An OLD MODEL for Building Consensus and a NEW ROLE for Foresters

Managing conflict over forest resources remains one of the central challenges to the profession of forestry. What forester has not expressed frustration with the political gridlock that stymies public and private forest management? The tension between producing forest commodities and protecting forest amenities grows each year. The list is all too familiar—endangered species habitats, wetlands protection, private property rights, public takings, state and local regulations of forest practice—and leads predictably from appeals, litigation, polarization of communities, and avoidance of real issues to the frustration of foresters whose measure of success has always been getting something done "on the ground."

Yet there are many examples of conflict resolution. From the Applegate Partnership in Oregon and the range-land stewardship programs in the West (Floyd 1988) to the Mount Roan Balds project in North Carolina and Tennessee (Wondolleck and Yaffee 1994), forest resource managers and citizens with different interests have reached consensus and implemented workable management plans.

What explains the different outcomes? Are some groups just lucky? Or have the successful communities employed sophisticated new models of conflict resolution? Finding the answers may be the most important challenge we confront, since our continuing relevance as a profession may depend on our ability to understand the problems and apply appropriate solutions.

Forestry has integrated a broad array of disciplines and applied them to the forest as a system. But chemistry, physics, and biology may no longer be sufficient. For insight into the problems of forest conflict and a framework for understanding how people act collectively to achieve public goals, professional foresters now also need to know American political theory.

The Good of the Whole

Ask a broad sample of foresters, "What do you hope to achieve in your work?" and both the environmentalists and the utilitarians would likely agree on the common professional goals of conserving the forest and improving the human condition. Indeed, the mission of the Society of American Foresters is to advance the science, education, technology, and practice of forestry and to use our knowledge and conservation ethic to benefit society. However different our motivations, our ideologies, and our images of a better society, we work in forestry for similar reasons—probably not including handsome remuneration. The rewards of the forester are found in the stewardship of the resource and the betterment of society.
We suggest these goals are obtainable only through collective action. Individual liberty, freedom, and a healthy environment can be achieved only through a social contract that protects individuals and the common good through a system of obligations and privileges. As with the environmentalist and the utilitarian approaches to forestry, there are competing visions of what we seek in society, and different ways of reaching that common goal.

In our current system, the government serves as a referee between competing interest groups, establishing the rules of the debate and implementing the policies of the side that wins the arguments. When interest is pitted against interest, however, individual stakeholders—and even public interest groups—cease to look beyond their own concerns and consider the good of the whole. Today, the public good is seen as an addition of parts rather than as a guiding vision for the nation that transcends specific issues and seeks the betterment of all society. Lost is the idea that public-spirited citizens might seek a whole that is more than the sum of its parts (Ketcham 1995).

**Competing Visions**

Ideological tension about how to solve problems for the good of all citizens is nothing new. The framers of the US Constitution limited the authority of citizens by restricting voting rights and providing for indirect election of senators and the president (Cooper 1984). Our founders believed not in true democracy, with direct participation in decisionmaking, but in representative government, with power deriving from the people but exercised by men of principle and property. The masses were to consent to government by elected representatives in recognition of their abilities, talents, education, and stake in the preservation of liberty and order. In a time when other governments ad-
hered to the principle of hereditary monarchy and privileged nobility, this form of government was truly radical (Dye and Ziegler 1971).

Right away, disagreements surfaced. The Federalists believed in the autonomy of the individual, the natural goodness of humans, government with the consent of the governed, civil and political liberties, and protection from tyrannical authority; their economic theory was laissez-faire and free market. These so-called liberals (not to be confused with the modern use of the word liberal) promoted a government that would protect the freedom of individuals and require only limited individual responsibility in government. The Anti-Federalists, the so-called republicans, sought a government in which groups of citizens would meet and put aside their self-interests as they sought the good of the whole.

The Federalists, led by James Madison, wrote a constitution that sought to balance powerful factions or interest groups in their pursuit of influence (Kemmis 1990). The resulting system of checks and balances relies on the invisible hand of competing interest groups to define the public interest. In this vision of government, citizens are not engaged with each other in the task of discovering the common good; rather, they are motivated by their own self-interest.

"Ambition must be made to counteract ambition," Madison wrote. "The interest of the man must be connected with the constitutional right of the place. It is necessary, therefore, to 'divide' and arrange the several offices in such a manner as that each may check on the other—that the private interest of every individual may be a sentinel over the public rights" (Publius 1787, Federalist 51, p. 322) Individuals would pursue their private ends without engaging each other. The structure of government would balance those private ends, and the invisible hand of interest group competition would reveal the common good.

Madison's vision focuses on the rights of individuals as opposed to the responsibilities associated with those individual rights. For example, the Bill of Rights gives citizens the right to keep and bear arms but does not attach any responsibilities to gun ownership. Similarly, the Constitution and Bill of Rights establish the right to vote and assemble but do not require participation in self-governance. The rights of citizens are specified; the responsibilities are largely implied (Erzioni 1993).

Informally, citizens may reach consensus through a classical republican approach, but official legislative action can emerge only from a liberal process in which competing interests fight it out.

Most foresters will recognize the Federalist approach to public decision-making as the one used in our state legislatures and the US Congress. In this structure, forest policy is determined by the interaction of competing interest groups, including environmental organizations, forest industries, and professional associations. Each considers its interest the best interest for society, and the result is often polarization and seemingly intractable disagreements.

Reconsidering Republicanism

Contrast the Federalist approach with classical republican ideology. In republicanism (not to be confused with the modern Republican party), citizens participate in public life, rise above their private concerns, and enter a "public spirited exchange about the common good. Once found, the public interest disciplines their private pursuits" (Farber and Frickey 1991, p. 37).

Most of the success stories in community decisionmaking involve republicanism. "The republican ideology rested squarely upon this face to face, hands on approach to problem solving, with its implicit belief that people could rise above their particular interests to pursue the common good" (Kemmis 1990, p. 11). The last decade has seen many efforts to use such a model to resolve forest management conflicts; the Seventh American Forest Congress and the Northern Forest Lands Council are among the groups that have worked to create a common vision. This republican model raises some important questions, however.

How do informal citizens' groups intersect with formal legislative processes? Informally, citizens may reach consensus through a classical republican approach, but official legislative action can emerge only from a liberal process in which competing interests fight it out. In the Northeast, the Northern Forest Lands Study illustrates the point. Despite significant disagreements among the participants in the study, the 1994 report reflected broad regional agreement for the northern forests of New England and New York, largely because the project was advisory. No resources were reallocated, no laws were changed, and no additional land was acquired by federal, state, or local government. When the Northern Forest recommendations reach the state or federal legislatures, however, the debate will likely resemble the rancorous forest controversies of the past. If we promote local or regional republican approaches that create common visions and expect them to make a difference, foresters and other participants must be prepared to see the process through the formal legislative bodies that retain the authority to make and enforce policy decisions.

Does the time-consuming process of local decisionmaking limit its applicability? The underlying assumption of republicanism is that educated, thoughtful citizens will invest the time neces-

10 January 1997
sary to solve complex social and ecological questions, but there are limits to participation. Families now often have either two working parents or a single working parent, and the middle class, which traditionally has provided most of the educated, concerned citizens who participate in forest-related decisionmaking, is shrinking. There are fewer volunteers with time to discuss natural resources. If relatively few citizens participate, of course, the discussions will be dominated by an interested minority.

Scale is a related issue. Because ecosystems are difficult to define, it will be no easy task to identify the appropriate participants who should determine the common good.

Do local interests coincide with broad regional or national interests? Local interests may differ from statewide or national conceptions of the common good. Two hypothetical examples illustrate the point. What if the citizens of the Catskills (which serves as New York City's watershed), after thoughtful deliberation, decide that improving water quality beyond current levels is not in their best interest? What if an Adirondack roundtable decides not to limit development within the Adirondack Park through a state-mandated regional planning authority? In such cases the "public interest" could only be defined as the sum of all the decisions undertaken by local interests instead of the sum of decisions approved by elected legislatures.

Finally, is the role of the professional forester different in a republican setting? The use of republican processes has implications for foresters. Professional forestry in the United States is closely associated with the Progressive political movement of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The Progressives' conservation goals placed professional foresters in the public sector, isolated them from politics, and sought to make science the guiding principle for managing forest resources. The exaltation of scientific expertise tended to minimize citizens' role in forest decisionmaking. To achieve progress and economic growth through forestry (Wellman and Tipple 1990; Hays 1959), the Progressives relied instead on an emerging class of technocrats.

As Cooper (1984) explains, identifying professionalism in public administration with technical expertise and efficiency "tends to substitute a market with consumers for a polity [government based on active citizenship] of citizens." Although this may be an appropriate way of dealing with the requests of the American people, it omits one fundamental element of the democratic equation: the consumers are not considered partners in decisionmaking. As citizens, however, we all have responsibilities in self-government. The consumerization of citizens, whereby citizens demand services from the government but do not take an active role in their government, leads to loss of responsibility for self-government and commitment to the common good. It is critical that citizens share in determining the operations of government, not merely reap the benefits and complain about the failings, all the while not participating in the process itself.

New Roles in Republicanism

Many authors have criticized the liberal approach of professional foresters, "armed with specialized training and backed by agency mandates, [assuming] control in order to provide efficient, economical, and effective management" (Wellman and Tipple 1990, p. 76). A republican ideological approach, on the other hand, would suggest that forestry professionals share knowledge with citizens and represent the broad public interest—that they become a voice for those who cannot be at the table as well as for the resource itself.

Ketcham (1995) criticizes the modern liberal state:

Even in its most inclusive, social justice seeking forms, the modern liberal state has derived its energy from the needs and pressures of various groups and has formed its programs with their specific demands. The effect has been to turn American politics and public life into an arena of competing groups which alternatively praise federal action on their behalf (and thus support government for its support of them), or condemn government at first partially for its neglect of their special concerns, and then totally for its malfeasance, corruption, or bias. In any case a rich mature strong sense of the role and potential benevolence of public life and government remains undeveloped (p. 8).

His prescription for a more republican form of government requires

...not only democracy (government according to the consent of the governed) and protection of rights, but also a richer, more participatory concept of citizenship (in the mode of Thomas Jefferson, John Dewey, or other theorists of self-government), a less adversarial, patchwork way of making decisions, and styles of leadership founded less on refereeing and managing factions and more on conceiving and seeking the common good (p. 26).

Citizens would be responsible for making decisions together and finding the common good among varied interests. Reestablishing their responsibility for decisionmaking could prevent some of the disputes that follow decisions about natural resources and give foresters the opportunity to be not just conservation leaders but leaders of democracy as well.

Natural resource decisionmaking must reflect the desires of the stakeholders. Just as the individual landowner is responsible for communicating goals to a consulting forester preparing a management plan for a parcel of private forest, the citizen owners of the land must communicate to public resource managers their goals for public land management. Civic discourse is at the heart of representative democracy, and facilitating it is forestry's new responsibility.

If republican processes are to become more widely used in developing a common vision of our forests, our professional standards for accreditation and certification must reflect those skills in addition to our scientific and technical expertise. We fear
that most foresters are not well prepared to meet these challenges. An important role for the Society of American Foresters will therefore be examining the implications of republicanism for forestry and offering opportunities for our members to improve their consensus-building skills and increase their understanding of public policymaking.

Literature Cited

ABOUT THE AUTHORS
Michael T. Goergen is congressional affairs liaison, Society of American Foresters, 5400 Grosvenor Lane, Bethesda, MD 20814-2196, and at the time the article was written and reviewed, was a graduate student in the College of Environmental Science and Forestry, State University of New York—Syracuse; Donald W. Floyd is associate professor of forestry, College of Environmental Science and Forestry, State University of New York—Syracuse; Peter G. Ashton is policy analyst, USDA Forest Service, Washington, DC.