

Forests: Growing for the Future
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Let me begin this evening's discussion with a reflection on something that happened in our family a short while ago. It involves education but says much more about how we live our lives and the standards we use to do so.

My wife's uncle recently passed away, a not unexpected event. Elmont Michaelson was born and raised in the small SE Idaho community of St. Charles. He grew up during the Depression and went to war as did most of his generation. He came home and spent the rest of his life as an education professional. He was well loved and respected in his profession and received many awards for his endeavors, including a stadium named in his honor.

Were the story to end there, Elmont would have had a successful life and career. But there was more that only his closest family knew. Uncle Elmont fought his way across Europe into Germany as a part of the 71st Infantry Division during WW II, but that's more to the story.

The 71st and Elmont Michaelson liberated Gunskirchen Lager concentration camp. The description of what the US soldier's found is beyond horrific. One soldier was quoted as saying, "Now I know why we fought this war." Elmont and his brethren volunteered to spend a significant part of their lives seeing and doing unspeakable things, yet put it behind them, came home and rebuilt our nation into what we have today.

Elmont chose to go into the education world and it is fortunate for us that we did. The message he leaves us is that we all have his standard of excellence as our benchmark. No whining, no complaining, no demands. Just do the job, no matter how awful, and get on with life. That's a high standard against which we all should measure ourselves.

My assignment, today, is several-fold: discuss my industry and our relationship with trust beneficiaries, relations with federal neighbors and threats to your trust lands. Each of these topics consumes entire college courses. Forgive me if I don't fill all the blanks in the next few minutes.

First, let me introduce to you my profession and employers.

People, ranging back to the first bi-pedal critters, used trees for food, clothing and shelter. Our job as forest managers is much the same: we grow the trees that make forest products you need to live or to live better.

My industry began with ancient peoples who used stone tools and fire to reduce trees to forest products or who boiled bark or berries for medicines and dyes; they made ropes, eating vessels and utensils, etc.

Today's forest products manufacturing plants are packed with computers. Lasers scan incoming logs and complex machines process wood in thousands of linear feet per minute. Energetic youngsters use sophisticated computer, engineering and economics backgrounds to extract the last board foot, cubic foot or bone-dry ton from a tree in the most efficient manner.

Our roots are based in antiquity and our future is increasingly complex but bright. Washington's Governor Christine Gregoire describes the forest industry as a "sunrise" industry. Given the metamorphosis we've been through in the past twenty years, maybe we are a "phoenix" industry, arisen from the ashes.

My history with the forest industry goes back to the end of WW II when I was born into a forestry family connected to Alaska's gold fields and Pennsylvania's steel industry. I wanted to be a forester by the time I could see over the dash board of my old man's pickup.

My career began at age ten, peeling Cascara bark and stealing cones from squirrels at \$4.00 per gunny sack, followed by fire-fighting, mill work, forest inventory, logging, tree planting in Washington and Idaho, all before I got my forestry degree. Over the past four decades, I've seen forestry in several different countries, many states and have been employed from the bottom to the top of the profession. It's been a long trail to this podium and I've enjoyed every mile of the journey.

One of the most fascinating parts of my career has been learning about trust lands and working with trust land managers. My industry has a direct relationship with your trust lands. You own and manage a valuable asset: trees. We pay for your trees, which allows you to build schools on your part and lets us produce forest products demanded by society.

In between, and in addition to your direct revenue, thousands of people have jobs, pay taxes, feed and educate their children all because someone had the foresight two hundred and twenty years ago to designate trust lands for revenue production. I think that is pretty cool but not everyone agrees.

Let me digress for a moment to read you a quote taken from a trust lands publication:

"A growing number of western communities are rapidly transforming as a result of urbanization and an ongoing shift in the United States towards more diversified knowledge based economies. This transformation has diminished the role of natural resources extraction in many regional economies, even as it has elevated cultural, environmental, recreational and location-based amenities to ever increasing prominence."¹

The author, in essence, says that natural resource management and extraction on trust lands is headed the way of the passenger pigeon. A political science professor would award the author an, "A," an economics student would fail. The perception of a changing paradigm is correct. The actuality is not. The hard truth is that all wealth comes from the ground, water or air. We probably should add the sun to that list. Regardless of the product, a natural resource is at the foundation. We currently are being reminded of that fact with nearly \$5.00 per gallon gasoline and its impact on our economy.

I am reminded of a recent time when the high-technology business was headed through the roof. I watched a giddy young investor shout, "the old economic rules no longer apply." If you ever hear someone say that, run as fast as you can. The old rules DO apply and we occasionally are forcefully reminded of that reality. But I wander from the topic...

You own a valuable natural resource which the forest industry turns into trust revenue. Some people believe that our interests are identical. Not so. Our interests are parallel, an important distinction to keep in mind. There is an important business and political relationship between the forest industry and trust beneficiaries, and as long as we set the right ground rules – and honor those rules - it can be a rewarding relationship.

¹ Culp, Peter W., D.B. Conradi and C. C. Tuell. 2005. Trust Lands in the American West: A Legal Overview and Policy Assessment. Lincoln Institute of Land Policy. Introduction at Page 2.

The business part of the relationship is fairly clear, the rules obvious to anyone who participates in trust timber sales and harvest. It is in the world of political relationships where the water gets murky.

It is human nature to navigate for the moral high ground. That can be a tough passage when you associate with people who kill trees for profit. Few people view production forestry as a fast route to a favorable audience at St. Peter's pearly gates.

If you want to protect trust lands revenue production, you must get involved in what some people see as an unsavory way to make money. Here are some ground rules that make it easier.

- Learn about your resources and how they are managed. You will conclude the masses have no clue about forest management, its complexity and how carefully it is done.
- Get to know your trust resource managers. You typically have excellent trust managers but they are the managers, not beneficiaries. You need to know what is happening on your trust lands. You don't need to be a technical expert but you should have a working knowledge of resource management. Your trust managers need to know you care.
- Get involved. The issues range from legislation to harvest level. Know your elected or appointed trust manager and let him or her know your desires, your needs, and your concerns.
- Identify your friends. This is not as easy as it sounds, because your natural political friends often are media targets. Some interest groups couldn't care less if you get one dime from your resources. Your commitment will be tested early and often.
- Protect your ability to extract revenue from your resources. It is tempting to leave it to the companies that harvest your trees or your trust manager, but they can't do it alone. Your involvement will range from getting involved in legal actions to testifying before a legislative committee to speaking with a reporter.

Not everyone needs to be a junior forester or commissioner or whatever. But you need to go at this with a plan so your voice can be heard. If you are looking for a model, Washington's trust managers, Commissioner of Public Lands, and beneficiaries have it figured out. Particularly look at the way Washington pays for its land management. It's as good a model as there is. I would've given a lot to have Washington's system when I was an Alaskan bureaucrat.

Washington's relationships among land manager, beneficiaries and the forest industry work because people respect the institution and people within the institution. It isn't perfect and it isn't without its occasional brawls. But it does work.

Let me turn to your Federal neighbors. We all know what is happening: insect infestations, disease, rampant wildfire, decrepit infrastructure and a pandemic fear of doing....anything. The state of the US Forest Service is professionally embarrassing. Some of the problems are self-inflicted and an overzealous Congress doesn't help; certain interest groups work to stop all forest management activity on federal lands. Parenthetically, you are in their gun sights, but more on that in a moment.

Why should you care? Well, let's say for the sake of argument that your trust lands border poorly managed federal lands and you are worried that bugs, might not recognize the property line.

What do you do?

First, arm yourself with information: what is happening? Why? What has been done to deal with it? If nothing, why? What is planned? What are the options? Most of this information can be provided by your trust manager, but there is no substitute for crawling around on site. You'd be amazed at the number of people who pontificate on natural resources issues they've never seen. Don't fall into that trap.

Next, initiate or participate in political and legal processes to protect your trust assets. You have that right. The law requires federal land managers to be good neighbors. I interpret that to mean federal managers must manage border forests in a manner that does not unreasonably impact their neighbors. Until society demands better federal forest land management, trust forests must be protected from their government neighbors.

Finally, on this topic, turnabout is fair game. Adjacent landowners may ask why trust land managers aren't doing more to control insects, disease, etc. on state managed lands. Pay attention to those questions. The answers are complex and may entail policy issues about which you will want more information. Again, a trip to the field is important to understand why those questions are being asked.

Let me talk for a moment about forest land management.

A currently popular line of thought promotes a strictly "natural" approach to forest land management, forests untouched by mankind. Ironically, this state of affairs probably never existed. Our nation's forests have been managed to one degree or another since the first human torched a forest to provide an opening, herd wildlife or to protect a community from bad guys.

The extent of that activity is debatable but some researchers believe it is far greater than most of us realize, especially prior to the time European disease decimated Native American populations.

Forests are dynamic. We cannot put a fence around a forest and call it "protected." It just doesn't work that way. In addition, our insatiable demand for forest products produces an undeniable need to manage forests to produce forest products. Obviously, not all forests will produce forest products, nor will all producing forests be managed with equal intensity. All forests, however, will have conscious decisions made as to how they will be managed.

The 1800's and early 1900's saw US timber harvest on a grand scale, in a manner perhaps best described as, "brutal." The early to mid 1900's saw a growing recognition that timber was a valuable natural resource that must be managed to have enough for all.

An explosion of resource management technology continues today and guides efforts to grow and harvest trees in an environment that is healthy and productive for all resources.

The mid to late 1900's saw a concurrent increased concern for the forest environment and all things potentially affected by timber production activities. Forest management changes resulting from public concerns are enormous. We still have much to learn but our progress is substantial.

Finally, let's discuss threats to your trust lands. I've alluded to those throughout this discussion but here they are in bold print:

- **The biggest threat to your forests is the movement to stop or substantially curtail trust timber harvest.** That fight currently concentrates on federal forests but trust lands are next in line.

The no-harvest strategy in Washington is to attack the trust mandate to produce revenue, either in a direct assault or piecemeal approach. It is a legal assault and one to carefully watch, but more importantly, one in which your voice is critical. You cannot depend on your state's attorney's general, your trust manager or the forest industry to do the job without your input.

A corollary strategy is to convince an unwary legislature that the world as we know it will end unless trust land timber production is curtailed. Again, this is an arena in which you must play. A favorite tactic is use a, "kids versus trees," label, a sure winner for newspaper editors more interested in hype than fact. You have a part to play in spiking that argument.

- **The next threat is the election or appointment of natural resource commissioners, department heads and the like, who do not understand - or who do not care - to understand their job is to honor the trust mandate to produce revenue.** Washington suffered through eight years of such a leader and the damage still lingers.
- **Regulatory creep is a subtle, effective road to reduced trust land productivity.** Washington's Achilles heel is compliance with the State Environmental Policy Act, an environmental review statute. It is tempting for your natural resource manager to say, "Ok, we'll exceed the requirements just this once" to avoid controversy.

Well, once becomes twice becomes four times, etc, until you give away the farm. Worse, by the time the problem is recognized, the pattern is established and the courts are reluctant to return to legislated standards. US Forest Service legal decisions coming out of the Ninth Circuit are examples of new law created almost daily. You do not want that to happen to your trust lands. State appellate courts, thus far, tend to be less blind to the written law than our federal courts.

Failure to aggressively protect your trust land management rights will be the death knell of those rights. This is not a business for the faint of heart or those who do want to get involved or get their hands dirty. It is not something that you do today; then walk away tomorrow. It is a constant struggle, a dirty little war, and sometimes it's not a lot of fun.

On those dark days when you wonder if it is worthwhile, however, drive out to a low income rural school district and watch children play in a well maintained environment. Go watch people at a sawmill, plywood mill, etc., go about their daily lives producing that which we use, or go watch loggers harvest your trees knowing they paid you for the privilege of so doing. When you do that, it becomes a worthy, honorable endeavor, one in which I'm proud to play a part.

Ladies and gentlemen, it has been an honor to speak to you. Thank you for the privilege.