

**Washington Forest Protection Association  
President Toby Murray's Message  
2007 WFPA Annual Meeting  
November 15, 2007 - 9:05 am**

Our theme for this year's Annual Meeting is a "21<sup>st</sup> Century Vision for Sustainable Forestry." When thinking about this theme, I note that I have become increasingly uncomfortable with the word "sustainable" because, quite frankly, there is no universally held definition of the word. Its use is commonplace, yet no one means the same thing when they say it. In fact, there are many perspectives on sustainable forestry; here are a few of them:

- One commonly used definition is adopted from the United Nation's Bruntland Commission which says that sustainability is meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.<sup>1</sup>
- Another states that sustainable forestry provides a way of using trees and non-timber forest products to meet people's need for lumber, paper and other products, without degrading forest ecosystems,<sup>2</sup> another word with a plethora of definitions.

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<sup>1</sup> 1987 Our Common Future: Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development aka "Bruntland Report",

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.rainforest-alliance.org/programs/forestry/why.html>

- Some have said<sup>3</sup> that sustainable forestry can never be defined; therefore, it's better to say it's an adaptive social process that responds to the diverse and dynamic perspectives of what the forest is and should be.
- The Sustainable Forestry Initiative certification system focuses on the perpetual growing and harvesting of trees with the long-term protection of wildlife, plants, soil and water quality.
- And, all of these definitions are not to be confused with what we will hear a little later today from Coach Lambright on how difficult it is to define sustainability in the world of college coaching.

After all of this, I'm not sure that it's even important to have a single definition of sustainable forestry. But what is important to me is that we talk about what it takes for the forest industry to continue to remain around for a very long time, and what we need to do to continue practicing forestry into the future.

One thing I can say about the forest industry and WFPA is that we have been around for a very long time, as we are on the eve of celebrating our 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary. I'd like to reflect on how we've done that.

I am the third generation of my family owned forest business, and I must say that we have **adapted to change** a great deal since we were formed in 1911, just as WFPA has done since its formation in 1908. We have weathered the stock market crash of 1929 and the Great Depression, World War II, Korea, Vietnam, adoption

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<sup>3</sup> Jeff Romm, Dept. of Forestry and Resource Management, University of California, Berkeley

of the most sweeping environmental legislation in the world with the Endangered Species Act, Clean Air and Water Acts, implementation of our state's forest practices and environmental policy acts, double-digit inflation, NAFTA, terrorism and increasing global competition. Our ability to **adapt** and respond to the changing public values over the years and economic and environmental limits has allowed us to stay in business for a very long time.

Looking back over the past 100 years, I can see that the values for the use of forest resources have changed from protecting our forests from fire purely for timber asset protection and production to a broader perspective of protecting our natural resources prior, during and after our operations.

At the same time, demand for wood products continues to increase in relationship to population growth. 1.5 million additional people will be moving in to our state by 2020 and they will need to be housed somewhere. They will also want other amenities like cool clean water and clean air that our working forests provide.

All of us can agree that growing and harvesting and re-growing trees is more compatible with protecting environmental values, than all other alternative land uses. However, our forest practices must be in step with public expectations. Our ability to **listen, respond and communicate** has contributed to the industry's success over the long run. I know this first hand, because my family's company was one of those timber companies that was asleep or otherwise occupied during the early 1980s when public values about the use of the forest were changing. At that time, the industry didn't understand the need to listen and respond to these values. The train had left the station and we weren't on it!

Public awareness of protecting forest values beyond timber became a priority during the decade of the 1980s, yet industry continued operating with a primary focus on the timber resource. The public determined that we had breached their trust and regulatory instability was the result! Of greatest significance was the listing of the Northern Spotted Owl under the Endangered Species Act that shut down federal timber sales and restructured rural timber-dependent economies, with the net effect of killing the culture of working in the woods by removing forestry as a career choice for many.

While this was an extremely painful lesson, we had plenty of incentive to learn to listen to public values, and have responded by changing our practices and communicating with the public. The most recent change is the landmark Forests & Fish Law which secured a 50 year contract with the federal government. It gives us assurance that our state forest practices rules meet Endangered Species and Clean Water Act requirements for fish habitat. We established an ongoing program of regular communication with the public and the timber industry now enjoys a high level of public support for its practices. This trust will allow us to sustain our forestry operations well into the future.

Since the Forests & Fish Law passed, there has been a marked increase in public acceptance of forestry:

- Net voter approval of forest products companies actions remains high and the average has more than doubled since the Forests & Fish Law was adopted;
- Voter disapproval of forest products companies actions is among its lowest level;

- The voter's demand for less regulation of privately owned forests is at its highest level; and
- There is wide approval of the Forest & Fish Law.

Because our business cycle is about a half-century long, it is important that we find some measure of predictability in our business. It takes courage, optimism, flexibility, open mindedness and perseverance on the part of forest landowners to make commitments for half of a century. But, this is what we do every time a new forest is planted to meet the world's growing demand for wood products. I'd like to think that we all have a vested interest in maintaining an economically successful forest industry, as this also maintains the environmental and social values to society free of charge, or as a by-product of forest management activities.

While we may never be able to point to one definition of sustainability, or even say definitively what it takes to be around for a very long time, I hope that I have described why we want to encourage investment in forestry and some of the ingredients it takes to sustain ourselves over time. In the long-run, a good indication of our ability to sustain working forests is whether we **believe** that a tree planted today can be harvested in 50 years or so for an economically competitive return on our investment. As we approach today's annual meeting, let's take the opportunity to discuss these ideas. Let's develop a vision that allows future investors to **believe** forestry will have the necessary infrastructure and be competitive in world markets tomorrow. This will allow us to continue practicing forestry in Washington State today, as we set the stage for the next 100 years of sustainable forestry in Washington State.

Thank you.