

## The Forest Service: A Story of Change

### KSB Speaker's Series

June 17, 2009

It's a pleasure to be here this evening. This is a beautiful spot, a destination of choice for millions of visitors, with some of the best known scenery in the world. So I think it's fitting that this presentation is set at our new visitor center at the gateway to the Red Rock area in honor of our 1<sup>st</sup> birthday.

KSB has been preserving the unique natural environment of the area in partnership with the Red Rock Ranger District since 1972. KSB and the Forest Service have much in common: our organizations are both committed to making sure Sedona and the surrounding landscape that makes this place so special, are protected for future generations.

#### Forest Service Mission

It seems appropriate on our birthday, to take a look back at where we've been, how we've grown and where we're headed. So, I'd like to take this opportunity to focus on the Forest Service as a whole and our mission.

Here's our mission statement: "To **sustain the health, diversity, and productivity of the nation's forests and grasslands to meet the needs of present and future generations.**" To me, that seems clear enough. But somebody else might see "health, diversity, and productivity" a little differently than I do. And different people are going to have different needs that will sometimes come into conflict. That was pointed out a hundred years ago by the first Forest Service Chief, Gifford Pinchot, and it's just as true today.

But does that ambiguity doom our agency? For a hundred years, the answer has been no, so why would it be different now? I would say that the **ambiguity inherent** in our mission has given us **the flexibility we need to adjust to changing times.** Unless we can adjust to change, we can't sustain the changing landscapes we care for, nor can we meet the changing needs of the people we serve.

I think our history illustrates this well, and that's what I'd like to talk about this evening. I'll focus on how the challenges we face as land managers have changed over time, and how we have risen to those challenges. After looking at parts of our past, I'll look forward to some of the challenges I think we face in the future.

#### Conservation

A century ago, our nation faced a crisis caused by unrestrained exploitation of our natural resources. Bison, elk, and other wildlife species were going extinct, we were seeing disastrous fires and floods, and forests were being cut to the point we had completely lost many forests in the eastern U.S.

Conservation came out of that crisis because people wanted to stop the waste. They wanted to conserve timber for future generations. They wanted to conserve water and stop the floods and disastrous fires. They wanted to save America's wildlife from extinction.

In response, President Teddy Roosevelt formed the Division of Forestry within the Department of Agriculture, which later became the Forest Service. Under Gifford Pinchot, the Division worked with private landowners to improve forestry techniques on hundreds of thousands of acres. Pinchot also promoted research studies of commercial forest trees.

Pinchot spelled out the purpose of the forest reserves in the first *Use Book*. He wrote, “Forest reserves are for the purpose of preserving a perpetual supply of timber for home industries, preventing the destruction of the forest cover which regulates the flow of streams, and protecting local residents from unfair competition in the use of forest and range.”

The mission of protecting timber supplies and watersheds comes from the Organic Act of 1897. Protecting local residents from unfair competition was Pinchot’s interpretation of our mission, and it implies social responsibility. I’ll come back to that in a minute.

The first *Use Books* explicitly promoted several uses—timber, water, range, minerals, game, and even recreation. We went in and put those uses, for the first time, under careful management. For example, overgrazing had been a problem, and we got that under control. We also protected game and started to get fires under control. It was a period sometimes referred to as custodial management. We were focused on “the greatest good, for the greatest number, in the long run.”

The Sedona Ranger Station, when established in 1905, was a remote outpost in an area frequented by local ranchers and others by horseback. One ranger managed the entire area by himself, climbing trees occasionally to check for fires, counting cattle to ensure permittees were abiding by their FS permits, and looking for suitable timber for commercial sale. Those early rangers did it all!

### **Social Responsibility**

Then came the Great Depression, and the Forest Service was faced with a whole new set of values and challenges. People wanted more from their government than ever before. The social role that Pinchot had anticipated for our agency now became a public expectation. And because he’d already planted the seed, we were able to respond quickly to public demands.

Our State and Private Forestry and Research branches helped plant 2000 miles of shelterbelts in states from North Dakota to Texas. The idea was to help prevent future Dust Bowls, and much of the work was done by the Civilian Conservation Corps. Every national forest had at least one CCC camp, and we gave jobs to thousands of unemployed Americans. The CCC helped us control fires and built a lot of our infrastructure—things like roads, trails, and campgrounds. It was a period of new social responsibility for the Forest Service. The closest CCC camps in this area were at the present day Beaver Creek Ranger Station site in addition to a large camp at the site of Kings Ransom Motel in Sedona. Our Pine Flats C.G., Schnebly Hill Road, the Beaver Creek Ranger Station, most of our Fire Lookouts and the barn at the old Sedona Ranger Station were all built by the CCC.

World War II ended the CCC, but our social responsibility continued through the war effort. A lot of our employees enlisted, and we ramped up timber supplies needed by our troops and grazing of sheep on national forest lands provided wool for making uniforms for our troops.

### **Timber Focus**

After World War II, we entered a new period. Our troops came home, and along came the baby boom, and demands for housing soared. The war effort had depleted state and private timber supplies, and the national forests were needed to fill the gap. From the 1960s through the 80s, every administration, with strong congressional support, called for more timber from the national forests. In those 30 years, we went from producing very little timber to meeting 20 to 25 percent of our nation's saw timber needs. We helped millions of Americans fulfill the American dream of home ownership. While this is what the nation was now asking of our national forests, it was not necessarily an easy shift for all of our employees, especially those who had grown up in an agency focused on social responsibility.

But timber production wasn't all we did in the postwar period, not by any means. Outdoor recreation grew by leaps and bounds, and popular demand for more of a balance between timber and the other uses led to the Multiple Use–Sustained Yield Act of 1960. We also had the Wilderness Act of 1964. These developments show that public values were changing. The first Earth Day in 1970 sent another major signal. And if there were any lingering doubts, the environmental legislation of the 1970s put them to rest—the National Environmental Policy Act, the Endangered Species Act, the National Forest Management Act, and so on. We learned that the public wanted more of a say in our management, and they wanted us to focus more on delivering values and services like wildlife, water, wilderness, and recreation.

### **Restoration and Recreation**

In response, we started moving toward a new ecosystem-based model of land management. The 1990s were a transitional period, where we no longer focused primarily on timber production. Again, the transition wasn't easy...Some of the folks who grew up under the old timber model weren't too thrilled.

But in my view, it was the right thing to do. It was necessary because both our landscapes and our social needs are constantly changing. If we don't adjust to those changes, then we can't fulfill our mission of caring for the land and serving people.

That brings me back to what we can learn from our past. No matter how you tell the story, I think it comes out the same in the end. It's a story of changing values—of changes on the land and changes in the people we serve. It's also a story of how we respond to those changes to protect the land and deliver the goods, services, and values that people want.

Today, I believe we're in a new period—a period of ecological restoration and outdoor recreation. Maybe more than ever before, we focus on delivering values and services like clean air and water, scenic beauty, habitat for wildlife, and

opportunities for outdoor recreation. These are the main things people today want from their public lands. We know that from our surveys and from talking to our partners and to people in our communities. And no place knows that better than our visitor center here where an average of 1200 people per day come through looking to spend time exploring our beautiful national forest.

And, yes, we also deliver opportunities to harvest timber, graze livestock, and extract minerals. With goods like these come important values, like jobs and community stability. We know that Americans want these values, too.

To deliver all these goods, services, and values, we've got to manage the land for long-term ecosystem health while meaningfully engaging the public in our decision making.

### **The Scale of What We Face**

The period we are in will some day end, just as every period did before it. So what will the future bring? I think that a few key strategic concerns will drive future change, at least for the next decade or so and possibly beyond. These concerns have nothing to do with timber harvest or livestock grazing or road building.

The major concerns are what we refer to as the Four Threats...

- First, fire and fuels. As you know, we're seeing fire effects in some places that are way outside the historical range of variability. We're also seeing beetle epidemics in a number of places that are unprecedented in modern history. As you know, beetle-killed stands pose huge fire hazards in many parts of the West and South.
- Second, the spread of invasive species. All invasives combined, cost Americans about \$138 billion per year in total economic damages and control costs. The *ecological* costs are even worse. One study has found that invasives have contributed to the decline of almost *half* of all imperiled species.
- Third, the loss of open space. Every day, America loses more than 4,000 acres of private land, working farms and ranches, to development. That's more than 3 acres per minute, and the rate of conversion is getting faster all the time. We're also losing forest cover in many areas, despite gains we've made as agricultural land has reverted to forest. We're losing valuable corridors that wildlife needs and rangeland that many plants and animals need to survive. We're also losing a piece of our *cultural* heritage as Americans.
- Fourth, unmanaged outdoor recreation. In many places, recreational use is outstripping our management capacity and damaging resources, particularly the unmanaged use of off-highway vehicles. This is a legitimate use of public lands, but we do need to manage it better.

These threats aren't new. We've been dealing with them for quite awhile, and there are lots of other things we do in addition to addressing these things. But if

you go out on our ranger district, I think you'll find overall that we spend *a lot* more time and resources on these *four threats* than on most other things.

There are also some other concerns. Each year strategic reviews are conducted out on our National Forests, and we've found some common themes. One common theme is the sheer scale of what we face. Besides the Four Threats, review teams have noted several concerns:

- First, we've got a huge backlog of work to complete. We've got thousands of deteriorating culverts to replace. We've got roads to restore, abandoned mines to reclaim, watersheds to repair, vegetation to treat, and all kinds of facility maintenance and ecological restoration to catch up on. These problems are only made worse by altered vegetation conditions, the loss of milling capacity for removing vegetation, and public distrust of active forest management.
- Second, we've got deteriorating watersheds in many parts of the country. As our population rises, the problem is only going to get worse. As a nation, I'm not sure we're thinking this problem through or doing enough about it.
- Third, the levels of ozone and other substances we're seeing in the atmosphere threaten long-term ecosystem health. Our ability as a nation to furnish clean air and water, biodiversity, carbon sequestration, and other environmental services from forested landscapes and other natural areas is increasingly open to question.

Again, these are not new problems, and we've been addressing them for some time. But what struck our review teams was the sheer *scale* of what we face. Each of these concerns alone would be huge. But when you take them all together and combine them with the Four Threats, you get some idea of the scale of what we face. The Forest Service is at a crucial moment in history. In the past century, there've been only a few similar moments where we've faced challenges on a similar scale. Meeting these challenges will lay out a career's worth of work for the next generation of Forest Service employees.

Some of these challenges might already be affecting the values that people want from public lands. Recall how the environmental legislation of the 1970s responded to changes in public values. Similarly, a couple of years ago, Congress passed the first major legislation affecting national forest management in a generation, the Healthy Forests Restoration Act. The legislation responds to the threat from fire and fuels. Does this signal the beginning of a change in public values? Another new strategy we're using with our wildfires is "managing them for resource benefits," where we monitor and herd the fire, all in an effort to save tax payers dollars while reducing hazardous fuels and improving watersheds and wildlife habitat.

### **Global Issues**

Before closing, let me again emphasize that we face most of these challenges on *all* of America's forests,

Today, the challenges we face are often at a global scale. This is part of the sheer scale of what we face. The Forest Service understands that we're not going to be able to meet these challenges unless we understand the global connections and address them through international partnerships.

### **Community-Based Forestry**

That brings me back to our mission and purpose. Our story is a story of change, and our mission focus has changed accordingly over the years. Just to recap:

- A hundred years ago, we focused mainly on timber, water, and general forest protection.
- Seventy years ago, we incorporated more social responsibility into our mission through the CCC.
- Forty years ago, we focused heavily on timber, but we also sought to balance that use with other uses, particularly recreation, range, watershed, and wildlife and fish.
- Today, we focus on sustaining the health, diversity, and productivity of forests and grasslands to meet present and future needs. Given the scale of what we face, our main focus has to be on ecological restoration and outdoor recreation.

In a general sense, our mission has always been caring for the land and serving people. But what that specifically means has changed over time. I think our history makes that clear.

Something else has changed, too: the way we deliver what people want. A hundred years ago, Gifford Pinchot recognized the need for working in partnership with local communities if we were to succeed. He planted the seeds of partnership in our first *Use Book* by directing our employees to work closely with local communities to promote conservation.

Ever since then, we've been committed to fulfilling our mission through partnerships. Today, the scale of what we face leaves us no other choice: We have *got* to work together. But the way we work with people has changed over time. In particular, we've learned the need for more upfront public involvement in our decision making.

Today, we need a community-based collaborative approach. It involves getting everyone interested in stating their ideas upfront and then getting them to talk through their differences and come to some agreement based on shared values. That can be really difficult. Sometimes, people believe we aren't giving them enough of a say in our decisions. Sometimes, they see things in terms of good and evil and want to have it all their own way. This community has taken keen interest in local issues and set a high standard for collaboration and partnerships.

### **Improving Collaboration**

In closing, we've come a long way together over the last hundred years. Values have changed and so have the challenges we face. In the period we're in now, where our focus is on ecological restoration and outdoor recreation, the sheer scale of what we face is overwhelming and the only way we can rise to the

challenge is through community-based forestry—by working upfront through collaborative partnerships like the one the Forest Service has with Keep Sedona Beautiful and groups like the Friends of the Forest. With your help, we can continue to work together to meet the challenges of the future—and to prepare ourselves for the changes to come. *Speech adopted from Forest Service Chief Dale Bosworth speech given to the Centennial Forum, Chicago, IL—November 9, 2004.*