

PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS — CONFLICT IN LAND USE

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A new religion has captured the attention of the news media over the past few years. Public concern for the environment has nurtured a "back to nature" movement wherein everything that is natural and untended is to be preferred to anything that is cultivated, or tended. Managed forests fall into the latter category. Unfortunately, the public, primarily products of an urban environment they increasingly gravitate towards but profess to abhor, fail to understand what forestry as a major user of our land resources entails.

The Gurus of the new environmental cult are mostly sophisticated and articulate, often titled Doctor or Professor, whether it be of Divinity or microbiology doesn't seem to matter. The media uncritically accept the pronouncements of these eminent gentlemen as divine grist to their sensation-making mill. It is, however, certainly disturbing that a small element of the scientists of this country take the opportunity to jump on the preservation bandwagon. They have either not been involved in, or gloss over, the difficulties in making decisions on land use for the present and future wellbeing of all our people.

The catch-cries of the zealots of the new cult, when applied to forestry, often portray a limited knowledge. Two terms frequently aired are "biological deserts" and "dangerous monocultures". The "biological desert" tag, often applied to our exotic plantations, infers that these forests are inferior to native forests as biological systems. Arrant nonsense! The forests as they stand today are complete ecosystems with a rich and unique diversity of flora and fauna. Surely it matters little whether the introduction of a particular species or combination of species to this country was by Californian miners, Polynesian navigators, migratory birds or accidents of continental drift. All were introduced — that is, exotic — in one era or another.

"Monoculture", used in a derogatory sense, connotes inferiority. The only way this world can support its wildly escalating population is by the selective breeding and intense cultivation of various monocultures. To name some of the most important: for food — rice, wheat and sugar cane; for clothing — cotton; for fuel and shelter — pine in temperate climates, teak in the tropics and eucalypts in the arid zones. The only practical way in which these species can be tended

economically, particularly in developed societies, is by manipulating the crop so that it may be cultivated, harvested, and processed by simplified mechanized or automated means. This virtually demands monocultures which are themselves highly developed ecological sciences.

Nevertheless, the concern of responsible and well-informed members of the public over aspects of forest management cannot be lightly brushed aside. Some practices bear critical examination. Basically the public is concerned about the following:

- (1) Removal or destruction of scenic or historical landmarks;
- (2) The evidence of careless and wasteful practice in our forests;
- (3) The gradual replacement of the native with the exotic;

Also people are uneasy that:

- (4) The possibility of flight from the cities and reality to an undiminished *primaeva* refuge may be diminishing; and
- (5) Any change in the landscape may destroy a value that cannot be quantified or may even be unknown at the present time.

Let's look at the forest industry and our profession and see if we can improve its practice and its image.

Forest industry is blameworthy on some counts primarily because it often disregards the long-term view.

(1) The accounting mentality dominates many companies who condone the poor forestry practice which may best meet the criteria of this year's balance sheet. The public's concern at present is centred almost entirely on indigenous forest and it is here that the immediate improvement in practice is required. Nevertheless, concern will eventually extend to exotic forests and industry must be prepared.

(2) Industry has to date made little effort to utilize minor species in indigenous forests, smaller piece sizes, deadwood and bark and has contributed significantly to visible waste both in the forests and by urban pollution. Luckily in the past year or two the situation shows evidence of rapid change and a viable beech forest industry can and should be based on complete utilization.

(3) Often a myopic urgency to produce wood has excluded concern for soil and water values, fisheries or landscapes. Most often poor road construction techniques are the prime offender. Limited attempts to minimize erosion during construction, lack of maintenance and a failure to leave behind a stable formation are unfortunately still common.

(4) Industry has made little effort to publicize the positive aspects of forest management — major conversion of waste lands to forest, the stabilization of natural erosion, the rehabilitation of deteriorating farmland, and the contribution to prosperity in significant areas like the Bay of Plenty and Nelson.

The forestry profession has contributed little to better public understanding.

(1) There has been limited effort by the profession to communicate with the public at large. The Forest Research Institute, for instance, has a world standing and many eminent and capable people. To the best of my knowledge the number of exposures to the popular news media, outside of the trade and scientific publications, throughout the country in a month could be counted on the fingers of one hand. Some scientists appear unable to communicate with anybody who hasn't copious time to study their highly technical papers or isn't a Ph.D. To many of the people of this country the FRI is a faceless ivory tower in a remote township. Management foresters are, if anything, worse and the rare times they are reported it is almost always in a defensive posture.

(2) The level of operational and professional forest management in the field in New Zealand is such that its effectiveness is the envy of informed overseas critics. But many foresters and rangers devote little time or patience to explain to the public or go out of their way to discuss practice with critical groups or visitors. In their concentration on technical criteria they sometimes devote inadequate attention to aesthetic values. Also unfortunately the bulldozer driver who can have a more spectacular impact on the environment than anyone else is often left to use his own initiative. He may conceive a different end result as being the most desirable, his tendency being to measure his ability by moving the most earth in the least time.

(3) The forestry profession's involvement in the education processes of the community are minimal. Most people, if given any type of word association game would, if they are older, collate forestry with unemployment, prison labour, planting trees; if they are younger the association may be cutting trees down, devastation, smoke pollution. To eradicate these associations requires patient work. Undoubtedly effort in the schools would be the most productive, and would have greatest advantage in the long run. We should encourage tours, and seek opportunity to speak particularly to teachers and senior students.

Foresters should be the prophets of conservation, balancing man's material and environmental needs through rational exploitation. Their history both in Europe and this country entitles them to claim competence in conservation. They should avoid swinging too far to the environmental/emotional angle at the expense of the supply angle of forestry. I suspect that this is happening in the "politically" sensitive areas of decision-making — where foresters may be "soft pedalling" their achievements in production and "back pedalling" on principles such as the productive use facet of the multiple use principle in Forest Parks.

What is not generally recognized by the public and must be clearly stated by the profession is that wood virtually alone of all the major resources of the world is renewable. It is

furthermore an eminently manageable resource which can be processed with less pollution and relatively low energy requirements compared with most other materials. Wood products are very suitable for recycling and are biodegradable. In New Zealand's case a factor that dictates the emphasis in forest management is that it has been conclusively proven that exotics have the capacity to grow ten times or more faster than native forests, thus to contribute to the support of our nation the major investment must be concentrated on these species. With regard to the population's just requirements for recreation, the possibility for continued enjoyment of the forest environment depends on the economic health of our industrialized society. New Zealand's prosperity depends on the management of its land-based resources and a vital part of the essential diversification and indeed decentralization is a major effort in industrial forestry.