

# CONSERVATION COMPASS

## Our National Forests – Will Conflict Never Cease?



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### LOOKING BACK TO SEE THE FUTURE

I begin with a look back into history with this thesis in mind—between 1890 and 1910 a few dedicated people changed the attitudes of the American people toward things wild and free. And, in doing so, they set our Nation upon a new course guided by a new vision of “conservation.” This vision included, in addition to “wise use” of resources, the preservation of wild places and wild things.

Theodore Roosevelt and a few stalwart friends and allies were among the primary instigators of those changes. In December of 1887, a 29-year-old New York Assemblyman from a wealthy and prominent family hosted a dinner for 10 influential Easterners to discuss the startling trend toward extinction of the big game animals of the West. Theodore Roosevelt had been smitten with the West and its declining wildlife four years earlier on a trip to the Dakotas to hunt and kill one of the last remaining buffalo.

That night they formed the Boone and Crockett Club to be composed of 100 “American hunting riflemen” and whatever associate members that might be deemed worthy of membership. They had the audacity to believe that they could be effective in reversing the declines in big game in the West.

Included in the early membership were men destined to become giants in the conservation movement. Think on such names as William Tecumseh Sherman, Philip Sheridan, Francis Parkman, Carl Schurz, George Bird Grinnell, George Vest, John Lacey, Raphael Pompelly, William Hallet Phillips, John C. Noble, Gifford Pinchot (see article on page 54 of this issue), Arnold Hague, and Albert Bierstadt.

Theodore Roosevelt remained active with the Boone and Crockett Club and was both educated and influenced by its members and they by him. Then with the assassination of President McKinley in 1901, Theodore Roosevelt, who had been

deemed too much of a “progressive” and safely “sidelined” in the vice-presidency, became America’s youngest President. This shocking turn of events prompted “boss” of Tammany Hall to state in disgust that “damned cowboy is President.” That comment was much related to fame that the now President had garnered as the organizer and ultimate commander of the Rough Riders Battalion of volunteers in the Spanish-American War.

Using the “bully pulpit” afforded by the Presidency and relying on the acumen and dedication of his long-term colleagues in conservation, Roosevelt’s words and deeds assured that “conservation” was to become a fixture of American life in the 20th century. His boldest move related to conservation was to dramatically increase the lands in national forests. In 1891, the General Revision Act made it possible for Presidents to reserve forest lands from both settlement and unauthorized use. By 1901, when Roosevelt became President, 38.8 million acres had been so reserved.

In collusion with his friend Gifford Pinchot, then Director of the Bureau of Forestry and later first Chief of the Forest Service, he increased the forest reserves (national forests after 1905) over three-fold to 140 million acres by 1908. The long neglected national parks were finally afforded protection—by the Army—and doubled in number. The Forest Service came into being in 1905 with a transfer of the forest reserves in the Department of Interior to become the National Forests in the Department of Agriculture with Gifford Pinchot heading the new agency. Pinchot saw to it, with Roosevelt’s backing, that the Forest Service was staffed with fully qualified professionals and not by political appointees.

Roosevelt did not really scorch the anti-conservationists until after he was overwhelmingly elected in his own right in 1904. “There followed such an era of en-

lightenment as the nation had never before experienced...” By 1907, the timber, mining, and grazing interests in the West and the politicians they controlled had enough of the old Rough Rider. Oddly, his conservation agenda attained maximum public support and maximum political opposition at the same juncture.

The enmity peaked with a rider to an appropriation bill for the Department of Agriculture forbidding Presidents from proclaiming any additional national forests within the states of Oregon, Washington, Idaho, Montana, Colorado, and Wyoming. Pinchot suggested to Roosevelt that national forests should be established from all suitable public lands within the 10 days before the President had to sign or veto the bill. Within that 10 days preparations were made to establish 21 new national forests encompassing 16 million acres. Roosevelt signed the proclamation on March 2, 1907, and, then, turned and signed the Appropriations Act forbidding future actions. The “midnight proclamation” finished organized opposition to the national forests. There remained no doubt that he was, and is today, the “conservation President.” The old Rough Rider still knew how to dodge a bullet and how to use his spurs.

### 1890-1910 AND 1990-2010 —

#### COMPARABLE DECADES

Thus, the conservation trail was blazed and cleared between 1890 and 1910. The rest of the 20th century was to be marked by progress in the conservation arena. However, the last several decades have been marked by significant disagreements over appropriate courses of action. By 1990, conflicts and acrimony were building as the people and their elected officials became ever more conflicted about endangered species, management of federal lands, global warming, and increasing population pressures.

The period of 1990 to 2010 seems destined to loom as significant for the nation's conservation path in the 21st century as the period of 1890 to 1910 proved to be for the 20th century. Likely the questions swirling around the management of the public lands today will be answered in this era. The die will likely be cast for our conservation actions of the 21st century. Where is the Theodore Roosevelt for our time when he or she is so badly needed?

I submit that he, and his companions, are here—right here, right now. How can that be? He and those who guided him and made impossible dreams come true, are present in us. We stand on their shoulders. We have knowledge and technology of which they could only dream. And, we care—a lot. We have but to keep the faith and believe that we can lead others to join together to make a better world.

The focus here is on the true crown jewels of our public lands that are haven to wildlife and to hunters and fishers—the national forests. Clearly, these lands are rapidly becoming the last bastion of “free” hunting and fishing in a nation that is increasingly crowded by both people and their works.

These lands, no matter how expansive, do not exist in isolation nor are they self-contained. Neither rivers nor wildlife recognize such boundaries. As human populations increase more rapidly near national forests than elsewhere in the West, there are new problems *de jour*. It will be increasingly critical to maintain “open space” adjacent to the national forests through conservation easements, attention to repeal of the “death tax,” and using grazing allotments on the public lands to assure economic viability of ranches.

DEBATES CONCERNING THE PUBLIC'S LANDS — THE BEAT GOES ON

It has long been recognized that the

public's lands are dramatically and increasingly important to wildlife and wildlife-associated recreation (e.g., hunting and fishing). These lands are the focus of intensifying debates as to their best use.

Central to these exacerbating debates are issues related to the economic welfare of communities, i.e., issues related to wood extraction, livestock grazing, and mining, and the motivations and desires of those living in close proximity to the national forests. Trends in human demographics, economics, welfare and desires—as reflected in voting patterns—will have significant impact on how and for what the public's lands are managed.

The welfare of wildlife, the degree of management emphasis on production of game fish and animals, and hunting and fishing opportunities, will be dramatically affected by land treatments—or the lack thereof—and the management of roads.

#### SHIFTING DEMOGRAPHICS AND ELECTIONS

New sources of data related to this question are available: the results of the 2000 census and the outcome of the 2000 national elections. Analyses of these data reveal trends in populations in terms of numbers, location, age, and economic class. Most of the data drawn on for this discussion can be found in a publication of the O'Connor Center for the Rocky Mountain West at the University of Montana (*The Rocky Mountain West's Changing Landscape*, Volume 2, Number 2, Winter-Spring 2001).

Of the counties considered herein, all have centers located within 50 miles of a national forest boundary, and none contain metropolitan areas of more than 50,000 people. Two factors accounted for changes in human population. “Natural change” related to births and deaths and “net migration” is immigration minus out-migration. Between 1980 and 1990, the population in 251 such counties grew

from 4,796,000 to 5,149,000 (an increase of 7.4 percent). Of this growth, 7.8 percent was related to natural change, and -0.4 percent to net migration. In other words, people were moving out slightly slower than they were moving in. This was the decade with the highest volume of timber harvested from national forests in their near 100-year history.

Then, between 1990 and 1999, there was a significant change. The population in the subject counties grew from 5,631,000 to 5,863,000 (an increase of 713,900, or 13.9 percent). Of this growth 4.6 percent was related to natural change and 9.3 percent to net migration. During this decade the number of people moving into these counties increased dramatically. Simultaneously, wood taken from the national forests declined some 90 percent.

#### COUNTIES MOST DEPENDENT ON WOOD PRODUCTS MANUFACTURE

Changes were even more pronounced in non-metropolitan counties that were classified as “Wood Products Manufacturing Dependent.” Between 1980 and 1990, the population in these 43 counties grew from 1,256,000 to 1,339,000 (an increase of 83,000, or 6.6 percent). Of this growth, 6.0 percent was related to natural change and 0.6 percent to net migration. In other words, the population was growing and increases were almost totally related to an excess of births over deaths. Immigration was insignificant.

Then, between 1990 and 1999, the population grew relatively rapidly from 1,339,000 to 1,523,000

“The conservation of our natural resources and their proper use constitute the fundamental problem which underlies almost every other problem of our national life.”  
Theodore Roosevelt,  
10 June 1907

Examination of the voting patterns that emerged in the 2000 presidential election make it clear that the political trends in the western states, which contain the vast majority of the acreage of the national forest system, have increasingly favored Republican candidates over the past decade.

(an increase of 184,000, or 13.7 percent), with 2.7 percent attributed to natural change and 11.4 percent to net migration. The growth in population was more than that of the overall U.S. population, while timber available from the national forests declined by approximately 90 percent.

As “gross migration” is often four to six times higher than “net migration,” the in-migrants during that decade may total over 2 million of the population residing in these areas. In the process, the percentage of persons in older age brackets increased faster than that of the U.S. population as a whole, and the percentage of younger people declined more than that of the overall population. The factors underlying these trends will likely strengthen in the coming decade.

Over the course of the last 20 years, earnings of those engaged in wood products manufacturing in wood products dependent counties fell from \$3.1 billion in 1978 to less than \$1.8 billion in 1991, and then to \$1.56 billion in 1998 (an overall decline of

52 percent). The contribution of wood products industry fell from 22 percent of the income base in 1978 to less than 9 percent in 1998. Data from the non-metro counties adjacent to national forests show that earnings from labor related to forest products (harvesting and processing) dropped from 7.5 percent in 1978 to 3.2 percent in 1998.

Such declines in a primary industry would be expected to be a

predictor of massive erosion and decline of the associated local economies. That does not seem to have happened—at least not yet. As a result, it has become increasingly difficult to argue that the economic viability of these counties rests primarily with the extraction and manufacture of wood products.

MORE THAN MEETS THE EYE—SOMETIMES THERE IS A FREE LUNCH

However, at this point, consideration of scale in evaluating social and economic effects becomes germane. While overall effects seem minimal, there were thousands of individuals who were adversely affected. Included were workers (and their families) who lost their jobs, and whose personal tragedies were masked by their out-migration from the areas in question—i.e., they “dropped off the radar screen.”

Many entrepreneurs connected with the wood products industry were likewise devastated, including mill owners, truckers, and those involved in the support industries. The in-migration and development of associated supporting infrastructure effectively masked those impacts.

There have been surges in home construction within these counties that exceed that expected from the net-migration figures. The construction of “second homes” by people who maintained residences elsewhere accounts for much of the difference. Some 90 percent of the growth in income in those counties in the last decade is related to increases in government (local, state, and federal), health care, financial and real estate services, wholesale trade, eating and drinking places, hotels and other lodging places, contractors, and miscellaneous services.

NATIONAL FORESTS—THE MIGRANTS’ MAGNET

In short, counties near national forests have become more attractive to in-migrants even as the traditional under-girding industries declined. It

is, therefore, obvious that the national forests are not declining in value to the region. In fact, they are increasingly stronger magnets for in-migrants for reasons unrelated to harvest and production of wood.

One of the authors, Larry Swanson, concluded, “The management and use of these lands (i.e., the national forests) have heavily shaped the history of settlement and economic development in the West. They will continue to do so in the future, but under vastly different circumstances and prerogatives than in the past.”

ISSUES AND POLITICS

No doubt the politics surrounding the management of the national forests has shifted dramatically over the last three decades. Much of that change has been the result of the interactions of the environmental laws passed in the late 1960s and 1970s and the resultant accumulating case law. Certainly, politics has played some part. But it is well to remember that the timber cut from the national forests plummeted from 13.5 billion board feet per year to less than 4 billion board feet during the administrations of Presidents Ronald Reagan and George Bush. Most of this decline was related to compliance with federal court decisions. The administrations were loath to vigorously apply the letter of the environmental laws, and were consistently called to account by the federal courts in cases brought by those of the environmental persuasion. Many elected officials, primarily from western states, have spoken out against these trends, but have been unsuccessful in bringing about any change in the operative laws.

This brings us to the results of the 2000 Presidential contest between Governor George W. Bush and Vice President Al Gore. Clearly, Vice-President Gore was the “environmental candidate,” and Governor Bush was the champion of reinvigoration of extractive industries (timber, livestock

grazing, and mining) on the federal estate. Mr. Bush won by a whisker in the electoral college, and was, seemingly, a bit shy of a majority in the popular vote. The Congress, particularly the Senate, emerged from the election essentially evenly divided, with control of the Senate shifting from Republicans to Democrats due to one Senator changing from Republican to Independent status within a few months of the election.

Examination of the voting results of the Bush/Gore race on a county-by-county basis is revealing. Mr. Gore carried most urban counties, and Mr. Bush, overwhelmingly, carried rural counties, particularly those under discussion here. What are we to make of those facts as related to future management of the national forests in the West?

In the course of the presidential campaign and since, President Bush has taken some strong positions on the management of the national forests consistent with promises made in the campaign. These positions have not set well with most of the organized environmental movement that had been strongly supportive of his opponent in the presidential election.

#### PENDULUMS DO SWING

President Bush sent the Forest Service back to the drawing board to revamp the first significant changes in planning regulations in 28 years that were put in place in the waning days of the Clinton Administration. Those new, and now withdrawn, planning rules had clearly stated that the overriding objective of the management of the national forests was the preservation of biodiversity and sustainability of the forests in question. Those regulations had been questioned as to their compliance with the enabling legislation (the National Forest Management Act of 1976) and in terms of their technical and economic practicality.

Then, he rolled back the last-minute decision of the Clinton Ad-

ministration to declare that one-third of the national forest lands were to be maintained in “roadless” condition. That action was quickly followed with the nomination as Under Secretary of Agriculture with jurisdiction over the Forest Service, a former timber industry lobbyist and Chief-of-Staff to the Junior Senator from Alaska and former Chair of the Energy and Natural Resources Committee. Is there some hint of the future emerging from these potentially interacting actions and facts?

As previously pointed out, there has been significant in-migration into areas adjacent to national forests. That rate of in-migration seems likely to continue over the next decade. Along with many observers, one could couple this surge in in-migration and the decline in the wood products industry in the same areas and conclude that one is the result of the other.

#### CAUSE AND EFFECT — MAYBE, MAYBE NOT

In fact, such an interpretation appears commonly in the press, and is described as a “cause and effect” phenomenon. Actually it is quite possible that the two phenomena are poorly connected, if at all.

Closer examination reveals that the timber harvest from the national forests was reduced significantly due to a combination of the impacts of environmental laws and economic circumstances. These economic circumstances relate pri-

marily to supply and demand impacts on prices and profits. Imports from Canada and other countries have been fingered by some observers as key to sustained low prices (and adverse impact on the U.S. wood products industry).

Alternatively, the in-migration may simply have been composed of people attracted to the presence of public lands, their associated beauty, and open access for recreation—regardless of forestry operations. Or, the in-migration may have been composed of predominately Republican voters who voted for Mr. Bush along party lines or for reasons unrelated to national forest management. Or, the vote may have been strongly influenced by disagreement with the course of management of the national forests over the past decade—i.e., sharp declines in timber harvest and perceived dangers related to widespread catastrophic fires in 1994 and 2000.

The wildland fires of 2000, the second biggest wildland fire year in the 20th century, were still cooling as voters went to the polls in November. Debates were (and still are) raging over “forest health” issues, particularly in relation to timber management, or the lack thereof. Yet to be weighed in the balance is the extent of salvage forest stand manipulations to reduce fire risk that will occur on the national forests and the public response over the next several years.



# BUSH/Republican

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Examination of the voting patterns that emerged in the 2000 presidential election make it clear that the political trends in the western states, which contain the vast majority of the acreage of the national forest system, have increasingly favored Republican candidates

over the past decade. This trend is particularly obvious when examining the voting trends in rural counties whose centers are within 50 miles of a national forest

Why? Is this voting pattern related to the management of the national forests? There is no clear answer to those questions at the moment.

#### FOREST HEALTH— THE LAST BATTLE GROUND?

Those that think the ongoing and raging debate over the management of the public land in the West, including the national forests, is over are sadly mistaken. It is likely that these debates are just getting started. But to what end?

The next battle ground will be that of “forest health”—what it is and what it is not—and what courses of management action and inaction will be required to produce and maintain national forests in a desired “healthy” condition. Some categorize “the forest health issue” as the last significant battleground over the future management of the national forests in the first decades of the 21st century. Combinations of laws, regulations, and case law have made it nearly impossible to perform timber-related operations “above costs” on the national forests. In other words, such actions cost more to execute than can be expected in revenue.

However, when vegetation is manipulated, including cutting of some trees that are commercially utilized for purposes of “forest health” and to produce a “desired forest condition,” there will judgment related to justification—economic and otherwise. Such actions may be economically and socially justified—or both—if overall benefits (e.g., fire management, esthetics, water yield and quality, and wildlife habitat) are deemed to match or exceed the costs incurred. Note that many of these attributes cannot be directly measured in dollars and cents. And, clearly, if there were no return on cutting of some trees in the process, favorable cost/benefit ratios would be much more difficult to attain.

If those arguments related to forest health can be discredited, it seems likely that essentially any manipulation of forest vegetation for purposes of improving “forest health” or achieving a “desired future condition” would or could be deemed unjustified—economically, ecologically, or both. And, there—right there squarely before the body politic—lies the newly defined and perhaps final battleground related to management of timber on the national forests, at least for the next few decades.

So far as growth of the human populations in the western states is concerned, there is likely to be continued growth at a rate significantly higher than that for the nation as a whole. In the last decade, the population in the mountain states increased nearly 25 percent as compared to the national growth rate of 9.3 percent. Of the five states that the U.S. Census Bureau expects to grow more than 20 percent in the 2000-10 period, all are in the West (Nevada, Idaho, Arizona, Utah, and New Mexico). Of the nine states projected to grow more than 15 percent, seven are in the West (adding Washington, Oregon, Montana, and Wyoming). Most of that growth not occurring in urban counties will

concentrate in counties near national forests.

#### GO WEST, OLD MAN

The share of the population in each region of the United States has shifted over the last 50 years. The Northeast lost 7 percent, the Midwest lost 7 percent, the South gained 4 percent, and the West gained 12 percent. It seems likely that political power will continue to shift from the Northeast and Midwest to the West (primarily) and the Southeast.

The overall population of the U.S. grew by 9.3 percent over the decade 1990-1999. If that growth rate continues, the present population will double in 77 years, while the population of the mountain West would double in 30 years and redouble in 60 years. These growth rates may prove to be conservative unless there is a will, or even the ability, to deal with illegal immigration.

Assuming that Americans will continue to seek and demand the “good life,” the economy will likely grow at a rate equal to or faster than the population itself. Such will be accompanied with all of the inherent demands for goods and services that interacting growth of population and economy imply. In other words, not only will the population increase rapidly, but the consumption per capita will likely increase as fast or faster. Will we be able to continue both our population growth and our hugely disproportionate demands for natural resources compared to the rest of the world by shifting our demands “elsewhere?” Or, will circumstances engender the need and will to meet more of our demand for resources from internal sources?

#### IT AIN'T OVER TILL IT'S OVER

So what does this all mean as related to management of the federal lands and particularly the national forests that lie predominately within the western states? I think it means that,

as my favorite philosopher Yogi Berra astutely observed, "It ain't over till it's over."

Then consider that observation in tandem with another quote from the famous author and folk philosopher, Mark Twain. He advised, "Buy land, they aren't making any more of it." A picture of the future emerges from the mist. As populations grow and continue to shift to the West, and a disproportionate number settle near national forests, those national forests will loom ever larger in both national and regional political arenas.

As populations grow and shift, the land per person shrinks, and economies grow inexorably to match human numbers with demands for "the good life," land itself becomes ever more valuable. Because the public's lands, and particularly the national forests, represent a treasure of land in terms of open space, wildlife habitat, water, and as a source of raw materials, their value can only increase. Although some increased yields of some resources can be achieved through appropriate management, in the end resources will have to be allocated. Allocation (i.e., rationing) will not be a popular concept and will, inevitably, produce competition and conflict.

Many, perhaps most, of these in-migrants will seek their place in the West near the national forests. This will result in division and re-

division of nearby or adjacent private lands with more and more people living near and spending time in the national forests. Yesterday's West is different from that of today. Tomorrow's West will change yet again. Yet, through all the change, the national forests and their management looms ever larger in a West that seems always in the process of becoming.

#### FORCES OF INEVITABLE CHANGE

Many forces are at work to direct this change. Some are peaceful and are prescribed by law, including formulation of forest plans, struggle in the courts, changes in political direction, and formulation of budgets. Others involve civil disobedience and even terrorism. Such actions, to the distress of many, have yielded results as both government and private industry capitulated to such tactics. Success begs imitation.

Then there are those who choose instead to heed the age-old admonition: "Come let us reason together." They struggle to work with neighbors of differing persuasions to seek means whereby the inevitable exploitation of natural resources can be carried out so that future generations can meet their needs and desires as we have met ours.

In that crucible of inevitable conflict, our mettle will be tested, and in the resultant casting our maturity as a civilization may be judged.

#### AND, SO, THE BUGLES SOUND OFFICER'S CALL

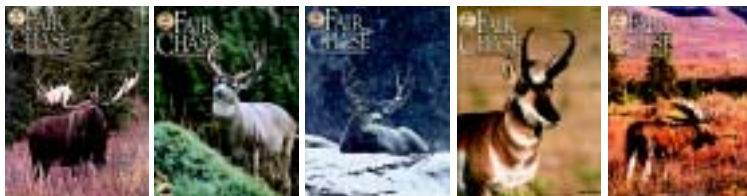
We visualize ourselves as modern day Rough Riders that have answered Lt. Colonel Theodore Roosevelt's call to duty. That imagery implies that we are committed to a dream that we cannot achieve individually. It implies that we are willing to serve in a cause that will make demands upon us.

The national forests and the men and women of the Forest Service need friends to help guide management actions, attain resources to carry out that management, and protect these lands owned by the American people. There are critics aplenty ranging from those who wish to shut down active forest management to those who wish to increase resource extraction activities many fold. The politicians have created, and now maintain, an almost impossible situation for Forest Service managers. But, for whatever reason, they seem to prefer casting stones to assuming the responsibility for corrective action.

We can help provide a way out of that morass. It won't be easy. Nothing worthwhile ever is. But, the Rough Riders in Cuba, following where their Colonel of volunteers led, did not find easy going either. But together—always together, they stayed the course and they prevailed. And, as a result, stood tall all their lives. So can we. So can we! ▲▲▲



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