COMMENTARY

Making a Living by It?

Terry Clark

Scientist and writer Johann Wolfgang von Goethe is reputed to have said, “Thus I saw that most men only care for science so far as they get a living by it . . . ,” and I suppose, to some extent, this is true. But it may be more important for all of us to understand that we “get a living by it” everyday.

Although the Society of American Foresters’ mission is “to advance the science, education, technology, and practice of forestry,” the vast majority of our members are directly involved in advancing the practice of forestry. Scientists and educators together constitute less than 10% of our membership. Yet the science of forestry is inseparable from the art and practice of forestry and is no less demanding.

It’s this 10% of our members who are on the leading edge of forestry research, making new discoveries and moving our profession forward. Many times, the basic research hardly seems cutting edge and may well appear to be too narrowly focused to ever be of practical value, but I think we need to keep in mind that is how discoveries are made. Even when innovation appears to be the result of pure luck, the work behind it generated enough awareness to know that this is something important.

The Forest Science and Technology Board holds the Science Fund Photo Contest at the Convention each year to help bring attention to the contributions of SAF’s forest scientists to the practice of forestry and how our practitioners and educators put their discoveries to use. There were two grand prize–winning photos from the 2009 Science Fund photo contest held at this year’s SAF National Convention in Orlando, Florida. This month’s Journal of Forestry cover features the winning photo submitted by Kurt Gottschalk of the US Forest Service’s Northern Research Station. The photo is titled “Fruiting Bodies of Ganoderma tsugae,” also known as Hemlock varnish shelf, on a downed eastern hemlock, Tsuga canadensis.

My introduction to Kurt was not through his prize-winning photos but through the practical application of his studies of the dynamics of gypsy moth populations and using silviculture to minimize gypsy moth impacts. Kurt and his team continue their research to provide methods for creating and maintaining healthy, sustainable oak-dominated forests based on a more complete understanding of ecological relationships, landscape ecology principles, silvicultural management, and gypsy moth population dynamics, to incorporate this knowledge into management guidelines and decision support systems, and to use his years of experience to tackle the hemlock woolly adelgid.

The Science Fund was created in 2006 to supplement the Foresters’ Fund. While the Foresters’ Fund helps SAF units promote education to enhance public understanding of the role of professional foresters in forest resource management, conduct forest policy activities, and strengthen state societies, divisions, and chapters, the Science Fund is intended to help working groups conduct and support forestry research, continuing education activities and the transfer of knowledge, and to promote collaboration and relationships with other SAF units and external groups.

The Science Fund has been growing slowly since its inception, but with the generous matching contribution by the Inventory Working Group the fund will soon be over $20,000. Although this is not enough to provide grants, it does provide the opportunity to provide loans for meetings and other projects that will generate their own revenue once they get off the ground.

Think about supporting the Science Fund and enjoy taking part in the Science Fund Photo Contest. Like Kurt, your photo may end up on the cover of the Journal of Forestry and the center of an SAF calendar.

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LETTERS

A Call for Collegiality

A letter in the October/November Journal from Travis Idol commenting on Timothy Lafarge’s review of “The Bridge at the Edge of the World” by James Speth is headed “A Basingly Useless Book Review.”* That heading is extremely inappropriate. SAF members who believe that human-caused emissions of CO₂ are a major cause of global warming (rather than natural causes such as solar activity) or who believe that capitalism is the source of much evil are entitled to their opinions. But they should not attempt to denigrate other SAF members who do not agree with them. The forestry profession in general, and the Society of American Foresters in particular, show commendable collegiality when exchanging opinions with fellow professionals. It would be unfortunate if we were to abandon that collegiality.

William McKillop
Berkeley, CA

*Note: The phrase “basically useless” in that heading quotes from the text of Dr. Idol’s letter and does not reflect the opinion of the Journal of Forestry, its editors and staff, or the Society of American Foresters.

Minority Viewpoint?

What follows is my reply to the letter by Travis Idol in the October/November issue of the Journal of Forestry, in which Dr. Idol lamented my contrarian review of Dean James Gustave Speth’s book The Bridge at the Edge of the World.

Dr. Idol’s principal dispute with my position is that my claim is at odds with the argument by many that climate change is “being caused by increased greenhouse gas