

# HOW

I applaud the celebration of the National Forest Museum and think it's long overdue. Being able to physically see what the Forest Service was and is all about, to understand its history, how it developed, what shaped it and who shaped it is to understand an important part of American history.

We've come a long way in 100 years. It's been a tough, bumpy ride, but we're still here. What if we weren't? What

# FOREST



if, in the early years, Bernard Fernow and Gifford Pinchot, who headed the organization at its birth, had not found a way to

sell the idea of keeping millions of acres of the public domain held in public trust? If you think that the cry to sell off federal land to any and all comers is a '90s idea you're right—1890s that is. When the

# SERVICE

Forest Reserves (as National Forests were then called) were created in 1891, people of the West

were outraged. No plan for their management was in place and for a period of time the public did not have access to the Reserves.

By JACK WARD THOMAS  
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# PIECES

No harvesting of timber or grazing was permitted, for example. Opposition from the West reverberated through the halls of Congress. And remember, acceptance by the

West was important because that's where the National Forests were, carved out of the public domain. All public lands back East had already been sold into private hands.

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# FIT

It was only with the passage of the Organic Act in 1897, which contained provisions for multiple use of the Forest Reserves, that the idea of "reserving" millions of acres of public lands from private sale become acceptable.

So politics and coming to an accommodation with local citizens have been a reality since the doors opened. After three years in the hot seat, I have

more than a little understanding of what Pinchot went through in those days. We would have a lot to talk about if I could chat with him over a cup of coffee. There would be a lot of catching up to do. I'd tell him that because of the vision of people like himself, Aldo Leopold and many others, we now have 191 million acres set aside for public use and enjoyment, for wildlife habitat, for wilderness, for harvesting of timber for forest products; 191 million acres in 43 states of which 140 million acres are forested. We've held tight. The Forest Service has, through no small feat, preserved a legacy for the American people—lands that I feel are sacred, to be held in trust for our children and our children's children.

As to how these 191 million acres are being managed, I think Pinchot would be intrigued with our initiation of ecosystem management. I'm certain Aldo Leopold would find it exciting and just a little impatient that it took us this long to catch up with him. But that's what visionaries are, ahead of their time. The point is we had the good sense to catch up to him.

Ecosystem management is managing land through examining the needs for survival and sustainability of all organisms in an ecosystem. It's putting the vision of past and present leaders into practice, of following what our scientists tell us the land needs, and what people tell us they need. Only the foolhardy leave humans out of the equation. Man has to be accommodated. That's reality. We are part of the ecosystem.

As Forest Service employees, one of our primary responsibilities is to face the day to day dilemma of how to meet people's economic and social needs as they relate to National Forests without affecting the ability of the ecosystem to sustain and rejuvenate itself. Careful management of public lands is critical and sometimes entails modification of human activity to conserve wildlife and plant species, which often owe their continued survival to the existence of public lands. Achieving this balance is the challenge of our job. By looking at ecosystems to determine the impact of projects on the environment, we also gain a fuller understanding of how the parts fit together and relate to one another. We end up by being better

stewards of the land, because we always keep the long view in front of us.

In finding solutions to these issues—which come up hourly in the life of a district ranger or forest supervisor—we've not relied on our own opinions. In fact, our decision-making process is very different than it was in Gifford's time and, in fact very different than when I started in this business 40 years ago. The Forest Service, literally, looks different than it did back then. When I started there were no women in management positions. There were very few minorities. Until the 1950s, it was an agency made up primarily of foresters. It's a different world today. Aldo Leopold would, I think, have gotten a kick out of the fact that in 1993, a wildlife biologist was appointed chief of the Forest Service. Today, working in the Regions, we have geologists, botanists, wildlife biologists, social scientists, entomologists and many others in addition to the foresters and engineers. That diversity of thought, of bringing in different viewpoints on how things should be run has made us better organization in every way.

We're also doing a better job in bringing in the public's diverse ideas on how the National Forests should be managed. Since the 1960s, various laws have been passed requiring "public involvement." Now Pinchot would probably laugh at the notion you needed a law to do that. He'd say his rangers knew how to talk to their neighbors, to build trust, to get people to understand what the Forest Service was about. Well, Gifford, you did listen to people and we have continued to listen to people over the years. But we are now looking at a different way of operation. We are looking for public collaboration, for meaningful dialogue with people for the purpose of finding solutions to problems or issues. Public meetings and open houses don't always cut it. We can take criticism. We need criticism. But criticism can sometimes be a little too easy; becoming part of the solution is tougher. You have to deal with realities and you have to be willing to search for common ground. That's the challenge the public and special interest groups must deal with in coming to the table. With collaboration you search for answers, in addition to pointing out the problems.

Outreach and public involvement has come to be an important mode of

# TOGETHER

operation for the Forest Service. We've been working as partners with a lot of public and private groups and organizations through the years. This has been especially true through the State and Private Forestry arm of the Forest Service. To quickly explain our structure, the Forest Service is composed of four parts: the National Forest Lands and Grasslands; Research; State and Private Forestry; and International Forestry. Three of these four divisions go back to early days of the founding of the agency.

State and Private Forestry has existed since 1908. Since Pinchot's time, we have been partnering with state forestry programs to maintain or improve forest health. Projects including such things as protecting forests against insects and disease or destructive fires (as opposed to prescribed fires). It is an historic relationship that has had a big impact on protecting American forests apart from those under our own management.

We've also been a partner in protecting urban forests. Keep in mind that 80 percent of Americans live in cities and towns. Forests within those communities account for 10 percent of the Nation's forest cover. As Joan Comanor pointed out, forests are becoming increasingly valuable and important to the vitality of towns and cities. They can also provide an important link for city dwellers to better understand the environment.

The knowledge, experiences, perceptions, and priorities of people living in our cities and towns will determine the future of our forests. Because of the key role urban forests play, State and Private Forestry provides technical and financial assistance to state foresters for improving urban and community forests.

The other part of this program is to provide technical assistance to private forest landowners, operators, and the processors of forest products. Remember that half of the Nation's forests, some 350 million acres, are privately owned. So the decisions that private owners make on how their lands are to be managed are important to the future condition and productivity of America's forests.

Another effort within State and Private Forestry which ties us closely with communities is the Rural Community Assistance Program. It's relatively new, only about five years old. Its pur-

pose is to help rural communities diversify their economic base and improve their environmental and social well-being. It focuses on the community and their needs, their cultures and their values in relation to their surroundings, and the natural resources that sustain them. What is exciting about this program is that the dollars we put into a community project leverage huge sums of non-Federal dollars and generate tremendous good will and trust within communities and among the Forest Service and other community partners.

For example, assistance is being given to one community to explore ways to make under-utilized, small diameter waste wood into useful products. It would be a boon to communities who have logging operations if there were a way to recycle this lumber. In forest health projects that involve thinning, small diameter trees are a complete loss. Finding an economic use for this material would not only help the environment by avoiding waste and at the same time help local economies, but also would help pay the costs of forest health practices.

A program under the administration of the National Forest System that involves us intimately in the life of our communities is the 25 percent fund. Since 1925, we have been returning 25 percent of revenue from timber sales, grazing permits, recreation fees and other sources to counties in which National Forest land is located. These payments support local schools and roads and make us paying members of our communities.

These paths have served us well over time in working at the state and local levels. The national structure set up by Pinchot, subdividing the organization into Regions, and the Regions into Forests and Districts have also served us well.

Downsizing has affected the structure in both good and bad ways. We're trying to shift our numbers and money out of the Washington and Regional offices to the field. From the get go, we've believed in decentralization. In the early part of the century, with the Chief in Washington and the Forests out West, it was the only way things could work. And decentralization is good for other reasons; ideas tend to flow up and down, from the grassroots to the top rather than with a centralized organization where things tend to flow from the top down.

At times, we've gotten too "top down" oriented but I think our recent restructuring will help to return the Forest Service to the community, to the district, and the supervisor's office.

Research is different. It needed some independence from the local political process and policy makers. For that reason, the administration of the research stations set up in different parts of the country were answerable only to Washington, and not subject to local whims. Certainly the thrust of the research has always been to address local issues, whether it be finding ways to reduce waste in timber harvesting or researching the role of fire, the human and resource dimensions of wilderness, and my own area of research—wildlife. Research has given priority to the solving the practical problems arising out of the forest or forest environment.

Our basic organization has stood us in good stead for the past 100 years. What our needs will be in the future I don't know. I do know the next millennium will bring incredible pressures on us. Some of the major trends and issues I see facing us:

- growing demand for goods and services from a shrinking forest base
- politicization of natural resource issues
- the information age and the emerging global village
- increasing involvement by Americans in all decision about the Nation's forests.

These are issues all of us will be dealing with in a shrinking world.

But to cut to the chase, the Forest Service is still here. We still believe in being good stewards of the land and good servants of the people. We make mistakes, but we keep looking for right answers. I still believe in the work of the Forest Service, now more than ever. I believe in the people of the Forest Service. I believe in the capacity to change. We all must change and adapt. We must all work for solutions. We are headed into the 21st century, folks, come hell or high water, and it's going to get tougher.



### U.S. Forest Service Chief Steps Down To Join B&C and The University of Montana

U.S. Forest Service Chief Jack Ward Thomas retired from his post in November to become the Boone and Crockett Professor of Wildlife Conservation at The University of Montana.

"I look forward to this opportunity, and returning to the West. That's where my heart is," Thomas said in announcing that he will leave the federal agency he has served for over 30 years, most recently as its 13th chief.

As Boone and Crockett Professor of Wildlife Conservation, Thomas will teach, guide graduate student research and offer public service in the fields of wildlife conservation and ecosystem management for sustainable development. Thomas, an internationally known wildlife biology researcher, also will oversee the Theodore Roosevelt Wildlife Research Station and administer the work of the Boone and Crockett Club's Conservation Program.

The position is privately endowed, primarily through gifts from the Boone and Crockett Club.

"This opportunity to work with natural resource professionals in an academic setting and be part of one of the more progressive natural resource organizations in the world is exciting," Thomas said. "Now that I have fulfilled my personal and professional goals with the Forest Service, I am excited to take on this new challenge with Boone and Crockett and The University of Montana."

— THE UNIVERSITY OF MONTANA