

National Association of State Foresters 2005 Annual Meeting  
Madison, Wisconsin  
Address by Donald H. Smith, Connecticut State Forester  
October 3, 2005

**"State and Private Forestry: Our History, Our Roots ... at the Turning Point — or not?"**

Good morning, Ladies and gentlemen. I truly am honored to be with you all here today in this beautiful city between the lakes.

In the 30 minutes I have before you this morning, I want to talk to you about the people, events and influences that have brought us and the forest we love to this moment. I want to talk some about what the future may bring and the role the State Forester and state and private forest lands may have in that future.

Let's talk about the way it was.

When European settlers first arrived in the New World, it wasn't long before the settlers and their governments assumed an almost religious belief in the "Legend of Inexhaustibility", the idea that this continent's forests would last forever. As the Europeans pushed back from the seacoasts, they found forests that seemed to go on forever.

Explorers were astonished at the vastness of the forest. In 1721, the French Jesuit priest and explorer Charlevoix wrote that "We are in the midst of the greatest forests in the world. They are as old as the world, itself, and there is nothing perhaps in nature comparable to them." For 250 years from the time of Jamestown and Plymouth, the seemingly endless forests of North America fueled the development of a new nation. By the time the 1800's rolled around, the Legend of Inexhaustibility had become a conviction held by the vast majority of the nation's citizens.

As our history has shown time and again, when humans believe something will endure forever, we begin to take it for granted. We become careless with it. As we all know, the few voices of caution heard at the turn of the 19th century were prophetic. Our ancestors were careless in the way they treated this nation's natural resources. But such words of caution fell on deaf ears and were basically regarded as heresy until well into the 1870's.

Our nation's westward push following the Civil War spawned an unprecedented epidemic of railroad building and construction of new cities and towns. The pressing demand for wood stimulated the invention of new harvesting technologies to feed increasingly larger and more efficient sawmills. In short order, the forests of the east, the south and the Midwest were ravaged and the voice of caution quickly grew louder.

In 1873, the American Association for the Advancement of Science held its national convention in Portland, Maine. At that convention, Dr. Franklin Hough of Lowville, New

York presented a paper on "The Duty of Government in the Preservation of Forests." His paper was well received and resulted in a petition to Congress for action with regard to the preservation of forests and the cultivation of timber. Many regard Dr. Hough's paper as the first in a chain of events that brought about the creation of what we now know as the Forest Service – and the State & Private Forestry programs within the Forest Service.

Dr. Bernhard Femow assumed control of the new federal Division of Forestry in 1886 and worked hard to lay the groundwork for the states to create their own forestry agencies. He immediately set the Division to promoting State forestry agencies and providing useful practical assistance throughout the national forestry community.

In his first report, he made a statement about European forestry that I was most impressed with. He wrote: "It is not the control of the Government over private property, it is not the exercise of eminent domain, it is not police regulations and restrictions that have produced desirable effect upon private forestry abroad, but simply the example of a systematic and successful management of its own forests, and the opportunity offered by the government to the private forest owner of availing himself of the advice and guidance of well-qualified forestry officials." Nearly 120 years ago, in 1886, the head of the agency that would become the US Forest Service embraced the philosophy that forms the root of what our State forestry agencies do today. Simply put: "Lead by example - and educate."

Gifford Pinchot took the reins of the fledgling organization and, during his tenure, shaped the framework of the Forest Service to much as we see it today. It was under Pinchot that virtually all the forestry work of the nation was transferred to the Bureau of Forestry, which was re-titled the Forest Service on July 1, 1905.

Henry S. Graves succeeded Pinchot in 1910 and almost immediately established the Forest Products Laboratory here, in Madison, Wisconsin. We all understand and greatly appreciate the astounding advances in wood technology that have issued from the Forest Products Lab in 95 years. These advances have opened new markets for wood products from State and private forests and thus contributed additional incentives for the application of forest management on those lands. I think it is absolutely wonderful that we will be visiting and touring the Lab. The Lab is an integral part of our history – and must be a part of our future.

Graves also saw the landmark Weeks Act signed into law on March 1, 1911. The law authorized the federal government to acquire land as national forests. Initially, eastern lands along navigable watersheds were considered.

As the years progressed however, the Forest Service relied upon the Weeks Law to also enable the acquisition of select western lands. Graves organized the Research Branch of the Forest Service — the source of the Forest Inventory & Analysis information upon which we depend so heavily today.

During Grave's tenure, the Smith-Lever Act of 1914 established a Federal-State Cooperative Extension program to provide education for the public in agriculture and natural resources. Today, this educational system includes professionals in each of

America's 1862 land-grant universities, in Tuskegee University and in sixteen 1890 land-grant universities. All of us in this room appreciate just how immense a contribution the Cooperative Extension system has made and continues to make to the future of our nation's privately-owned forest lands.

William B. Greeley was appointed chief in 1920. During his 8 years at the helm, the Clark-McNary Act of June 7, 1924 broadened federal/state cooperative efforts to include producing and distributing tree seedlings and providing forestry assistance to farmers. The Clark-McNary Act also provided a strong incentive to States to establish and support State forestry agencies. Most of us sitting here today owe the existence of our state forestry agencies to the Clark/McNary Act.

Ferdinand A. Silcox was appointed Chief of the Forest Service in 1933. Especially significant during his 6 years in office was his success in focusing public attention on the conservation problems of private forest land ownership.

It was during his turn at the helm of the Forest Service that the Civilian Conservation Corps and the Works Progress Administration lent so monumental a hand to the then and future management of the nation's federal and state forests. Each State Forester — in fact, every American citizen - owes a debt of gratitude to Chief Silcox, to those who worked under him and to the men of the CCC's and the WPA who worked in the woods. The accomplishments of that army of conservation workers are of historic proportion, far reaching and far, far too numerous to relate here today.

A flurry of government incentives for private forestlands were spawned in the 1950's and 60's as the Cooperative Forest Management Act, the Soil Bank Program and the McIntire -Stennis Cooperative Forestry Research Program all came into being.

The Cooperative Forest Management Act of 1950 gave authority to the U.S. Forest Service to work with private landowners through state agencies and formed the basis of State administration of federal forestry programs for private lands and forest-based industries for decades to come.

Good fortune continued to smile on state and private forestry programs through the 1970's and beyond. The Cooperative Forestry Assistance Act of 1978 re-wired and juiced up the old CFM for the modern era of forestry.

Since then, the various Farm Bills of 1985, 1990, 1996, and 2002 have built upon the array of programs initiated by the CFM Act of the 1950's.

A seminal event occurred in the latter half of the 20th century that caused a fundamental shift in the theater of public opinion and, thus wrought significant change in the world of North American forestry.

Following World War II, the demand for wood products became ever more intense. The nation increasingly looked to its National Forests for raw materials and in just 25 years, timber production from the National Forest System increased twelve fold.

In the late 1960s, the clearcutting and terracing of slopes on the Bitterroot National Forest became the lightning rod of the clearcutting issue. Protests erupted after a series

of sensational articles in the Missoula, Montana, newspaper (the Missoulian). Shortly afterward, a second clearcutting controversy erupted on the Monongahela National Forest in West Virginia, intensifying the debate over clearcutting and forest management.

The extraordinary publicity surrounding the Bitterroot and the Monongahela, brought widespread condemnation of the practice of clearcutting. It didn't matter that the vast majority of Americans didn't understand what clearcutting was. In the lexicon of the times, the cutting of ANY tree was regarded as a clearcut – and therefore an anathema.

The public relations damage to the practice of forest management across the United States was almost immediate and certainly long-lasting. Every time a skidder was spotted in the woods some form of protest or outcry was sure to follow. Speaking from my personal experience, in Connecticut, only horse logging was spared the lash.

As a consequence of the Bitterroot/Monongahela controversy, in order to ease a landowner's anxiety over forest management, state and private foresters were forced to engage in the long, repetitive process of patiently explaining that there was a difference between the Bitterroot and Monongahela cuts and the type of forest management that was most appropriate for their forests. Gradually, a growing general awareness of both the benefits and adverse effects of various forest management practices on the ecosystem has emerged. And yet, we're still explaining today, some 35 years later.

Gratefully, the state and private forests and their management have evolved and distanced themselves from the early blissful ignorance of the "Legend of Inexhaustibility" and its wasteful, abusive practices. Today, the state and private forests of the United States are served by a sophisticated, ecologically responsive suite of services and programs that echo the twin paradigms of stewardship and sustainability.

The state and private lands successes during the end of the 19th and first half of the 20th centuries came about through a miraculous confluence of forceful, articulate and dedicated national leaders, an unprecedented demand for domestic wood products to fuel the growth of a young nation, a unique set of economic conditions, and the wakening of the American citizen to the place of the American forest in their lives.

Sounds like we've attained a state and private forestry brand of utopia, doesn't it, my friends? Perhaps we can take a break and rest on our laurels for a while...pat ourselves on the back, so to speak.

Well, not so fast. A show of hands, State Foresters:  
How many of you have as many staff as you need?  
How many of you have as many staff as you had 10 years ago?  
How many of you have reason to believe that your staff numbers will grow over the next 10 years?  
How many of you enjoy state-based funding that has grown faster than the rate of inflation over the past 10 years?  
How many of you have fewer programs to administer today than you had 10 years ago?

Shortly after I became Connecticut's 13th State Forester, I was asked to prioritize the programs of the Division of Forestry – in preparation for significant budget cuts that were in the offing. To do that, I had to soberly reflect upon where my Division's meager resources ought best be expended. In preparation for today's talk, I went through a similarly reflective exercise. There are disquieting clouds gathering on the horizon. The hairs on the back of my neck are telling me that a crisis or two are brewing and that the future of state & private forests and their management hangs in the balance.

My conclusions can be distilled down to four basic priorities:

**I believe that, as leaders in the field of conservation and responsible stewardship, the first priority of each State Forester and of this organization must be to retain or increase the integrity of our nation's forest ecosystems.**

During most of the 20th century, the amount of forest land in the United States remained essentially unchanged.

Recently, however, an increasing amount of forested acres in many states has been lost to development or to a shift from traditional forest to more highly fragmented, more urban forest. This trend is the result of uncontrolled urban expansion, a lack of practicable land use policies, and limited economic incentives to own and manage forest land. Fragmentation, parcelization and urbanization is a cancer that is inexorably destroying the ecological integrity of the forests of America. If our forests are to continue to provide the variety of amenities for life in this nation, we must find a cure for this cancer.

This cannot be an easy task, my friends. The uniquely American lifestyle contributes to the fragmentation of forests. In their drive to own a piece of wilderness, more and more Americans are moving to rural areas and building big houses on large lots.

This human-caused forest fragmentation disrupts many ecological processes and threatens the health and sustainability of forests. It endangers wildlife habitats, plant and wildlife diversity, and water quality. Fragmentation also compromises the economic value of a forest as a recreational or timber resource. When you think about it, fragmentation destroys the very thing that draws humans to live in the forest in the first place. It eats away at the unbroken forests' inherent, natural beauty. People are loving the forests of America to death.

What can we do to address this problem? We are the experts – and we have discussed parcelization, fragmentation and urbanization among ourselves – as experts. We are the trusted servants of the public — and yet we have not seriously tried to raise their awareness of this insidious problem. It is time to sound the alarm and educate, educate, educate!

We must teach a nation in love with its forests to "Love it and Leave it!" People must learn to be content with recreating in the forest in as many sustainable pursuits as may be invented — and then leaving the forest to go home. The drive to own a chunk of our continent's precious forested lands must end.

The future of the forests of America lies in the quality of life in America's cities. If we can make our cities a joy to live in, the demand to carve up the forests of America will abate. Ironically, if we as State Foresters are to protect the integrity of our nation's forests, we must become the strongest of advocates for the renewal of our nation's cities. We need to advocate for more than just our own parochial interest in urban forestry funding. We must be even stronger advocates for all urban quality of life issues — for better services, better public safety, better education, better public transportation, better local recreational facilities.

On the supply side of the equation are those who now own the forest and are prone to subdivide it, carving it into chunks for sale.

In general, Americans believe that a landowner should have the right to do anything on or to his land, provided his actions don't infringe on others. Americans believe that a landowner should have the right to sell all or part of his land if he wants to. Yes, we're all about property rights - and that's fine — in most cases.

But we, as State Foresters, know — or we should know — that there is a difference between property rights and property responsibilities. While a landowner may have the legal right to destroy the forest he owns by, cutting it up and selling it, piecemeal, every landowner has an ethical responsibility to honor the future. Every landowner has an obligation to be a steward of the land for the future.

State Foresters need to become the loud and insistent conscience of today's forest land owner. In today's world, where the seductive lure of profit has become a justification for any action, State Foresters need to shout a counter-cultural message: "Subdivision is wrong. Your responsibilities as a trustee for the future supersede your rights as a landowner."

I know what you're thinking — it's useless . . . we'll be tilting at windmills and doomed to failure. Maybe — or maybe not. But, it doesn't really matter, does it? It's the truth and we have to say it. We have to say it loud and long. Because, if we don't speak up for the integrity of the forest for the future; we are betraying that future — and betraying our past — and we have no right to call ourselves leaders.

The National Association of State Foresters has tremendous potential to lead in protecting the viability of privately owned forests and strengthening the incentives for forest stewardship. This is truly our turf, and yet, in my 13 years as a member of NASF, this organization has not meaningfully studied the role that federal, state and local taxation systems play in the involuntary liquidation and parcelization of family-owned farms, ranches, and forests. Private forest owners are an endangered species — upon which the well-being of all other endangered species clearly depend. It is time for NASF to call together America's best minds for a comprehensive review of federal, state and local forest taxation policies and practices – and to recommend broad changes at the federal, state and local levels to insure the future of privately owned forests.

**I believe our second priority must be to act to protect our nation's existing forest resources from damaging agents that effect broad areas of forested land.**

We all know Smokey's mantra by heart. We're also familiar with the more recent messages pertaining to fire in the wildland/urban interface. And, yes, wildfire is a damaging agent for our nation's forests. But, our concern for the safety of the forest must extend beyond the old saw of fire.

We should recognize and act on what may be a greater imperative – that of protecting the forest from poor or abusive management practices. Slipshod pseudo-forestry and flat-out abusive practices have the potential to devastate the genetic characteristics of forest stands. The damage from bad forest practices can take generations to resolve – and, in some cases the ecological and economic potential of the forest will be ruined forever. We, as State Foresters are expected to act to be certain that our management of the public forests in our charge is technically appropriate and environmentally responsive. We must also act to insure that the practitioners of forestry and forest management on private lands do no less.

When European settlers first arrived on this continent, globalization also arrived. Europeans brought new diseases and pests with them – and the New World was defenseless against them. Are things significantly different today? Only in that, thanks to advances in transportation, the spread of new diseases and pests can occur in the span of hours rather than months or years. For our forests, the threat of non-native invasive insects and plants – and exotic diseases – has never been more immediate and our forests are, essentially, defenseless. The Asian Long-horned Beetle, Emerald Ash Borer, and Sudden Oak Death are all poster children for what's wrong with the regulation of interstate commerce. The prospect of any such pest arriving in your state through infected shipments is not only bad for the forest, it is bad for commerce. It is bad for the nursery industry; it is bad for the timber industry. In the case of Sudden Oak Death, shipments with infected plants or plants exposed to infection were shipped throughout the East Coast - despite quarantine. That kind of quarantine is no quarantine.

It is true that, under the Constitution, no individual state can regulate interstate commerce - but the United States Congress can. The National Association of State Foresters ought to be demanding that Congress better regulate interstate commerce.

Protecting our state and private forests must also include shielding them from extremes in policy or regulation. At one extreme, there are those who advocate for policies that would place unreasonable and non-sustainable demands on the state and private forests of the nation.

At the other extreme, there are those who would bar any use of the state and private forest, sustainable or otherwise, effectively putting our nation's greatest asset in the proverbial "lockbox" and throwing away the key. State Foresters are called to lead policymakers and public, alike, to understand and endorse a balanced approach towards the use and care of the nation's forested lands.

It is a daunting task, my friends – because forestry has a persistent image problem. As Adam Moore, the Executive Director of the Connecticut Forest & Park Association said in a recent speech, the thing about forestry is that we cannot hide the aspects of this business that are ugly and violent. Agriculture doesn't have this problem. Cows grazing in the field look wonderfully pastoral – and steak looks great in the supermarket. But those who enjoy a sizzling steak, hot off the grill, don't see what happens in the slaughterhouse.

Trees also look great as they stand majestically in the woods – and lumber looks great at the lumberyard. But, for the most part, logging is a violent activity that, to the untrained eye looks pretty bad. There is no concealing it. The forestry version of the slaughterhouse is right out there in the open, for everyone to see. The unsightliness of logging has been, and probably always will be, a problem for forestry. There is an opportunity here for us, as leaders, to be frank and honest about that. Honesty in government can be refreshing, nowadays. We have an opportunity before us, the leaders of the profession of forestry, which is conducted in both the public and private sectors, to take a stand for honesty and openness. We can show the public: this is where your lumber comes from, this is where your paper comes from, this is how we do it.

Like the inevitability of death and taxes, debates over appropriate uses of forests will continue to rage – and, in those debates, the State Forester cannot afford to be viewed as anti-environmentalist. The trick is to be a positive force in the discourse that will take place. We need to recognize that whether we are State Foresters, members of organized environmental groups, or simply members of the common ruck, each of us look for many of the same things in life: clean air; clean water; good jobs; a safe, healthy environment; and healthy, diverse forests. These are reasonable expectations. We simply cannot afford to expend our energy battling with a small number of organized environmentalists over different ways of working toward the same goals. As leaders, we need to think seriously about how we can play a larger, more visible role in achieving these positive societal goals.

**I believe that our third priority should be to responsibly and effectively manage our publicly-owned forested lands.**

Each of us has been entrusted with the management of forest lands for the public good. Over the past few generations, the citizens of our respective states made conscious decisions to fund the purchase of specific lands and to place those lands under the care of their State government. Good and trusting people with a vision to the future set aside these lands as their loving gift to descendants that they will never know. To honor those expectations, we are called upon to be stewards of these lands for the future.

**Finally, I believe that our fourth priority must be to motivate and educate those who own forested lands and those who earn a living from them to embrace the concept of forest stewardship and to employ sound forest management practices on the land.**



I spoke earlier about the difference between property rights and property responsibilities as they pertain to forest fragmentation. The concept of rights versus responsibilities also applies to the care of the forest. All forest land owners need to exercise their property responsibilities as well as their property rights. This means approaching their forests not from the perspective of "What is the minimum we can get by with while yet complying with laws and regulations?" but from the perspective of "What do we need to do to honor our responsibilities to our neighbors, to those who depend on the forest for its economic contributions, and to future generations?" This is what forestry is all about. It is all about how to manage and sustainably use forests for human benefit.

It is a sad statement, but true, that there are foresters and forest products harvesters who care nothing for the future. Each of us here could probably relate at least a few instances of abusive forest practices and the ne'er-do-wells that perpetrate them. As leaders of our respective local forestry communities, we should be encouraging foresters and harvesters to recognize that forestry is far broader than just timber sales and inventory. If a trail is to be established in the forest, that is the forester's domain. If warbler habitat is the goal, if scenic vistas are the goal, those, too, are the work of the forester. If there is an endangered plant in the forest, it is the forester's duty – and privilege – to care for that plant. Truly, what an honor it is to be charged with the care and nursing of a species teetering on the brink of extinction. Too many foresters and loggers view endangered species as roadblocks to their limited view of forest management.

If the history of state and private forests in America reveals anything, it is that land and people are intertwined throughout that history. It took 250 years for the Legend of Inexhaustibility to be seriously challenged. Another 100 years of selfless dedication by a series of charismatic and influential national, state and local forest conservation leaders saw the return of the forest and the development of a suite of forestry programs and services targeting our nation's state and private forestlands. In the past 30 years, user demands on State-owned forestland have dramatically increased as have threats to the continued viability of privately-owned forested lands. This is a pivotal time in the history of the state and private forest lands of this nation.

It is a moment that cries out for a new cadre of charismatic and influential national, state and local forest conservation leaders.

Now is the time for NASF to step forward and become the catalyst . . . calling out the visionary, charismatic and influential from within its own ranks and from across the breadth of our nation's forestry community to lay the foundation for the next century of progress.

Those who came before expect it of us - and we owe it to those who are yet to come.

###