

Opening Remarks: Welcome to the Allegheny National Forest; but will we be here 10 years from now?

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Abstract.—In our day-to-day struggles, we must keep our eyes on what is going on. The bottomline questions are, will we be harvesting timber 10 years from now, or will the Forest Service as an agency even exist 10 years from now? The author is not optimistic, but still holds some hope. That hope is in silviculturists and other who are willing to step forward and speak out.

WELCOME

How many of you have been to the Allegheny National Forest (ANF) before? Welcome back. The rest of you are in for a treat. Like all Forest Supervisors, I enjoy bragging on the Forest and its people. I will share a little about the culture of the ANF, some unique features, and a little about the theme "communications."

CULTURE

The culture of ANF has undergone some major changes since 1988 when it moved to a unified approach. In particular, implementation of the unified budget process has been a key to breaking down barriers and eliciting employees in decision-making through program champions. This has worked very effectively for us.

The Allegheny is the most intensively-utilized Forest I have ever worked on or seen. Unlike forests in the west, we use natural regeneration; we use herbicide; 93 percent of the Forest subsurface is privately-owned; landlines are by meets and bounds. The ANF is within a day's drive of 1/3 of the population of the U.S. and 1/2 the population of Canada. Our forest health situation is compounded with deer pressure, unprecedented defoliation, topped with droughts, open winters, and windstorms, and some of the highest levels of acid deposition in the country.

We have excellent relationships with Research, S&PF, State agencies; good relations with industries; improving relations with local communities; excellent partnerships with a number of conservation organizations and universities; good working relations with elected officials. Relations with some environmental groups is not as good as desired, which brings me to the theme - Communications.

COMMUNICATIONS

The questions I ask are, will we be harvesting timber products on the Allegheny National Forest 10 years from now? Will the Forest Service exist 10 years from now? I am not very optimistic, as I believe the answer to both is "no," but it does not have to be.

What role does the silviculturist have in communications? First, just out of curiosity, how many of you are practicing silviculturists? How many of you think you have the greatest job in the FS?

Silviculturists have one of the toughest, most challenging jobs in the world for two reasons: 1) You, as silviculturists, write prescriptions that determine the destiny of the future forests - an awesome responsibility; and 2) you turn beautiful, living organisms into stumps and then must explain that this does not harm the environment and is actually good for society.

Allow me to set up a picture in your mind to help illustrate the second reason. Most of us have a favorite tree or species. Now, take a moment to picture that tree or that perfect specimen - magnificent isn't it? Now picture this tree as a stump and you standing in front of a crowd explaining why changing this beautiful, living organism into a stump doesn't harm the environment and is actually good for society.

Think about this for a moment. The public is relying on you, one person, to write a prescription that sets the destiny of future forests by turning trees into stumps. It is indeed one of the toughest jobs in the world.

Take a moment to reflect on the following statement. Trees can be safely harvested from your National Forest without harming the environment. How many of you think this is true - show of hands? How many think this is false? How many are uncertain?

Can you say trees are, not can be, but are safely harvested from your National Forest without harming the environment? Can you say that?

Hang on to those thoughts and your uncertainty, these are important.

I will read to you something that came out about 50 years ago that may sound a little familiar to you.

"The other day I was lying on the sofa listening to a symphony and thinking what a grand and glorious world this is with nothing to worry about when, as it closed, some bull-voiced gentleman began to shout that Niagara Falls was about to be destroyed by power companies. In two minutes, he had my nerves on edge and my hair on end, aghast at the frightful catastrophe. According to his picture of it, the Falls will soon be a mere trickle, and the rapids below a brook so stagnant it will breed mosquitoes. As a honeymoon resort, it will be a total loss and, as a result, the marriage rate will go down, the birth rate will drop, and the American people will soon be a vanished breed, on their way to join the ichthyosaurus and the dodo."

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Effective! He painted a picture of something no one wants based on the uncertainties that most people would legitimately harbor about such a project, and, without saying it, grabbing at their lack of trust for big business, or in our case, big government. He brought up some legitimate concerns about water flows, the value of Niagara as a national asset, and the aesthetics for honeymooners — key ingredients to environmentalists' effectiveness with people/media. They use symbolism, uncertainty, and trust - or lack thereof.

What do you think happened to the hydroelectric project? How many of you have been to Niagara Falls? How many of you have noticed a hydroelectric plant? It is there and very unobtrusive. What side is it on? Canadian! What if that had been between us and another country not as prepared as Canada? What would the result have been? Are we prepared to export our environmental concerns to nations that are not as prepared as is the United States? We will do just that by allowing our timber program to diminish to nothing. We have a responsibility to communicate, proactively, the importance of vegetative management on National Forests to society.

We are a nation built on our resources. We are a nation built on our people. Are we prepared to say we are a nation built on other nations' resources, other nations' people, other nations' money, and other nations' environments? Is this environmental imperialism?

Why is it important that we speak out proactively? We supply important products that fulfill a demand, a demand that will be satisfied by other nations—nations not as prepared with strong environmental laws, sufficient numbers of highly-skilled people and a wealth of technical knowledge. We, the Forest Service, also play a critical role in providing answers on how to manage resources within the capabilities of the ecosystem. We provide the answers to private landowners, to other public land managers and to other nations. We should export our knowledge, not our environmental concerns.

Environmentalists are forever examining what we don't know—the glass half empty, the uncertainties of our work. They actively voice the uncertainty to the public and then add their own dramatic outcomes (symbolism) - birth rates drop, Americans a vanishing breed!

What is our typical response? Do we debate such issues in the media, the media that the environmentalist so readily use? No. We generally respond by stating what we DO know. By stating what we do know, do we address the uncertainty? Do we address the issues raised? Do we adequately address the dramatic outcomes raised by others? No, not usually.

It is time we were proactive in providing the public the questions we do not have the answers to, including what we

professionally expect the result to be with the knowledge we have today. But we must take it one step further and tell the public what we are doing to answer the unknown, to test hypotheses, and monitor and share the results.

Do you have questions about what you are doing? Do you know all the answers? Do you share your uncertainty openly with the public?

How many of you, when writing prescriptions, thinking about ecosystem management, biodiversity, fragmentation and the like, and have unanswered questions, uncertainties or doubts about the results that our current breadth of knowledge does not answer? Do you feel free within our organization, the Forest Service, to voice your questions, your uncertainties openly? Do you feel you are adequately responding to your uncertainties? Are there questions you have that you never voice or dare put into an environmental assessment (EA)?

We must be proactive. We must be the first, I repeat, the first to share our uncertainties, our questions. Let opponents play off of our words, our symbols. We will always be in a losing position playing off their words and their symbols.

Put the uncertainties in EA's. We must be the first to share the probable results and be willing to monitor and share the final outcome. And we must share what we are doing to fill the knowledge gaps, to increase our breadth of knowledge. If we are truly top notch stewards, top notch professionals, as I believe we are, then we are constantly seeking answers to our questions. That is a big part of why you are here this week - you are here to seek and share knowledge.

The key ingredients of our message must contain uncertainty, symbolism and trust. The symbols will be you, the professional, providing your judgement based on science and experience, and it will be a healthy forest environment that is serving the public. Trust would be approached in two ways. Big government may never be trusted, but you individually, as a person and as a professional, will be. The other way is through proof that comes from research, monitoring, operating with an open book, and a collaborative approach to solving uncertainties.

In closing, can you explain why turning a beautiful, living organism - a tree - into a stump is good for society? Are you ready to tackle your responsibility to do just that? Are you ready to display and discuss our, your, uncertainties, and the probable results, as well as what monitoring tells us about the outcomes? Are you ready to seek answers to your uncertainties? Are you ready to share your knowledge with others? These are the questions I hope you will ask yourself - this week and beyond. You are the symbol, you are the trust - use it wisely and proactively! Have a good week!