SAF: A Catalyst for Change

Marvin D. Brown

It truly is a very great honor for me to serve as the President of SAF for the coming year. I already have had the opportunity to attend and address many local chapters and hope that this will expand to all parts of the country before my term ends.

A number of folks at these early meetings indicated that they really want to see SAF play a strong role in policy leadership, and it took only a short time for me to realize that our Washington, DC staff is being highly successful at carrying out that desire. We engage in virtually every significant forest policy discussion on Capital Hill, bringing some of the most credible experts in the country to the debate.

My single most important goal during my tenure is to build on that success and move us toward the next level of policy engagement. At that next level we don’t just play a role as knowledgeable brokers of honest, relevant information, but we begin to be respected as catalysts for needed change.

As a forestry resource professional, I look around everyday and see the need to more effectively promote sustainable forest management in the United States. I believe that sustainable forest management is about meeting the forest-related needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. And I believe that to have sustainable forest management the economic, environmental, and social values of forests must be mutually supportive.

Unfortunately, we can point to instances all over the country where this vision of sustainable forest management is not being realized. The declining health of federal lands, the fragmentation of private lands, the loss of forest industry infrastructure, the substantial increases in wood imports despite harvesting far less than we grow in the US, along with many other signs I am sure you could identify lead me to believe there are compelling reasons for change in US forest policy.

Rather than waiting and reacting, I strongly believe we should be leading. We should be making the case for change and crafting the solutions. We should understand that this will be viewed as a threat to the status quo, but it is the environment in which leaders regularly operate. It is our responsibility to understand what it takes to ensure sustainable forest management and lead in the creation of public policy and private practice that will promote sustainable forest management. In the coming year, I hope I can help SAF move further in that direction.

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More on Mission Possible

To further press the point made by Malcolm R. Dick Jr. in the July/Aug. issue of the Journal of Forestry—Gifford Pinchot said, “I hold it the first duty of a public officer to obey the law. But I hold it to be his second duty, and a close second, to do everything the law will let him do for the public good, and not merely what the law compels or directs him to do.” In my opinion, a lot of the current stalemate in national forest management is a result of the Forest Service being very good at the former, but a miserable failure at the latter.

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Reorganization

Reorganization as a method of solving problems (“When an Agency Outlasts Its Time: A Reflection” by Sally K. Fairfax, July/Aug. issue) has been around for quite some time:

“We trained hard but it seemed that every time we were beginning to form up we would be reorganized. I was to learn later in life that we tend to meet any new situation by reorganizing, and a wonderful method it can be for creating the illusion of progress, while producing confusion, inefficiency, and demoralization.”—Petronius Arbiter, 60 AD

“Warriorlike uniforms” in the Forest Service? Wow! I wonder what the problem is, and how that ties in to reorganization?

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