What can we do to eliminate waste? You as a group have already identified areas where we can help: educating the public on the need for intelligent consumption; providing public guidance for intelligent consumption; developing more efficient technologies; and establishing institutional incentives for intelligent consumption. I will briefly outline what the Forest Service will do in these areas.

- First, we will encourage all Americans to understand the effects of their consumption—not by placing blame, but rather by asking people to make informed, intelligent consumption choices. Leadership must come from the most credible and visible public sources at every level—our political and religious leaders, government agencies, conservation NGOs, and re-

source-producing industries. The Forest Service will support and mediate the effort, partly through such efforts as your good work in this important forum. Through our new, expanded staff area for conservation education, we are using professional outreach techniques with public messages on the need for intelligent consumption. For example, our Washington Office will feature a new visitor center designed to get visitors to critically examine their own daily consumption choices.

- Second, we will develop technical and scientific information to guide intelligent consumption. A priority for Forest Service Research will be to study and compare the implications of alternative consumption choices for our economy and for the conservation of our natural resources at all levels—locally, regionally, nationally, and internationally. For example, the Forest Service RPA timber assessment for 2000, to be released later this summer, will indicate the projected effects of our current consumption choices on our range, wildlife, water, mineral, recreation, urban forest, and timber resources.
- Third, we will develop more efficient technologies for utilizing our natural resources. The Forest Service’s Forest Products Laboratory—FPL—is a longtime leader in this area. For example, our innovation in recycling and efficient wood utilization helped to increase products we can produce from a single log by 40%. Remember those stamps you had to lick? They were replaced by self-adhesive stamps, and the FPL figured out how to recycle them. The Post Office sold 33 billion self-adhesive stamps last year, and now billions of stamped envelopes can be recycled. Our top priority today is finding uses for the low-value trees that we need to thin from 54 million acres of our national forestlands at unnaturally high levels of risk from fire and pests. FPL has already found ways to use small-diameter Douglas-fir for flooring and furniture, and red maple for trusses and I-joists. If you took the FPL tour, you saw the demonstration structure that uses small-diameter ponderosa pine roundwoods as a new building element. I envision a future where homes are more adaptable and recyclable, where walls can be easily moved to accommodate a growing or shrinking household, and where wood removed from pallets and from building demolition projects is not sent to the landfill, but turned into usable products such as particleboard for furniture.
- Finally, we must develop institutional incentives for intelligent consumption. Leadership must come from political authorities such as Congress, with informational support from government agencies, conservation NGOs, and resource-producing industries. A priority for Forest Service Research will be to help find ways to encourage environmentally friendly products and manufacturing processes in a manner that does not impair the health, diversity, and productivity of the land.

Collectively, these four strategies—educating the public on the need for intelligent consumption; providing public guidance for intelligent consumption; developing more efficient technologies; and establishing institutional incentives for intelligent consumption—will help eliminate wasteful consumption. All are grounded in Gifford Pinchot’s insight that “the Conservation of natural resources is the key to the future.”

Minimizing Consumption

Theodore Roosevelt and Gifford Pinchot established a system of public lands—our national forests and grasslands—on the basis of “the greatest good of the greatest number for the longest time.” Today, we can perhaps best realize the greatest good for the greatest number through an-

other principle, a principle stated by E.F. Schumacher in his 1973 book *Small Is Beautiful*: “The aim should be to obtain the maximum of well-being with the minimum of consumption.”

Ultimately, that’s why we’re here today. It’s up to us to find ways, individually and collectively, both in this group and in our own agencies and organizations, to work toward intelligent consumption—a maximum of well-being with a minimum of consumption. The health of America’s watersheds, the vitality of our forest and grassland ecosystems, depends on intelligent consumption. Through intelligent consumption, we will lay the groundwork for extending our land ethic across the boundaries that divide us—and ultimately all around the world.