



SOCIETY OF AMERICAN FORESTERS

Representing the Forestry Profession in America

JAN 6 1976

FOREST WILDERNESS: A POSITION OF THE SOCIETY OF AMERICAN FORESTERS*

Introduction. The Society of American Foresters (SAF) recognizes mankind's need for forest wilderness. Forest Policies of the Society of American Foresters, comprising the Society's general statements on forest policy approved by the membership, states:

Forest conservation provides for maintaining some land in a wilderness state for spiritual enjoyment, scientific study, and primitive recreation... Forest lands should be reserved and used for parks, monuments, recreation areas, wilderness areas and natural areas where intensive study demonstrates that such reservation and use is in the long-term public interest. (Emphasis added)

Definition of Forest Wilderness. The concept of forest wilderness is inherently subjective. Wilderness is what people think it is, and because of their different attitudes based upon varying experiences, knowledge, characteristics and circumstances, wilderness means different things to different people. Consequently, wilderness, including forest wilderness, cannot be defined with precision.

However, it is useful to consider a spectrum of environments in terms of the degree of human influence, ranging from the totally wild to the totally civilized. As successive movement is made away from the wild extreme, human influence becomes successively greater. The rural environment characterizes the middle of the range. Remote, roadless, undeveloped lands constitute that part of the range closest to the wild extreme. Large urban centers are at the civilized extreme. Although people will differ in their attitudes as to which environments should be included as wilderness, collectively there will be a consensus on which portion of the spectrum is wilderness. Land included in this part of the spectrum is characterized by different degrees of wilderness. Accordingly, forest wilderness in general comprises those forest landscapes and forest associations most capable of accommodating people's perceptions and needs for forest wilderness.

A wilderness definition which is embodied in federal law by the Wilderness Act of 1964 is "an area where the earth and its community are untrammelled by man, where man himself is a visitor." This definition is subsequently refined as:

*Approved by the Council of the Society of American Foresters, November 12, 1975.

an area of undeveloped Federal land retaining its primeval character and influence, without permanent improvements or human habitation, which is protected and managed so as to preserve its natural conditions and which (1) generally appears to have been affected primarily by the forces of nature, with the imprint of man's work substantially unnoticeable; (2) has outstanding opportunities for solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation; (3) has at least five thousand acres of land or is of sufficient size to make practicable its preservation and use in an unimpaired condition; and (4) may also contain ecological, geological or other features of scientific, educational, scenic, or historic value.

The preceding definition is the basis for the National Wilderness Preservation System (the Wilderness System), which included approximately 12.7 million acres in 1975. In the statements which follow, the term "Wilderness Areas" with a capital "W" refers to Congressionally established Wilderness Areas in the National Wilderness Preservation System; the term "wilderness areas" with a small "w" refers to land areas allocated for wilderness by jurisdictions other than the federal government. The Wilderness System is restricted to certain federal lands. Because numerous land areas having wilderness qualities are either in non-federal ownerships or are federal lands not included in the Wilderness System, the extent of wilderness in the United States, including forest wilderness, greatly exceeds that included in the Wilderness System.

Forest Land Allocation for Wilderness Use. To allocate a forest land area for use as wilderness is not without cost. Some uses of the land are foreclosed--at the expense of some people for the benefit of others. Furthermore, many forest land areas not allocated for wilderness are capable of satisfying some people's wilderness needs. Therefore, when a forest area is being considered for wilderness allocation and use, there should be a comprehensive study by capable analysts of all the costs and benefits, tangible and intangible, of such an allocation. Natural resource management professionals are uniquely qualified by their education, knowledge and experience to make such studies. The decision to allocate forest lands for wilderness use to the exclusion of commodity uses is ultimately political. Nevertheless, it must be based on as much factual information as possible.

Access to inholdings. Section 5 of the Wilderness Act of 1964 states that state and private owners of land surrounded by areas designated as wilderness by the Act "shall be given such rights as may be necessary to assure adequate access...or the State-owned land shall be exchanged for federally owned land in the same State of approximately equal value..." Such provisions are necessary and should be incorporated in the statutes of states and other jurisdictions allocating forest lands for use as wilderness.

Management of Forest Wilderness. Forest lands which are to be maintained for wilderness use must be deliberately managed for that purpose. Where they are not, they will likely lose some or all of their wilderness qualities.

The goal of forest wilderness management is to permit natural ecological processes to take place unmodified by man, to the extent feasible, while making available to human visitors a wilderness experience on a sustained basis. A wilderness experience is the

perception of solitude and freedom in a natural environment. Human visitation to forest wilderness areas has an impact on the soil and other resources, and if uncontrolled, can alter substantially the natural ecological processes and reduce the quality of the wilderness experience. For these reasons, human visitations must be controlled, where necessary, by dispersion, rotation or limitation techniques to prevent resource abuse. Similarly, if control of fires, insect infestations and diseases is necessary to prevent drastic alterations of the wilderness landscape, the methods of control used must not be harmful to the forest ecosystem.

Restoration of Forest Wilderness. For the typical user, forest wilderness can be reproduced by restoring lands previously utilized for other purposes. Furthermore, most forest lands can be managed to restore wilderness qualities. Of course, time and adequate funding are necessary, as are forest land areas of such size and shape as to be suitable for wilderness management. In addition, human activities on adjacent lands, including those on lands under other ownerships and management programs within a forest wilderness area, need to be compatible.

Finally, the knowledge and skills of forestry professionals are required for both restoration and management of wilderness. Forest ecosystems involve extraordinarily complex relationships. Managing them effectively and responsibly for whatever purpose or purposes is a task best accomplished by those who are expert in these interrelationships.

Efforts should be made to acquire and restore lands which are readily accessible to large population centers for use and management as forest wilderness. While this will be difficult and costly, it will allow more people the opportunity to obtain a forest wilderness experience.



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THE USE OF OFF-ROAD VEHICLES ON PUBLIC FOREST LANDS: A POSITION OF THE SOCIETY OF AMERICAN FORESTERS*

The use of off-road vehicles has become an important recreational activity on forest lands in the United States. In some areas, particularly public lands, such use is so extensive that it has become a major concern of resource managers. An Executive Order was issued in 1972 directing federal land-managing agencies to develop regulations to:

"control and direct the use of off-road vehicles so as to protect the resources of those lands, promote the safety of all users of those lands, and minimize conflicts among the various uses of those lands."

The different regulations which the agencies prepared in response have had uneven success. Similarly, state land-managing agencies have had uneven and only partial success in developing effective measures to control the use of off-road vehicles. Thus, the use of off-road vehicles on public lands continues to be a matter of concern.

Typically, an off-road vehicle is a motorized vehicle designed for or capable of cross-country travel over rough terrain, water, sand, snow, ice, marsh, swampland and other natural surfaces. Vehicles of this kind include four-wheel drive vehicles, dune buggies, motorcycles, snowmobiles, and amphibious and air-cushion vehicles.

When improperly used, off-road vehicles can damage forest ecosystems. Improper use can cause erosion and compaction of soil, harm plant communities, degrade wildlife habitat, and disturb and cause injury to wildlife. The use--and especially the misuse--of off-road vehicles may conflict with other forest uses. Conflicts in forest resource use may occur where individuals engaged in hunting, fishing, hiking, horseback riding, bird-watching or camping activities are disturbed or made unsafe by the noise and presence of individuals using off-road vehicles.

For these reasons, 1) trails should be designed, located and constructed for the proper safe use of off-road vehicles so as to minimize conflicts with other uses and protect resources; and 2) the use of off-road vehicles should be controlled. Private forest landowners have the authority and flexibility to implement such controls. In addition, most public agencies managing forest lands, while lacking the flexibility of private landowners, do have the authority to establish and enforce regulations which are reasonable in content and appropriate to the purpose of the agency.

The Society of American Foresters recommends that public agencies make increased use of their authority to control the use of off-road vehicles. In order that control

*Approved by the Council of the Society of American Foresters, November 12, 1975.

be effective, off-road vehicles should be allowed only on forest roads, trails and areas, either new or existing, which are explicitly designated for off-road vehicle use. Experience shows this approach to be less costly, and easier to enforce than a restriction in which off-road vehicles are allowed on all forest roads, trails and areas except where designated to the contrary.

Implementation of the above recommendations will serve the public interest by protecting forest resources, reducing forest user conflicts, and making forests safer for the public.

ABOUT THE SOCIETY

The Society of American Foresters, with about 20,000 members, is the national organization representing all segments of the forestry profession of the United States including public and private practitioners, researchers, administrators, educators, and forestry students.

Objectives of the Society are: To advance the science, technology, education, and practice of professional forestry in America, and to use the knowledge and skills of the profession to benefit society.

Gifford Pinchot and six other pioneer foresters established the Society in 1900.

Members subscribe to a code of professional ethics. The Society is the accreditation authority for professional forestry education in the United States. Its periodicals are the Journal of Forestry, Forest Science and Proceedings of SAF national conventions.

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