Improving Our Image

Concern over how the public judges foresters appears often enough in the JOINAL to be a familiar item, the latest being Brian Keel’s letter (“Evolve to Survive”) in the July 1997 issue. I cannot pretend that my efforts here in upstate New York are regaining for us the confidence of the American public, but they can help, at least on a local level. What follows may give other foresters incentive to do likewise.

First, I am a forestland owner, not by inheritance but by preference, putting my savings where my chief interests lie. That gives me credibility with the public.

Second, with written permission but without payment, my 1,173 acres is open to the public for hunting, fishing, trapping, hiking, and riding.

Third, on the first Saturday of every May I give tree seedlings to whoever comes to get them, free of charge and in any quantity. The seedlings are white spruce, germinating in the understory moss of a 5-acre stand near my house. Local newspapers publicize the event, which has drawn as many as 150 people. Depending on the weather, 2,000 to 6,000 seedlings are given out each year.

Fourth, with the sponsorship of local organizations, I conduct woods walks to show the results of silvicultural work, some of which began 50 years ago. The 30 walks have drawn about 500 participants.

Fifth, I manage to write and get published about every six weeks a short article on a forestry issue or a matter of silvicultural interest. Various magazines and newspapers take what I write. Writing does not come easily to me, and I have to work hard to put what I want to say in a clear, readable form.

My activities are far from proving that we foresters can supply the United States and the world with the wood they need, but I believe what I do is useful and certainly not beyond any forester.

Henry Kernan
South Worcester, New York
(Continued on page 38)
(Continued from page 2)  
**Insufficient Focus**

I disagree with SAF President Harry Wiant Jr.'s COMMENTARY in the July *Journal of Forestry* that this is not the time to redefine our profession or the meaning of the title “forester.” He emphasizes the unique responsibilities foresters have for timber management. This is not wrong, just insufficient.

SAF should focus on the management of forest resources, all of them, including timber but not restricted to it. Most institutions offering an SAF-accredited degree also offer non-SAF-accredited degrees in disciplines that are part of forest resources management (fish and wildlife, recreation, watershed management, etc.). Wiant warns against accreditation approaches resulting in a de-emphasis of timber management. For those needing credentials as timber managers, he is right, but this is too narrow for many others.

Perhaps SAF should have more than one accredited forestry degree, including some in which course work in timber management is more limited. Such an approach could allow us to redefine “forester” in terms more accurate as to our future responsibilities.

The Critical Issues Forum at the 1997 SAF convention will focus on core values. The discussion will test our ability to accommodate the diversity of disciplines and core values relevant to the forest resources we manage. The outcome will determine whether we are indeed the society for the management of forest resources or only the timber management subdiscipline within it.

**Logan A. Norris**  
Corvallis, Oregon

**A Prerequisite to Practice**

Once again, Harry Wiant hit the nail on the head in his July COMMENTARY, “A Defining Moment.” In a previous column, Wiant proposed a national media campaign as a means for promoting scientific forest management and for elevating the image of foresters. Such an effort is long overdue but likely to miss the mark if serious reforms of forester credentials are not implemented.

I believe the forestry profession suffers most from a lack of clarity in regard to what a forester is. Everyone knows what C.P.A., M.D., and D.D.S. mean because the accounting, medical, and dental professions have standardized qualifications and have implemented rigorous examinations for members to earn and maintain their credentials. Why should foresters get any respect when we have not policed our ranks with rigorous board exams or lobbied and won the legislated exclusive right to dispense forest management? Until we act and look like the other professions, we will fail to be one.

Only pharmacists can dispense medications and only attorneys can render legal advice. It’s the law. SAF should lobby for passage of laws favorable to foresters. Endless discussions over environmental, gender, and other issues engage us intellectually but distract us from the real issue, the sorry state of our profession.

Medical doctors have hot debates about highly controversial issues, too, but they all agree that a license is a prerequisite to practice. If and when the SAF acts as a true professional organization that polices its ranks with exams and lobbies on behalf of its members, as the AMA does, I will enthusiastically renew my membership and donate my time and money.

**Todd E. Hepp**  
Norris, Tennessee

**Time to Redefine**

I’ve been following the LETTERS and COMMENTARY sections of the *Journal* in regard to the scope of forestry and the “core values.” Harry Wiant and Bill Barton are quite active in this arena and they’ve made some good points. They’re dedicated professionals and I’m pleased to have worked with them over the years.

I must also say that I disagree with them in significant ways because I think they view forestry and the forestry profession in a far too narrow sense, and in doing so they limit the profession and its potential for leadership and growth.

I agree with Wiant that the core values must include solid fundamentals in silviculture and timber management. But think about his quotation of Warren Doolittle’s remarks of 31 years ago: “…timber production is the one use of the land which is our undisputed responsibility. We manage forests for other uses too, but other groups and scientists usually claim primary responsibility for the disciplines representing these uses.”

That comment, taken from another era, confines today’s forestry profession to thinking of itself in timber management terms, not as forest resource managers. If foresters continue to think of themselves in those terms, they will remain timber managers—a niche role—and forests will be managed by other professionals who have a broader view and a broader set of technical and managerial skills.

I share Wiant’s concerns that the fundamentals of forestry have been compressed in many schools to make room for other, broader courses. It does result in a watered-down set of core skills, and that harms the profession, not just because it hurts timber management but because it detracts from other resources. One has only to note publications on the management of tropical forests for nontimber resources by Charles Peters, a forester at the New York Botanical Garden, to understand this. He uses exactly the same silvicultural principles, systems, and skills to manage for nontimber products in Indonesia that we use to manage company forests in the United States. These are core values for managing all forest resources.

The solution isn’t to retrench into timber management core values in the bachelor’s degree. Forestry wasn’t cast in stone a century ago by Gifford Pinchot; it is dynamic and has to grow and evolve. It’s time for us to think of forestry as forest resource management, in which timber management is one of several specialized roles. I advocate becoming not “another nebulous environmental interest group” but a grow-
ing professional body of broadly, solidly educated resource managers supported by highly educated specialists and well-trained technicians.

Aeronautical engineers didn't limit themselves to the core values of piston engines and winged flight. They evolved to put a robot on Mars. Nautical engineers didn't limit themselves to core values of sails and wooden ships. If we limit ourselves to the core values of yesterday, we will remain a small, niche player with an ever-diminishing role and outlook, inevitably working for others who are better educated and have a broader view of the whole forest. This is absolutely the time to redefine our profession, or the proud title "forester" will indeed lose its meaning and value.

R. Scott Wallinger
New York, New York

Reprint Wrangle

I would be curious to know how many other members feel that reprinting the June issue of the Journal of Forestry because of a couple of extremely minor errors was an overestimation of the importance of printed matter in our lives, as well as perhaps a waste of membership money that could have been so much better spent on some meaningful educational or other grant at the local level. To my knowledge, this is the second time such a reprint has happened in the last five years, each time prompted by very minor mistakes and each time costing thousands of dollars.

Cecilia Polansky
Essex Junction, Vermont

The Mass of the Center

The centrist position listens to proponents and opponents, decides what is believable and feasible, and then moves in that direction to enact change. There are not enough prophets to make a change; it takes the mass of the center to do that.

Those of the emotionally negative, extremist environmental community have narrow, selfish agendas. They have their counterparts, as well.

I support the public's right to share in defining natural resource values and to understand forest dynamics. The way to educate the public is to allow it to become fully involved at the local level. Public lands are now subject to this; private lands will not be far behind.

It's not so that science is out and passion is in. Passionate, reasoned exposition of the art and science of forestry is necessary. But a passionate exhortation to circle the wagons and wave the flag will excite only the true believers. It will repel some and may even frighten those of the public who bother to listen.

Standing in the way of change can be unpleasant, even dangerous. But every profession, every institution with which I am familiar today is undergoing the pangs of restructuring and regeneration. The forestry profession cannot and should not escape; it cannot return to the "good old days." As Fernand Brandel has written, "The present is largely the victim of a stubborn past bent on self destruction."

I will not close my eyes, ears, mind, and heart to the events of the past half century in my chosen profession. (Nor will I leave it!) Knowledge has grown, technology has multiplied, attitudes have matured, and society has evolved. The mass of the center has guided those changes and will continue to do so. These are chaotic times, but chaos theory teaches that "order always seeps toward chaos, but the ways of entropy can be passing subtle" (H.C. Von Baeyer). Perhaps our passing to a new order has not been so subtle. But subtle or solid, let's shape it, not shackles it.

Jim Wilkinson
Barre, Vermont

Paulownia

The trees prefer well drained, sandy loam type soils and direct sunlight.

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Rebecca Staebler replies:

I'd like to thank Cecilia Polansky and others who have responded to the reprint of the June issue of the Journal of Forestry. I am pleased that our readers are so forgiving of our mistakes and conscious of saving money! I'd like to clarify a couple of points that perhaps were not clear in the letter accompanying the reprint. First, this issue represented, through the Buyers Guide, a substantial amount of advertising revenue for the Journal. Such revenue is essential to SAF's operating budget; it enables us to provide quality programs and services without relying solely on membership dues. In reprinting this issue to ensure accurate information about our advertisers, we conveyed our appreciation for their continuing support. Second, the cost to SAF was minimal; the printing company with whom we contracted assumed full financial responsibility for the reprint (as they did in the earlier situation to which Polansky refers).