

THE CHALLENGE OF FOREST MANAGEMENT IN THE 1990s AND BEYOND

KEYNOTE ADDRESS

Brian Boyle
Commissioner of Public Lands
State of Washington

As scientists and foresters, the first question you should ask is, "What is this guy doing here?" Why do we have an elected official, a politician, managing Washington's Department of Natural Resources and the 2.1 million acres of state-owned forest lands? Managing the DNR is no trivial task. The department is a public agency charged with making money off state lands, among other things. Some of the forest lands are held in trust for school or university financing, so there is a specific obligation here to practice profitable forestry so as to produce trust income, and not just this year, but indefinitely. This is a complex technical field—why isn't an expert in charge?

The reason why—and what I want to talk to you about today—is that resource issues are at the core *political* and not *analytical*. I'm not belittling analysis—obviously we need all the smart ideas we can get and, in fact, the daily work of DNR is based largely on advice from the technical and scientific communities. But we keep the experts on tap, not on top.

This is because resource issues are not soluble except by agreement between contending parties, and that doesn't happen by getting the parties to read a research report. We don't use computers to pick the ideal spouse, and you probably wouldn't marry the person picked for you, even if data showed that all marriages so arranged were happy. We all understand that in real life there are limits to analysis. And governments especially must not forget this.

It's like the story of the dog food company president who wanted to create the ideal dog food. He assembled the best marketing people, chefs, and animal psychologists he could find, used the best ingredients, everything technology could provide. Finally, he called a big meeting in the board room and plates of the stuff were passed out to the board of directors and the management. Everybody tasted the new dog food and agreed that it was delicious.

So they marketed it with a huge advertising campaign and waited for the money to roll in. Six months later, the marketing director reports: sales are dismal, nobody's buying it. "Why not?" asked the president. We did everything right—the best ingredients, chefs, market research—we even tasted it, and it was great. So why aren't people buying it!"

The marketing director said: "That's all true, sir, we should be doing great. And there's only one problem: the dogs won't eat it."

How many brilliant schemes of government—well-thought-out, technically correct, applauded by all professionals—have failed of execution because of a wave of public rejection! Governments have tried to forestall such disasters by erecting an elaborate system of formal public involvement in

administrative decisions. There are statutes and rules that say government decision can't be arbitrary or capricious, that government agencies have to publish their intentions and allow ample time for public comment. And, if members of the public still don't like what the government does, they can take it to court.

This system of administrative redress was designed to control a bureaucracy that in recent decades has become ever more involved in the lives of citizens. But a system designed to prevent a bureaucracy from becoming unduly repressive is not very good at getting things done or at promoting agreement among contending parties who differ on issues of public policy. Since differences about public policy are at the heart of resource issues, it follows that actually *solving* such problems requires something beyond the ordinary administrative process.

Over the past eight years, the Department of Natural Resources has been involved in a set of public processes that collectively represent that alternative problem-solving tool. I'd like to tell you about four of these now, and try to draw some lessons from them both about the way I believe resource decisions are going to be made in the future, and, incidentally, about the evolution of democratic institutions.

The four processes I want to talk about are:

- the Timber/Fish/Wildlife Agreement.
- the Tiger Mountain Plan.
- the Commission on Old Growth Alternatives.
- and the currently ongoing Sustainable Forestry Roundtable.

Let me outline for you how these all work.

Timber/Fish/Wildlife arose out of the growing understanding that what forest landowners did on their land had impacts on other stakeholders in the forest ecosystem. Certain cutting practices, for example, may harm streams and the fish that live in them. Because of this, the tribes and environmentalists had gotten into the habit of routinely objecting to harvesting permits they thought were not protective enough of water quality. An enormous amount of administrative time was taken up in essentially sterile debates about such issues as whether 25 feet or 50 feet was an adequate buffer zone around a stream.

What the TFW Agreement did to resolve this situation was to set up a way of examining proposed cuts on an individual basis, using teams made up of representatives of the important stakeholders. To return to the example, it's a way of reaching the kind of accommodation that says not only that the riparian protection zone *doesn't* necessarily have to go to 50 feet in some areas, but that it *does* have to go to 250 feet in others that might be unusually sensitive.

Under TFW rules, the timber industry enjoys the advantage of cutting without having to fear that every cut will be blocked administratively or in court, and the environmentalists and the tribes get serious attention paid to their concerns. It's a labor-intensive process, but most participants continue to believe that it's well worth the effort.

At Tiger Mountain the same principles were applied to a different sort of issue—the fate of a particular and critical area. Tiger Mountain lies just southeast of Seattle, and in 1981 consisted of 13,500 acres of patchwork ownership, representing most of the large timber companies as well as DNR. The area was heavily used for outdoor recreation and all the forest landowners were anxious to cut their timber before environmental interests caught on to what was happening and made them stop.

What struck me was that we could not manage on Tiger and similar areas if we engaged in a who-cuts-first competition with private landowners. Somebody was going to be left holding the bag, and because public agencies can't act as quickly as private firms, and because public agencies are generally more responsive to public pressure, I judged that it was going to be DNR.

The idea for the Tiger Mountain plan was hatched, as so many great ideas are, in a saloon—to be exact, the Rolling Log Tavern in Issaquah, over a beer with the conservationist and outdoor writer Harvey Manning. The vision we had then was that we would move boldly and do a land exchange with the private companies, so as to acquire the majority of the land on Tiger Mountain. Then, once public attention was focused on us as the significant landowner, we would engage in public committee process, that would bring together all the people who used, or were concerned about, Tiger Mountain. Out of this process would come a consensus management plan for the area.

And that's what we did. The process gave something to nearly every stakeholder—hikers, environmentalists, neighboring homeowners, horse enthusiasts, rock climbers, even hanggliders. On the timber side, the Tiger Mountain Plan calls for smaller harvest units, an emphasis on education and interpretation, innovative harvesting and plantation techniques, and a sustainable yield calculation based on individual watersheds.

It works too. We got a hundred percent overbid on two recent timber sales on Tiger, which yielded over a million dollars to various school trusts. Harvey Manning calls it "the forestry of the future."

We did a very similar thing on a vastly larger scale on the Olympic Peninsula, an extension of the concept of involving citizen groups in government decision-making. In 1988, I chartered the Commission on Old Growth Alternatives for Washington's Forest Trust Lands to advise us on the management of the old growth resources on state-owned trust lands on the Olympic Peninsula. The commission consisted of 33 knowledgeable citizens drawn from conservation and wildlife interests, the timber industry, the peninsula communities, Indian tribes, and trust beneficiaries (such as the schools), as well as legislative leaders and experts in economics, forestry and the law.

Formally, it was chartered to make recommendations that would provide three things: reasonable revenue flows to school trusts that depend on the income; ecological diversity and the

availability of wildlife habitat, especially for rare or endangered species; and an adequate flow of timber from these lands to local industry.

The commission was not a decision-making group, nor was it strictly speaking a forum for negotiation, nor was it in a hurry. The point of the commission was to allow a group of concerned people to absorb a considerable quantity of information, to discuss that information in a non-adversarial setting, and to develop *original solutions* outside the usual polarities.

The Commission on Old Growth Alternatives met for nine months, the first four months of which were devoted to taking in information from technical experts. As a result of this information, the commission reached a remarkable and unprecedented consensus on a set of recommendations that included the following:

- the creation of a 260,000-acre experimental forest on Olympic Peninsula state trust land to explore techniques for producing a level of timber harvest comparable to contemporary practices while retaining many of the ecological values typical of old growth forests;
- the creation of an independent sustained yield unit for the entire experimental forest to stabilize the timber supply for the local economy, provide income for trust beneficiaries, and slow the loss of old growth habitat;
- the deferral from cutting for 15 years of 15,000 acres of old growth timber identified by biologists as critical to spotted owls. This will allow for additional research into ways of simultaneously extracting valuable timber and preserving wildlife habitat;
- and finally, that the state purchase from the trust up to 3,000 acres of lands having unique natural features justifying permanent protection.

The work of the Old Growth Commission shows that when concerned citizens take the time to master an issue, when they are able to conduct their deliberations outside the courts or the political fishbowl, they can learn to speak a common language and come up with creative solutions for problems that appeared to be frozen in a perpetual contention between narrow interests.

The last process initiative I want to mention is still going on: the Sustainable Forestry Roundtable. I organized this group last November, in concert with the Forest Practices Board and the Timber/Fish/Wildlife Policy Group.

The 40-member panel, which includes representatives of state and county governments, large and small forest landowners, environmental groups, Indian tribes, and developers, has as its goal designing a set of incentives and sanctions that will encourage landowners both large and small to keep managing forests as forests, rather than converting them to other uses. This will necessarily involve changes in forestry practice near the urban fringe, but we think, on the basis of our own experience, on Tiger Mountain and at Capital Forest near Olympia, that this is economically and technically possible.

I believe that seeking common ground in this fashion, through an open public process, is a better way to approach these problems than chasing them through the twists of bureaucracy. These problems won't be solved by a small group of experts

drawing lines on the map. We need a public process that is early, broad-based, and continuing, a process that will, in a sense, civilize forestry.

I should mention here that all this talking with citizens is starting to change the basic orientation of the Department of Natural Resources. We have been told over and over that besides running a forestry program and making money for trust beneficiaries, the people expect us to watch out for the landscape of the State of Washington.

Thus, in addition to the innovations that arose directly from these public processes, we have worked for the authorization of over \$70 million to buy especially valuable trust lands for preservation. Also, because we believe that the kind of management we practice on the public lands is good for the state, I have asked this legislature to authorize the department to spend up to \$20 million a year to buy more of it—about 10,000 acres of productive forest lands a year.

Now in all of these initiatives we can make out a few general themes or principles. First, the core of this method is a professionally facilitated process that involves all significant stakeholders in the outcome of the process. Stakeholders may include people who are not generally recognized as having legal standing or expertise, but who may represent significant interests. For example, we had a grocer from Forks on the Old Growth Commission. Obviously, he was someone whose future was going to be affected by decisions about the timber industry, and for that reason we thought he should be included.

Second, all participants have to agree to work out their differences within the structure provided. We found that people will really do that, and will not get into the typical war of press releases and TV sound bites, if they have confidence in the basic fairness of the proceedings.

Third, this kind of process does not rest on the expertise of panel members. Rather, the citizens on the panel solicit the information they require from experts available in the community. In practice, this gets the process away from the well-worn bureaucratic or expert positions, and opens the door to creative solutions.

And this is the most remarkable thing about such processes when they are successful—their ability to come up with wise solutions that no one ever thought of before. It's as if simple empowerment, and a fair hearing of their legitimate concerns, unleashes strong forces of creativity in people from all walks of life.

Where does this leave the expert and all the analytic tools on which modern decisions are supposedly based? Let me tell you a story about that. When I was in county government, there was crusty old county commissioner on the board with me, and one day a staff analyst was trying to get us to buy a new computer system that would give us all kinds of good information about finances and labor costs, and predict the future and so on, and the old commissioner wasn't having any of it. This young man got more and more insistent, and finally he made his big mistake. He said, "Commissioner, you *need* this system to make decisions." And the Commissioner looked at him with a cold eye and said something I've remembered ever since. He said, "Sonny, I don't *need* anything but 51% of the vote."

You could draw a number of morals from this, some of them not very pretty, but what I like to bring away from it is the sense that in a democracy public decisions are ultimately the responsibility of the public and its representatives. Obviously, the public can make mistakes, and mistakes are made, and people suffer for it, but over the long run, that process of trial and error, of slow civic education, is what distinguishes democracies from nations where decisions are made by a small group of all-knowing experts.

It's also what gives democratic societies their enduring strength, and their capacity for renewal. In the processes I've just described, we've tried to accelerate that process of civic education around a narrow set of issues. In doing so, I think we've created the basis for a new sort of *democratic* institution and gone some way towards solving what I believe will be one of the great problems of the coming decades: how to keep democratic institutions working in the midst of massive technology-driven changes, where our understanding of what those changes mean is in the hands of a relatively few people, people like yourselves.

In this situation, we have to be careful that our scientific expertise is matched with what we might call *democratic* expertise. Every citizen is the world's foremost authority on his or her own life. Governments ought not to decide on issues that affect those lives without engaging in some direct process that will involve the people affected.

Author

Brian Boyle
Commissioner of Public Lands
Department of Natural Resources
Public Lands Building
Olympia, WA 98504