The Wildlife Society

IDAHO CHAPTER

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August 1994

President's Message

Forest Health-What does it Mean?

At any given point in time, the various fields of natural resources have their pressing issues and crises. Presently the field of forestry seems obsessed with forest health or the lack thereof. The July 1994 issue of the Journal of Forestry was devoted to this topic. My own college's Policy Analysis Group recently produced a voluminous report on Forest Health Conditions in Idaho and there have been numerous meetings and symposia that have addressed the subject. The U.S. Forest Service has created a National Center of Forest Health Management. In reading, scanning and reviewing some of these documents I have developed an uneasy feeling about this debate and how forest health is being interpreted. My concerns involve the definitions of a forest and how the issue of forest health might be used to make land management decisions.

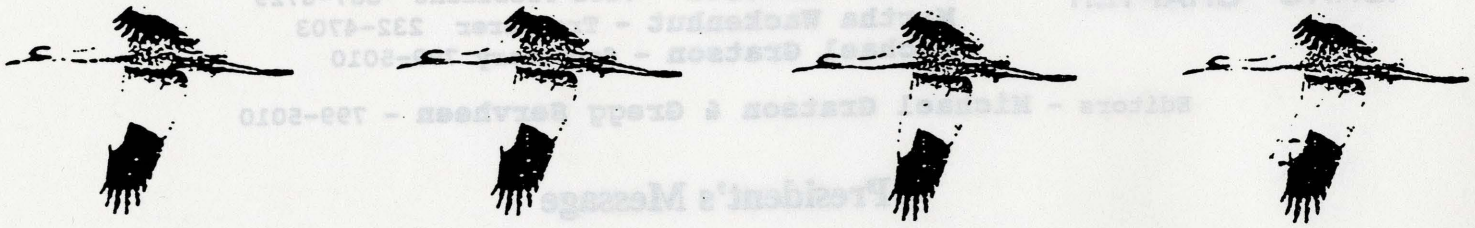
There is a definite utilitarian perspective in most of the definitions of forest health. I will paraphrase some of these. "Forest health is a condition that is consistent with management objectives and that does not interfere with achieving these objectives". "A healthy forest is one in which tree mortality does not exceed replacement or the capacity for replacement". "A healthy forest is one in which there is a balance between growth and mortality". "A forest is healthy if it produces the desired outputs". "Forest health is concerned with trees and groups of trees".

Other more broadly worded and ecosystem-oriented definitions than the above are mentioned but are almost always discounted, even to the point of stating that because the health of an entire forest ecosystem can not be described there is no point in considering it further. To summarize, the emphasis in most discussions in the forestry literature view forest health as timber-production health and not ecosystem health.

According to some spokesperson in the forestry profession, the way to a healthy forest is through management interventions. The interventions are justified because of past mistakes and a lack of proper management, and rationalized by statements such as "without trees there is no forest." It is pointed out that expanses of forests have been converted into densely packed monocultures of fire- and insect-sensitive tree species. It is these forests that are the primary objective of management interventions. I can agree with

some of these arguments and conclusions but am deeply concerned about the approaches that are implied. There are some basic questions that I would like to ask and which all wildlifers should pose.

The most important one concerns the definition of forest health or perhaps the definition of a forest. A forest includes all of its inhabitants--the trees, the brush, the forbs, the insects, the birds and other animals, and yes even the microorganisms which are essential to perpetuation of the trees and of the entire forest ecosystem. What about the "health" of all these other components of the forest? A forest stand with some trees that contain bark beetles might flunk the forest-health test but I doubt that woodpeckers would agree with this diagnosis. If my memory serves me properly the U.S. Forest Service adopted the concept of ecosystem maintenance as its guiding philosophy in management of the forest system. What has happened to this idea? Has it been cast aside in favor of tree or stand vigor?



Of paramount importance to the entire issue of forest health is management intervention and the consequences for the forest ecosystem which includes my favorite organisms, wild animals. The USFS National Forest Health Monitoring Program has stated objectives of protecting forests from the stresses of insects, disease and fire. Objectives of the Society of American Foresters Committee on Forest Health and Productivity include maintenance and improvement of forest health and productivity, and a goal of influencing national policies on sustainability of forest resources. This latter statement is cause for us in the wildlife profession to become active in making sure that wildlife interests are not short changed on public forest lands in this country. I frankly do not understand the intentions of the SAF relative to influencing national policies but trust that many of its members have a broad perspective on forests and forestry.

Every politician knows very well that selection of the proper slogan has a great deal to do with public acceptance or rejection of an idea or proposal. Who can possibly be against health? And what rational person can oppose attempts to restore someone or something to a state of health? I am not accusing my fellow professionals of deliberately choosing the term "health" to hide other motives. I do remember seeing the term "temporary meadow" used to describe a clear cut! However, my understanding of suggested management interventions is removal of trees and perhaps conversion of stands to other species. Whatever the approach, intentions seem to include some type of timber removal on a large scale and seemingly without consideration for other components of the forest ecosystem except tree or stand vigor. It is this possibility that has me worried. Management of public forests certainly includes the production of timber but it also includes many other values.

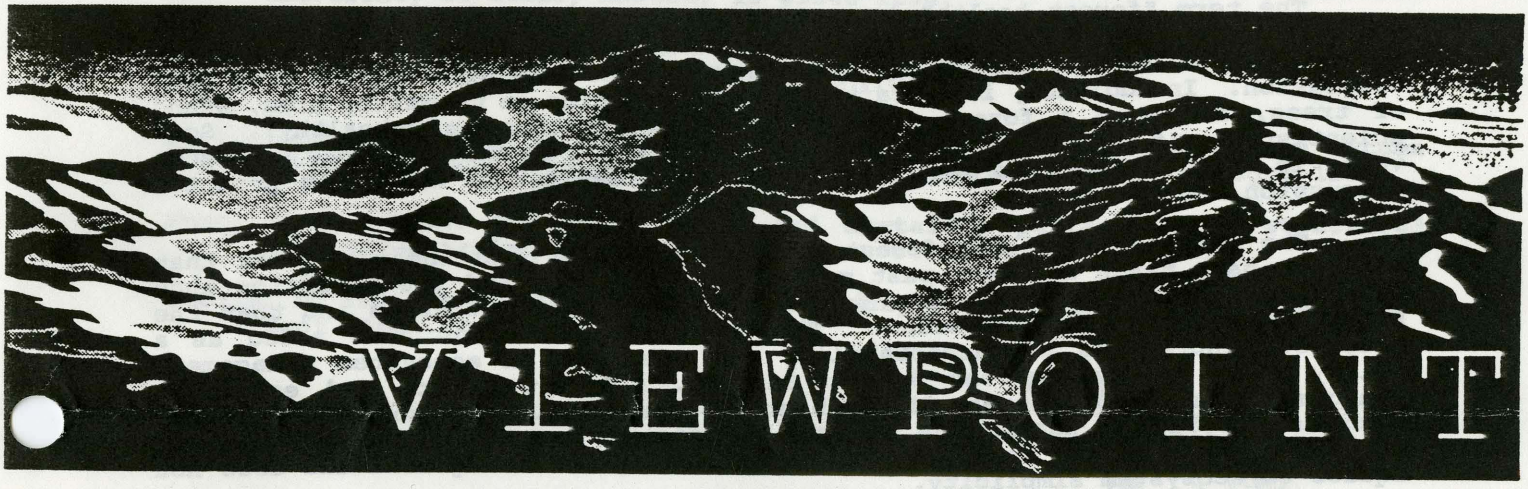
Health is an unfortunate choice of terminology that has been extended from the individual or population (stand) level and can't be easily applied across a landscape or to an ecosystem. As such it should be dropped from the lexicon of ecosystem management. It has become an impediment to proper understanding of

functioning or conditions in natural environments. We need to develop a better understanding of functions and processes in ecosystems including those that affect trees as well as every other organism. Ignoring everything except trees and excluding other components of an ecosystem because they do not fit the terminology is not the proper approach.

Committee Reports

1995 Annual Meeting

Erne Ables and Jim Unsworth have been working on the annual meeting. Tentatively, it has been set up for March 16-19, 1995 in Idaho Falls. They would welcome any ideas from members on a major focus or theme. Call Erne or Jim with your ideas!



Viewpoint

Forest Health and Ecosystem Management: A Comment

Gregg Servheen's editorial concerning forest health issues, ecosystem management, and wildlife databases raises some good questions but needs some clarification. As second author of the University of Idaho Policy Analysis Group's (PAG) report on forest health conditions in Idaho, hopefully I can accomplish this.

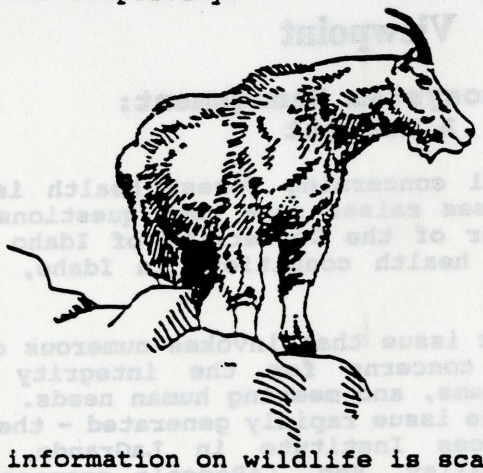
Forest health is a complex issue that invokes numerous other issues and concepts that revolve around concerns for the integrity of ecosystems, sustainable use of those ecosystems, and meeting human needs. This complexity was reflected in the attention the issue rapidly generated - the creation of the Blue Mountains Natural Resources Institute in LaGrande, OR, scientific conferences in Boise and Sun Valley, Rep. LaRocco's proposed forest health legislation and Sen. Craig's more recent attempt, numerous proposals for research programs, etc. The PAG report took two years to complete, and the full version is nearly 250 pages due to that complexity. A one or two hour discussion at an annual meeting can only touch on the highlights of the issue. I've provided some citations that will lead to a full understanding of this issue.

The focus on trees is a function of three facts: 1) trees are arguably the primary component of forest ecosystems, 2) there is little to no data on anything else at a comparable geographic or time scale, and 3) high rates of tree

mortality created the whole issue of "forest health". Unfortunately, the data on tree growth and mortality is less than adequate, coming from U.S. Forest Service inventories conducted at 10 year intervals and spanning only the last 30 years. The value of that data may lie more in the process of analysis (i.e., estimating an historic range of variability with which to judge current conditions) than the actual numbers themselves. Another important qualifier is that these data were collected only on lands suited for timber production, about one-half the Forest Service lands in Idaho. The data analyses, interpretations, and conclusions apply only to the suited timber lands as identified in the forest plans. In addition, the alternative of salvage logging and intensive thinning (only one of many alternatives) applies only to those suitable timber lands, and only if those lands are to be largely dedicated to tree production. These prescriptions are not simply fulfilling primarily human needs. For example, thinning programs should favor species best adapted to fire influenced sites, i.e., ponderosa pine and larch vs. grand fir and Douglas-fir, and result in tree densities closer to those that existed under the pre-fire suppression wildfire regime.

The term "forest health" is problematic since health is value laden and somewhat scale dependent. If a forest is deemed unhealthy, that automatically implies that a serious problem exists. However, not everyone agrees with that conclusion. In addition, it is fairly easy to envision an unhealthy tree, stand of trees, and even a forest. However, can ecosystems be unhealthy? Some scientists don't think so. Regardless, the term won't go away and does have some value in that it captures peoples interest and imagination which has promoted discussion and some action.

The real value of the forest health issue has been the hard look that managers have taken at their past management practices and the admission that those prescriptions ignored some fundamental ecosystem processes and that the situation needs to be corrected. The forest health issue also acted as a catalyst, increasing the acceptability and need for an ecosystem management policy that now guides the Forest Service. Forest health and ecosystem management came to the forefront at about the same time. With the maturation of each issue, forest health has become but one of many concerns imbedded in ecosystem management. Forest health is not ecosystem management and does not equate to ecosystem simplicity.



Pertinent information on wildlife is scarce which limited its usefulness as applied to forest health assessments, however, it was not eliminated from consideration. There were some specific studies supporting models of predator-prey functional responses and the potential role of birds in regulating insect populations. This invoked questions about declines in neotropical migrants and their role in Idaho's forest ecosystems, but the annual breeding bird surveys indicated that populations in Idaho were stable or increasing. Forest Service management indicator species were not useful since no data on their population trends has been collected and little consideration has been given to what they are supposed to indicate and these relationships have not been validated. In

addition, the mere presence or absence of a species can be the result of so many variables that it is also inadequate to assess forest health. As Mr. Servheen concluded, we need to implement serious wildlife monitoring programs and practice adaptive management. Unfortunately, this is a long way off and apparently the "forest health crisis" won't wait for us to catch up.

Gast, W.R., et al. 1991. Blue Mountains forest health report: "new perspectives in forest health". U.S. Dep. Agric., For. Serv., Pacific Northwest Reg., Portland, OR.

O'Laughlin, J. et al. 1993. Forest health conditions in Idaho. Id. For., Wildl. Range Policy Anal. Group Rep. No. 11, Univ. Id., Moscow. 244pp.

Papers in a special issue of the *Journal of Sustainable Forestry*, Vol. 2:in press, 1994.

Jim MacCracken, Idaho Forest, Wildlife and Range Policy Analysis Group, University of Idaho, Moscow, ID 83844-1134.

New Titles/Software

McClelland, B. R., et al. 1994. **Migration ecology of bald eagles from autumn concentrations in Glacier National Park, Montana.** Wildl. Monogr. 125.

Wood, S. N. 1994. **Obtaining birth and mortality patterns from structured population trajectories.** Ecol. Monogr. 64:23-44.

Yodzis, P. 1994. **Predator-prey theory and management of multispecies fisheries.** Ecol. Appl. 4:51-58.

Membership Profiles

Sharon Ritter **208/983-2818**

Employer: Idaho Department of Fish and Game, Grangeville (Lewiston office) as Wildlife Research Biologist - Nongame Wildlife.

Education: University of Wisconsin

Working on nongame wildlife surveys. Formerly with the Wyoming Department of Fish and Game and served as Wyoming Chapter TWS President, Secretary, Editor of newsletter, and on various committees. Special interests and expertise include nongame wildlife, primarily birds, habitat requirements, and nongame wildlife surveys and monitoring techniques. A member of the Idaho chapter of TWS to continue development as a professional and to keep up contacts with other biologists across the state.

LeAnn Eno **208/769-5027**

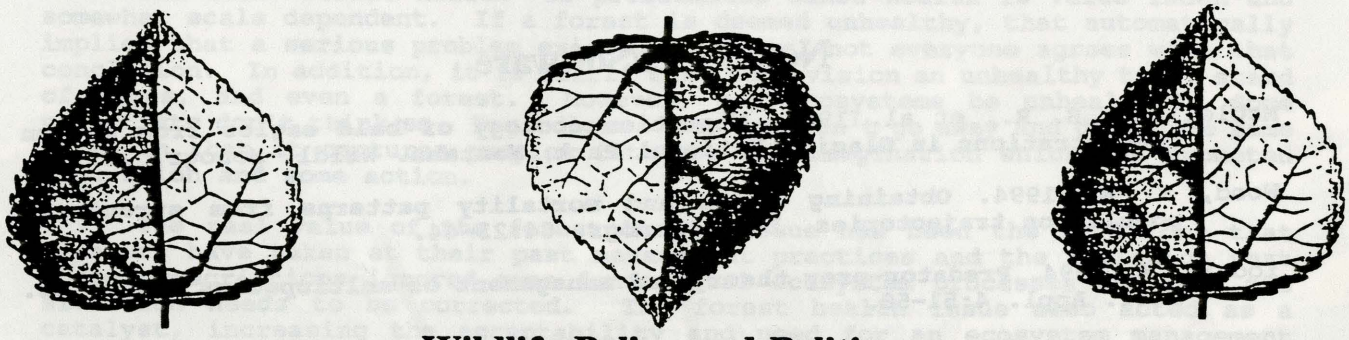
Employer: Bureau of Land Management, Coeur d'Alene District, as Biologist.

Education: Harding University, AR; University of Idaho, ID

Working primarily as a Botanist for BLM. Expertise and interests include riparian plant communities, Sensitive and Rare plant species in Idaho, and habitat restoration. A member of ID TWS because interested in wildlife professionally and to keep current on new wildlife issues and management.

Editorial

Dare I not have something to say about forest health!? For this issue we've decided to add a timly piece about wildlife policy and politics and grizzly bears provided by one of our members, rather than an editorial. **M.W.G.**



Wildlife Policy and Politics

Grizzly Bear Restoration in the Selway-Bitterroot

The potential of the Selway-Bitterroot area of Idaho and Montana as a grizzly bear ecosystem was recognized with the listing of the grizzly as threatened in 1975. The goals of the 1982 Grizzly Bear Recovery Plan for the area were to determine the historical and current status of grizzlies and assess the suitability of the area as a recovery zone. Studies by the Idaho Department of Fish and Game, University of Idaho, Forest Service, and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) noted that grizzlies were abundant in the area prior to extensive human occupation, the 1956 shooting of a grizzly on the upper Lochsa River was the last confirmed report, and that the Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness and surrounding area was suitable as a recovery zone. In 1991, the Interagency Grizzly Bear Committee announced that it would pursue grizzly recovery in the area, which was designated as the Bitterroot Grizzly Bear Ecosystem (BE). That action along with the release of a Draft Chapter for the BE to be included in the revised recovery plan brought grizzly bear recovery to the forefront of the policy arena in Idaho. Opponents cited presumed land lockups, road closures, livestock predation, Endangered Species Act (ESA) regulatory obstacles, and the potential for human injuries as reasons not to pursue grizzly recovery in the area. Proponents noted that grizzlies belonged in the area and that the BE could provide a crucial link with other occupied grizzly ecosystems and greatly enhance grizzly bear recovery efforts.

In 1993, the Idaho Legislature created a Grizzly Bear Management Oversight Committee composed of representatives of a variety of interest groups. Through the efforts of this committee, the Idaho Department of Fish and Game, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, opponents realized that grizzly recovery was mandated by the ESA and would likely proceed in the BE with or without their input. In addition, proponents acknowledged that a successful recovery effort was dependent on adequately addressing the concerns of local interests. A

consensus position on grizzly recovery in the BE was reached and adopted by the Interagency Grizzly Bear Committee (IGBC) in February 1994. The major provisions of the position are that: 1) grizzlies be reintroduced as an experimental-nonessential population, 2) introductions be confined to the Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness, 3) no land-use restrictions specific to grizzlies be applied to areas surrounding the Wilderness, 4) nuisance bears be treated under existing guidelines, 5) the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service proceed with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process and preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), 6) the State of Idaho be an integral partner in development of the EIS, 7) a wide array of recovery area boundaries be considered in the EIS in relation to experimental-nonessential status, and 8) the USFWS should immediately seek funding to initiate the NEPA process.

The BE is unique among grizzly bear ecosystems because there is no solid evidence that grizzlies currently occupy the area. This fact allows for the establishment of an experimental-nonessential population outside the current range of the species under section 10(j) of the ESA. Section 10(j) was part of the 1982 amendments to the ESA and was designed to increase the acceptability of reintroductions by allowing for more flexible management (in relation to Section 9 takings and Section 7 consultations) than threatened or endangered status. The amount of management flexibility is specified in the rules and regulations that are written for each experimental population.

A complicating factor with experimental-nonessential status is the boundaries of a recovery zone. Any experimental-nonessential animal that wanders outside the recovery zone for that population undergoes a status change to that of the nonexperimental populations – i.e., either threatened or endangered – and is then subject to the regulations associated with those populations. This situation argues for making the recovery zone large enough to insure that experimental-nonessential animals have little chance of leaving the area. Needless to say, many people are uncomfortable with the proposition of exceptionally large recovery zones.

Currently, the BE chapter has been revised to reflect the position adopted by the IGBC and was finalized at the IGBC summer meeting this July and added to the recovery plan. Decisions concerning the NEPA process for the BE reintroduction program are still pending. **Jim MacCracken**

Upcoming Meetings

1994

Aug. 29-31, 1994. **Sustaining Rangeland Ecosystems**, La Grande, OR., John Tanaka, Blue Mountains Natural Resources Institute, 1401 Gekeler Lane, La Grande, OR 97850. 503/96307122.

Sept. 21-25, 1994. **First Annual Conference of The Wildlife Society:** Excellence in Wildlife Stewardship Through Science and Education, Albuquerque, NM., Harry E. Hodgdon, The Wildlife Society, 5410 Grosvenor Lane, Bethesda, MD

20814. 301/897-9770.

Oct. 26-29, 1994. **Third Annual National Watchable Wildlife Conference**, Burlington, VT., Hannah Kirchner, National Watchable Wildlife Conference, 607 Lincoln West, Mishawaka, IN 46544. 219/258-0100.

1995

Feb. 1-4, 1995. **15th Conference of the Trumpeter Swan Society**, Cotton Tree Inn, Mount Vernon, WA., Martha Jordan, The Trumpeter Swan Society, 3800 County rd 24, Maple Plain, MN 55359. 206/787-0258.

May 23-27, 1995. **Seventh National Wild Turkey Symposium Workshop**. Rapid City, SD., James G. Dickson, USFS Wildlife Habitat Lab, PO Box 7600 SFA, Nacogdoches, TX 75962.

May 24-25, 1995. **Western States and Provinces Joint Deer and Elk Workshop**, Sun Valley Inn and Lodge, Sun Valley, ID., Lonn Kuck, Western States and Provinces Deer and Elk Workshop, ID Dept. Fish and Game, 600 S. Walnut, PO Box 25, Boise, ID 83707. 208/334-2920.

Jun. 7-11, 1995. **Society for Conservation Biology 1995 Annual Meeting**, Colorado State Univ., Ft. Collins, CO., Richard L. Knight, Dept. of Fishery & Wildlife Biology, Colorado State Univ., Ft. Collins, CO 80523. 303/491-6714.

Jun. 16-21, 1995. **10th International Conference on Bear Research and Management**, Univ. Alaska, Fairbanks, AK. Harry Reynolds, 10th IBA Conf. Co-chair, AK Dept. Fish and Game, 1300 College Rd, Fairbanks, AK 99701-1599. 907/452-1531.

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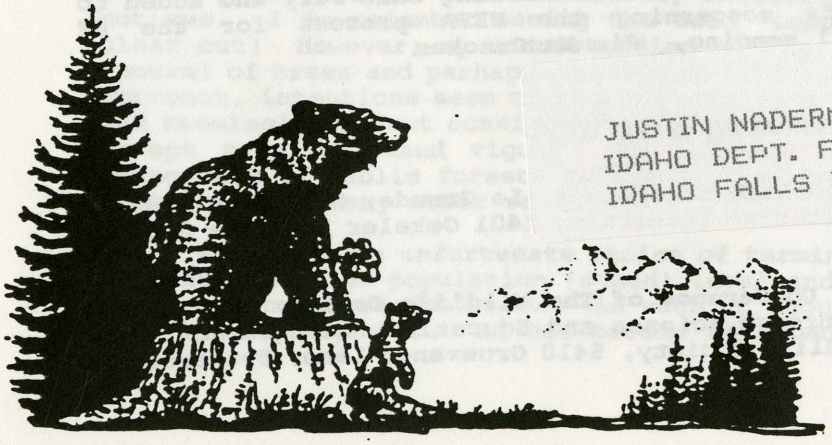

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