

KEYNOTE ADDRESS

IMPLEMENTATION OF ECOSYSTEM MANAGEMENT

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I would like to welcome all of you this morning. I appreciate your interest in this subject and hope it is worthwhile for each of you. As Washington State University President Smith said, the symposium is really an important forum for continuing the dialogue on ecosystem management. The reason you are all here is our very important national forests and other natural resources. These are incredibly complex systems that we are dealing with. Some of the problems we are trying to solve today indicate that the systems themselves are more complex than we are able to understand. But I believe that with open dialogue and working together, we can come to better solutions. We can meet our objectives. We can meet the legal direction that the U. S. Forest Service (USFS) has and if the American people decide it needs to be changed, it can be changed. That is the way Congress operates; it is a reactive body.

Some of the systems that we are dealing with are complex and dynamic enough that our legislative system has not had an opportunity to refine and rechart our legal course. We went through a period of years, in the late 1960s and 1970s, where there was an awful lot of legislation relating to natural resources. As we look at it today, some of that legislation is in conflict with each other. It is only through symposiums and similar events that we will be able to develop a strong base, go back to our elected leaders and begin to see some legislative adjustments made.

I want to explain to those who weren't here last night that Chief Jack Ward Thomas was supposed to be giving this presentation. He is ill with a very serious sinus infection. He was sick all last week. As I told the group last night, we were at our House Appropriation Hearings last Thursday and he really felt bad. I know that he wanted to be here. He told me Thursday evening that he was looking forward to the opportunity to be out here. He saw this symposium as really critical. I have a presentation he was going to give and I will try to deliver it. I can't deliver it with the authority or the feeling that Chief Thomas would give it, but I want to give you the words and the message that he had. Then I will be happy to answer your questions.

My presentation this morning is on ecosystem management. Ecosystem management means using an ecological approach to achieve the management of national forests and grasslands and blending the needs of people and environmental values in a way that national forests and grasslands represent diverse, healthy, productive and sustainable ecosystems. It is a holistic approach to natural resource management; moving beyond the compartmentalized approach, focusing on the individual parts of the forests. It is an approach that steps back from the forest stand and focuses on the forest landscape and its position in the larger

environment in order to integrate human, biological and physical dimensions of natural resource management. Its purpose is to achieve sustainability of all resources.

We in the USFS are looking at several areas where we will need to change our current policies to implement ecosystem management. There may be areas where changes in our existing statutory framework would be desirable. We do know that we will need to change our regulations to streamline our land management planning process and base it on ecosystem management principles. We plan to submit these proposed changes in the summer of 1994. The USFS will require that all processes and activities will involve the public and other cooperators throughout the implementation of ecosystem management. The Federal Advisory Council Act (FACA) of 1972 poses a challenge in developing this full public participation. We have asked our Office of General Council to assist us in complying with FACA and still conduct extensive public participation.

The USFS faces major challenges similar to other federal agencies with declining budgets and staff. The development of techniques to support ecosystem management and agency-wide implementation requires significant adjustments in the central information, analytical tools, planning processes, field actions and monitoring activities. This necessitates adjustments in workforce skills and institutional processes. Based on the Forest Service Reinvention Team's report, and continuing evaluation of ecosystem management skill needs, the USFS will address staffing adjustments by retraining some existing employees and emphasizing ecosystem management skills in the hiring of new employees. Presently, we are sharing critical skills between USFS units and by assignment from other agencies and organizations.

The USFS intends to play a leadership role in fully developing an ecosystem management approach for managing resource values and human interactions. This role will be a highly collaborative one with other agencies, organizations, universities and interest groups. The short-term future is one of continued development of essential tools and techniques to support ecosystem management. The agency has been deeply involved in pilot projects and experimentation for several years and is shifting towards consolidating the best available understanding from these efforts and building a consistent agency-wide approach. There is a continuing focus on developing or accumulating the latest and best available knowledge about resource values and human interactions. The USFS is moving ahead with an ecological approach that focuses on long-term sustainability of the environment, economies and communities. While many issues

will remain highly controversial, ecosystem management will provide a better basis through which to view and understand these issues and develop sustainable solutions.

To carry out ecosystem management, the USFS land managers are directed to understand the structure, function and variability of ecosystems and to develop appropriate site-specific management activities. Because of its complexity, ecosystem management requires an accelerated scientific effort and the efficient incorporation of science into on-the-ground projects. It also depends on grassroots participation in decision-making and partnerships to achieve shared goals.

The USFS has adopted an ecological unit framework to provide a scientific basis for ecosystem management. The framework is a classification and mapping system for stratifying areas and the ecological units that have common biological and environmental factors. These factors include climate, physiography, water, soils, air and natural communities. We have been working closely with other federal agencies as we develop this framework, to assure we are moving forward as one government.

Looking at broad directions and programs that you can expect to affect the operation of the agency, one major initiative stands out: the Forest Service Reinvention Team. This is a project to reinvent the USFS—how it looks, how it is organized, what key functions ought to be addressed by the Washington office and how the agency will prepare for the next century. How the USFS develops and implements ecosystem management will involve in part from this reinvention effort. A final report is expected this fall (1994).

Based on what we have learned today and the current thinking, some of the changes that can be expected are as follows. The agency must quickly and successfully implement ecosystem management on the national lands. Successful implementation will affect more than how we manage national forests and grasslands. It will also change how the USFS interacts with other federal, state and private landowners, how we are organized and how we request and allocate our resources.

Ecosystem management is a term much in vogue, but too little understood. Systems that exist in our environment are incredibly complex. It is unlikely we will ever fully understand how ecosystems work. We have, however, learned a great deal. We need to quickly develop tools to measure the health and vigor of our forests, rangelands and the plant/animal communities of which ecosystems are composed. We need to develop and implement strategies that truly conserve biological diversity and maintain aesthetic values while producing our much needed commodities.

The agency is also changing planning regulations to incorporate ecosystem management principles into the forest planning process. A key element of ecosystem management is a consistent monitoring effort; evaluation of management applied and the outcomes of that management. Where necessary, this evaluation is used in adapting our management to incorporate new information. Monitoring cannot continue to be treated as an appendage that may or may not be done based on future funding. In the past,

we have proposed mitigation for risky courses of action by promising rigorous monitoring and mid-course correction. Frankly, we have not always carried out the required and promised monitoring, nor have we been funded to do so.

The underpinning of good resource management has always been, and will continue to be, science. Implementing ecosystem management, we must enhance the use of scientists and science in the decision-making process. The contribution of science to better decisions requires continued and strengthened independence of our research arm, development of guidelines for collaboration of scientists and decision-makers and the continuous upgrading of the technical skills of our workforce.

These are the technical aspects of ecosystem management. Equally important are the changes we must make in the way we approach our job. More than ever before we recognize that successful management is collaborative management. The USFS has a rich tradition of using partnerships to accomplish organizational goals. For example, we have developed more than 12,000 ongoing relationships with a host of outside interests. These include sister agencies at all levels of the government, universities and colleges, rural communities, organizations such as Nature Conservancy, the Wild Turkey Federation, Trout Unlimited and many others. But we must do more. We must institutionalize collaboration. We must create forums where reasonable people, environmentalists, industry representatives, recreationists or government officials can come together to discuss issues, learn from one another and work towards consensus on how our forests should be managed.

A major task facing the USFS is to establish clearly our desired outcomes and develop pro-active programs that will put us there. We need to move beyond the individual functional programs of the past and realize that the total is greater than the sum of the parts. An example of the type of change needed is the recent direction to eliminate traditional timber targets in our 1994 budget allocation. Rather than assigning timber targets and funding those targets, the national forests are being asked to meet timber goals that are appropriated and attainable given their land stewardship objectives.

We also expect to continue to accelerate our emphasis on quality wilderness management and meeting fish, wildlife, recreation and watershed protection objectives in the overall job of stewardship.

We need to reexamine our fire management programs in light of broader ecological objectives and design incentives to achieve stewardship on non-public ownerships. In all cases, we need to evaluate these component programs carefully to assure they are realistic to implement and provide significant gains towards the desired outcomes.

Finally, our programs must be designed to incorporate new knowledge more rapidly than in the past. New knowledge must be moved into implementation and pro-active change made rapidly if we are to meet the needs of the future. The USFS is participating on a coordinating committee with the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service,

National Park Service, Department of Defense and the Nature Conservancy to promote the role of research natural areas in ecosystem management.

The USFS is also working with the BLM to develop parallel land management planning regulation which will incorporate the same principles of ecosystem management. The effort will greatly improve the coordination of plans and activities on public lands.

Ecosystem management includes a commitment to working with even more partners than we have in the past. Because ecosystems cross boundaries, many federal, state and county agencies, tribal governments, private landowners, community leaders and corporate foresters are interested in ecosystem management.

We recognize the sensitivity of private property rights and the questions about how ecosystem management can be implemented across property boundaries. Our objective is to provide technical and financial assistance to federal and state land managers and to non-industrial private landowners. Through this effort, we can help land managers and landowners meet their objectives for their land by encouraging the use of sound ecological approaches. The USFS does not intend to, nor do we now, control private land management decision-making or activities.

Long-standing partnerships with federal land managers, state foresters, non-government organizations, local officials and landowners have developed strong and successful working relationships. These relationships foster ecosystem approaches at all levels to achieve sustainable forests, as well as sustainable communities. The state foresters working independently and through the National Association of State Foresters are major partners in delivery of state and private forestry programs to the field level. Ongoing coordination is maintained with national associations, representing local community groups such as the National Association of Counties and the National Association of Conservation Districts.

Ecosystem management is a major challenge each of us face. I want to pledge today, from the USFS standpoint, that we are committed to work with you to implement this important management philosophy. I believe we can make a difference in the next few years. Coming together as you are today provides a strong basis and, I hope, a strong incentive for more of these forums as we deal with the challenges of the future.

We can learn a lot from what we have done in the past. One of the tragedies of the past is that we have lost the interconnection of some of our management in the last 10 to 15 years in the USFS. Early foresters and range managers did an excellent job of tracking the effects of their management, recording their science (during the photographic points) and evaluating their results. But in the last 10 to 15 years, we have certainly gone backwards in monitoring and evaluation in the USFS. This is going to be an essential part of future ecosystem management in the USFS and, I hope, throughout this nation as we deal with the challenges with which we are faced.

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