The Myth of the Omnipotent Forester

Martin Luckert’s essay on the “Myth of the Omnipotent Forester” (September 2006) deserves comment. First, foresters are either employed by timber firms as so-called industrial foresters or are employed in the government sector. Private forestry consulting firms are another category. Therefore, the marching orders, if you will, are determined by the employer.

Forestry is primarily managing forests to produce wood for societal needs, while aiming to maintain forest health and productivity. This statement is intended to boil it down to a basic definition, recognizing that many public ownerships have management that does not fit the traditional purpose of forestry. The USDA Forest Service, for example, is required to manage under congressional legislation that in some cases is far removed from regarding timber as the primary value. The Threatened and Endangered Species Act and Wilderness Areas are just two examples. These are the result of public demands, stemming from organized environmental groups. Foresters have little or no say in such legislation, although the SAF may testify one way or another. That influence pales compared to major environmental groups.

On the one hand we have the American propensity for exploitation of a new continent, which is ongoing; meaning making money or...