

The Instability of Stability

by

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As I and my key staff suffered through all the acrimonious congressional hearings that have gone on this year--with more to come--I was struck with how many times the desire for "stability" or "predictability" of timber supply was mentioned by committee members and witnesses as an absolute necessity. The issue is at the forefront of the discussion of how national forests should be managed. The extensive, increasing and continuous changes prevalent throughout western societies now becomes manifest in how natural resources are exploited. These continuing debates and changes shake the pillars of the temple of the faithful who chant many mantras with the same meaning--"non-declining even flow," "community stability," "annual sales quantity," "predictability." This refrain was manifest in hundreds of the responses that the Forest Service received to the proposed revised land use planning regulations published in the Federal Register "give us guaranteed results and assured stability."

The vision that I was taught in school of the "regulated forest" and the resultant predictable outputs of commodities has turned out to have been a dream. And a dream that could only be realized in a time of seemingly boundless virgin forests. This vision held only so long as, no matter what the circumstances, there was more timber available over the next ridge. And, that timber was relatively cheap--easy to access and long--and environmental risks were either less appreciated or more palatable than at present. Further, it was assumed that good forestry was--as a matter of course--good wildlife management, good watershed and management, etc.

By now it is becoming obvious that this dream was built on the pillars of the seemingly boundless virgin forest and an ethic of manifest destiny coupled with hubris of being able to predict the response of nature and humans. This was coupled with an inflated sense of understanding of forested ecosystems and of human control. Perhaps it is time to recognize that such stability is not attainable in any western region except for relatively short periods of years or decades.

Why? Consider the variables that interact to affect long-term stability of the supply of timber. Each variable is subject, more or less independently, to considerable variation over the longer term. Taken together, in terms of their interactions, these variables are guaranteed to produce varying levels of uncertainty and makes attainment of stability unlikely.

It is increasingly apparent that ecological processes are not as well understood nor as predictable as had been assumed by natural resource managers steeped in Clementsian ecological theory of orderly and predictable succession of plant communities from bare ground to a mature, steady state. Ecologists now understand that ecological responses to management actions may vary widely depending on the interactions of influences ranging from vagaries of climate to impacts from previously executed management activities.

Impacts of insect and disease in managed forests are not clearly predictable nor more than marginally or temporarily controllable. The levels of insect populations and diseases are influenced by the interactions of ecological processes and previous forest management actions. Such presents problems enough with native insects and pathogens. And, given an adequate timeframe, the continued exchange of forest pests and diseases between continents is certain. It is well to consider the consequences of such introductions that

have already taken place such as chestnut blight, white pine blister rust, gypsy moth, to name a few. Methods of "control" are constantly evolving but the feasibility of such treatments are dependent on a number of factors including environmental effect, cost effectiveness, public acceptability and legality --all of which fluctuate. Only 25 years ago, DDT was being widely applied in the forest environment and was highly effective in suppressing some insect "outbreaks" and assumed to be benign in the environment. Times change. DDT is now banned from such use.

Fire seems less and less "controllable" or even manageable--at least not at the levels assumed in the past. Of course, fire is part and parcel of ecological processes. Debates now rage over appropriate policy toward fire control, the use of prescribed fire--and where, when, if and how to suppress wildfire. The extent and severity of wildfires that occurred several times in the past decade would not have been considered likely one or several decades ago.

Drought, perhaps another word for weather, comes periodically and is not highly predictable in terms of occurrence, duration, severity or influence. The interactions of weather extremes with other variables that affect the forests can be dramatic. For example, consider the interaction of the spruce budworm outbreak and severe drought in the Blue Mountains of Oregon. If global warming and its effects on weather patterns predicted by some scientists are borne out, there will be dramatic impacts on managers' ability to forecast commodity production. Others question the entire hypothesis. Uncertainty abounds.

Management actions have a pronounced effect on future forest conditions--this, of course, is expected. But, such management actions vary widely and treatments change quickly with the interactions of ecological understanding, markets, public acceptability, cost/benefit estimates, funding available and legality. And, management actions frequently do produce the results anticipated. Management actions take place with capabilities in risk assessment are rudimentary at best.

Funding is the fuel that drives most land management activities. The best laid out management plans can only be effective when executed by a qualified work force to the extent that funding allows. Experience has shown that funding for forest management--at least on federal lands--has never come forth at anything approaching programmed levels. And, what funding is available have proven to be neither stable in amount nor in designated purpose. Funding amounts and focus change dramatically with the surges of political tides, the change of persons in power in key positions and the economic and social pressures of the moment. The trend to micro-management of federal land through the budget process by the Congress and the Administration, seems to be increasing inexorably over time. Perhaps the instability of natural resources management is one of the attributes of a vibrant democracy.

The presence of a stable work force of adequate size and with appropriate skills and sufficient experience in working within particular ecotypes and cultures is essential to any "stable" management approach. A work force that is in a constant state of flux due to budget shifts, uncertainty of policy, shifts in organizational structures and dramatic adjustments in size is not a work force that has the highest probability of producing predictable results. The last several years have been notable for dramatic change in work force numbers and skill mix--with significant losses among the most experienced personnel, declining budgets and changes in budget allocations that reflected changes in priorities.

Science continues an inexorable march toward "truth" or, at least, some better approximation thereof. Unfortunately, for the sake of predictability, in the course of this march new knowledge, understandings and hypotheses for management come even more rapidly to the fore. Inevitably, such proves perennially unsettling to the status quo and cause adjustments--sometime dramatic adjustments--in management approaches. Stability, thus, can only be maintained in the absence of new knowledge. And, in the longer term, achievement of some degree of stability will require a constant balancing act between new knowledge that increases yields and new knowledge that produces changes in or constraints on present practices. Unfortunately, this recognition has led some in political power to seek stability by means of limiting the acquisition, dissemination or use of new knowledge.

Closely related to development of new knowledge is the development of technology that will constantly produce new opportunities to conduct forest practices in better ways, obtain information and store and process data in new and more meaningful ways. Yet new technology, like new information, can cut both ways in terms of effect on stability.

Markets determine prices to be paid for commodities and, in turn, the feasibility and purpose of management for the production of wood fiber. Markets also influence the timing of the cutting of trees and the feasible intensity of management. Markets then produce both short- and long-term effects on forest management that have an unsettling effect on stability and form of supply. Local fluctuations in markets for wood products seem to be becoming even less predictable as timber markets become increasingly worldwide in scope.

Closely related to markets for wood are the effects of substitutability of other products for wood or stability. As wood prices increase, more and more substitutes for wood come into some markets which serve to constrain some wood prices at the margin.

Perhaps most influential of the variables that influence stability in forest management, and resultant timber cut levels, are shifts in perceived public opinions about what is appropriate forest management. Such is particularly focused as to what is appropriate management for the public's lands. Significant changes in public opinion can be noted over the past 50 years--with truly significant and intense shifts over the past 2-3 decades. These shifts are manifested in the laws with direct influence on federal land management that came into being over that period. Examples include the determined move by foresters to even-aged forest management in the period 1960-1985 and the subsequent retreat from "clearcutting" in the early 1990s.

These shifts in public opinions come to bear on land managers through politics. As the political pendulum has swung back and forth over the decades, associated effects on forest management and timber supply are obvious. Politics comes most obviously to bear in the enactment of laws that can and do have dramatic effect on forest management. The interactions of such laws as the Multiple-Use Sustained Yield Act, the National Forest Management Act, the Wilderness Act, the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, the Clean Air Act, the Clean Water Act, the Endangered Species Act and others that geometrically increase those effects have produced a situation where predictability of timber yield has been dramatically influenced. This predictability is also shaken by administrative actions of regulatory agencies exercising their authorities under these laws. Note the 80% reductions in timber yields from the public lands in the Pacific Northwest emanating from the decisions to list the northern spotted owl, the marbled murrelet and various species of salmon as "threatened" under the Endangered Species Act. Such listings, of course, were the result of the recognition of more complex social and environmental problems.

Of equal significance is the inexorable increase in the number of court cases and appeals emerging as a consequence of these laws and their interactions directed toward federal land management agency(s) actions. New court decisions are, in turn, rendered--often with dramatic influence on federal land management--on an ever-increasing rate. Each such court decision has potential to dramatically influence the predictability of timber supply and other multiple uses (grazing, fish and wildlife, recreation and water).

Added to this already fluid situation is the increasing propensity of both Administration and the Congress to micro-manage federal land management agencies' activities through the budget process. Budgets, after all, are very significant policymaking tools. It is increasingly common for the long-standing struggle for power between the Executive and Legislative bodies over federal land management to be played out in the form of increasingly detailed budget direction to land management agencies. And, it is becoming more common for the Congress to dramatically alter the effects of law(s) and evolved case law by giving contrary direction in legislative budget action with the caveat--"all other laws notwithstanding." These "quick fixes," however, frequently cause far more problems in federal land forest management over the long term than they "fix" in the short term. The increasing acrimony of the debate over the advisability and approaches to carrying out the timber salvage and release of the "318 sales" mandated in the Rescission

Bill of 1995 is another example.

The response by the various government agencies involved in attempting to carry out Administration and congressional budget direction in compliance with all the applicable laws that are constantly--and independently--subject to interpretation by the courts at these levels has been to evolve increasingly complex processes to try to lay out a path--a yellow brick road to the Emerald City--that will assure a managerial decision that will stand up to the judicial review that will, most assuredly, come.

These increasingly complex processes, in turn, produce a veritable minefield of potential violations of process that resource managers must avoid in any attempt to produce commodities in compliance with often conflicting laws and regulations and political direction. Any violation of process, no matter how slight, may well result in a judicial injunction. These complex processes--which become more complex with each court loss--require more and more sophisticated technical assessments of various kinds and more and more time to execute. And, thus, these processes become increasingly expensive in dollars and time. Managers, unfortunately but understandably, produce an atmosphere for managers that has become known as "risk aversion." This makes timber sales ever more expensive to execute and produces increasing difficulty in producing timber from federal lands with returns that are above costs needs careful examination as to the "benefits" that result from such increased sale preparation costs and difficulty--i.e., are better, more environmentally sensitive timber sales the result?

Given the myriad of interacting variables, it is time for concerned citizens and our leaders to accept the reality that the dream of a stable timber supply--and other "products"--from public lands is an illusion. Certainly, this conclusion is inevitable if the status quo is maintained.

If the stability or predictability of timber supply (or any other product) is deemed important, the picture painted here is a gloomy portrait. However, while stability seems likely to be considerably less certain than in the "good old days" when virgin forests and forest managers unknowing of consequences and with too much certitude buttressed the myth of stability, commodity production from federal lands could be much more predictable than at present. How?

Ecological processes are too complex to ever be fully understood. However, such understanding is being dramatically enhanced and can be accelerated with increased, or at least stable, levels of research effort. The trend toward using ecosystem management concepts in carefully defined contexts holds promise for dampening oscillations in forest management outputs caused by managerial attempts to sustain biodiversity by addressing "recovery"--one threatened or endangered species at a time. Oscillations in timber supply can be moderated by taking a conservative view of "annual sale quantity" projections as opposed to the tendency to make overly optimistic projections such as those that resulted in the first forest planning efforts of a decade or so ago.

It is becoming increasingly obvious that the overriding de facto policy for the management of federal lands has become the protection of biodiversity. That de facto policy has evolved through the interaction of laws, regulations, court cases and expedient administrative direction. This de facto policy, I believe, is the crux of the raging debate over the levels of commodity production that can be expected from the federal lands. Such a dramatically important policy should be recognized and examined closely by the American people, the President and the Congress. If that is the policy, it should be clearly stated, recognized openly and the consequences accepted. If such is not a desired national policy, that should be stated. In the recognition of this crux of the issue of federal land management and in a clear declaration of policy regarding preservation of biodiversity, lies one key to the "stability" debate.

The role of insect and disease in forest management could be addressed in a fashion more in tune with long-term effects. This would replace the more common management course of "control" efforts involving application of pesticides whose effects in overall ecological processes are poorly understood and are often found ineffective or environmentally unacceptable in the long term. Such a systems approach will require reconstitution of research and development efforts that have deteriorated over the past several decades.

Much good thinking and planning have already gone into the design of such efforts.

The role of fire in forest ecosystems has been reevaluated at the federal policy level. It is clear that controlled fire has a part in forest management. But, past fire and forest management practices have helped produce situations in many areas of the west where many wildfires now burn too hot and too expansively to be ecologically, socially or politically acceptable. Therefore, it is essential to begin producing situations in managed forests wherein fire can play an appropriate and immediate role. This will require a shift in management policy and a shift in management policy and a shift in management focus and funding priorities. It is well past time to face up to the costs of fire management. "Funding games" with the federal land management agency budgets in which true costs of fire control efforts are, at best, difficult to ascertain and, at worst, camouflaged should cease. These games make it appear that budgets for fire management are much lower than is actually the case. Fire management is routinely funded at too low a level to make proactive, effective management efforts possible. And, then, agencies are afforded an "open checkbook" to fight wildfires of a size and intensity to provide adequate political impact to open the checkbook. Such an approach is misleading in both terms of the actual resources allocated to fire suppression management over the long term and in terms of making the best and most effective use of resources, of people and dollars.

Weather fluctuations cannot be controlled but can be recognized and anticipated as natural phenomena that occur--and on a recurring basis. Such occurrences are normal and are not an unnatural "disaster." And, if such fluctuations are considered as within the range of anticipated variability, anticipated consequences can be modeled into anticipated management outcomes.

Outcomes of management actions can be conservatively estimated with past experience as a guide. Insanity has been defined as doing the same things over and over and expecting a different result. Decidedly, optimistic outcomes were the trademark of the first generation of forest plans. With decided regularity, this optimism has not been justified and only reluctantly recognized and abandoned. This caused the agency(s) performance, in terms of commodity production, to consistently come in at below anticipated levels--i.e., the predictions were not valid and belated recognition of that fact, in turn, caused additional instability because of accumulated effects. More conservative approaches are more apt to produce predictable results. And, if results exceed those anticipated, it is easier to adjust commodity yields upward than to deal with the social and political consequences of short fall.

Funding could be guaranteed over longer time frames. For example, steady funding for, say a 5-year period with enhanced ability to shift funds between budget line items at the land management agency head's discretion could add considerable stability to programs. This stability in funding is directly related to the maintenance of a stable and appropriately balanced work force. It would be likewise conducive to stability of production if work force numbers and composition were predicated on work to be done and objectives achieved rather than on politically driven manipulations of the work force unrelated to the work to be done. Or, conversely, the work to be done should be adjusted to match funding and work force--and quickly. Doing "more with less" can only stretch so far as the corollary situation of doing "less with less" quickly sets in.

While the search for new understanding through science may produce short-term instability in commodities such as timber supply as managers react to new information, such efforts are essential to long-term stability if renewable natural resources are to be managed in a sustainable fashion. In the end, there can be no turning back from science--no matter how politically expedient that may seem in the short run. Given the inexorably increased human population with increasing per capita demands on natural resources, humans are engaged in a race between increasing knowledge to ensure the sustainability of renewable natural resources and ultimate disaster. And, while the cost of the acquisition of understanding through science may seem expensive, that cost is minuscule over the long term compared to the cost of ignorance. Yet, as a nation, we are stepping back from an already inadequate investment in such research and synthesis of extensive information for use in guiding management.

The continued development of technology is likewise essential to make better and more environmentally benign use of forested lands that are available for timber production. The same is to be said for better and more varied uses for wood previously considered non-merchantable. These and other such developments can help increase the efficiency in use of timber yields and thus offset the constraints on wood supply that come about for other reasons. Efficiency in the harvest and processing of wood and in reuse (recycling) of wood fiber should be considered as valuable--or more valuable--than increased wood production.

The effects of shifts in markets for timber can be somewhat stabilized by allowing land management agencies more flexibility in when and how timber is marketed. Selling timber at a relatively continuous rate regardless of current price would seem irrational to any private land owner and might seem equally ill-advised to land management agencies. Timber purchasers sometimes buy, for speculative reasons, the regular offerings of federal timber--which are offered regardless of market conditions--and cut these sales at a more opportune time. Withholding federal timber from the market during periods of inordinately low prices should produce pressure for increase in price and selling when the price is relatively high should produce forces that reduce price. The result should tend to be a market with dampened oscillations in price over time--which should, in turn, have a stabilizing influence. This should provide better opportunity for federal land managers to avoid "below cost" timber sales, which would tend to stabilize the political discourse that surges around this complex issue; discourse which is often times over simplified. Timber sales could be readied at a relatively continuous rate and marketed at appropriate times in order to assure a stable work force and a mechanism to respond rapidly to market conditions.

Substitutability of other products for the use of wood, over the long term, may well be based on comparative advantage in terms of environmental costs and consequences of production. To the extent that wood can be produced in a sustainable and aesthetically acceptable fashion, it should have a significant edge in the market relative to substitutes over much of the developed world. That, over the longer term, can also influence the stability of "market share" for wood products.

Public opinion seems to be increasingly polarized about the management of federal lands and leads to potentially wider swings in the politics surrounding these issues. This volatility could be dampened by concerted efforts to bring voices of moderation into the debate to provide credible alternatives to the "spin doctors" that make a living by and through dissemination of propaganda and the creation and exacerbation of conflict. These gladiators get paid to win, not to search out consensus. The Forest Service played the role of moderation in the past and could do so again given proper policy direction by the administration and the Congress. So long as the land management agencies operate in an arena where national policy is unclear and federal land management agencies serve as "designated punching bags" for the gladiators, the melee will continue. In clearly stated national policy for management of public lands lies enhanced stability. And, the Forest Service (among other agencies) given portfolios and funding to take "the bully pulpit" for natural resources management that executes a clearly stated national policy in a sustainable manner could play the agency's historic role as a conservation leader.

It is time to acknowledge that this nation has come to a point where the interacting forces of the myriad of laws and regulations that come to bear on federal land management plus the constant upsets in balance that occur with decisions in court case after court case have produced a situation antithetical to predictability and stability of federal land management.

The applicable laws should be evaluated, in total and restructured to remove conflicts while radically simplifying management processes. More "quick fixes" of amendments to various acts seem likely to cause instability over the long term. Changes, piece meal, inapplicable laws could cause even more problems due to the upset in the balance of the myriad case law. Perhaps it is time for a resurrection of the concept embodied in the Public Land Law Review Commission. The efforts of that commission, in the late 1960s, indicated significant problems and solutions which were never significantly addressed by the political process. And, it is important to recognize that most of the environmental laws which impact so significantly and disproportionately on the federal lands were enacted since that time. This is not time for timidity. The situation is producing increasing polarization in concerned citizenry and conflicts in public

land management which, in turn, produces increasing frustration in the body politic. This could lead to poorly considered and sweeping changes in the responsibility for or methods of public land management or both.

Administrative findings of regulatory agencies concerning proposed management activities by land management agencies produce situations where equally or better well-qualified experts in management agencies can be and are second guessed by colleagues in regulatory agencies. This can be disruptive, redundant, irritating and expensive duplication of effort. For example, might it be preferable for regulatory agencies to produce or approve recovery plans for threatened or endangered species in cooperation with management agencies--and, then, leave the responsibility for plan execution to the land management agencies. The current situation increasingly amounts to joint management of federal lands by management and regulatory agencies. Though such is working somewhat better over time--the situation should be reevaluated with an eye to reducing redundancy, some increases in efficiency assured (i.e., costs reduced) and time of project execution minimized.

Court rulings are proliferating and creating continuing chaos in trying to carry out land management activities. Agency decisionmakers spend as much or more time with lawyers than with natural resource management personnel. Of course, such is a part of what has evolved as the "American way" of increasing solution to disagreement through litigation. And, of course, agencies should obey the law. That is not my point. The laws might be changed to provide that the loser in a legal action pays the cost of the winner--particularly if the judge considers the plaintiff's case to be frivolous. In present circumstances, the government pays if it loses but the reverse is not true, i.e., the plaintiff does not pay costs if they lose. In fact, the government sometimes pays the plaintiff even when the government wins depending on the opinion of the presiding judge. This provides incentive to sue the government and no significant disincentive (i.e., no penalty--and, perhaps, a reward for losing) for such actions. Some lessening of court cases would contribute to enhanced stability.

Micro-management of agency activities by both executive and legislative branches of government are somewhat antithetical to a stable management program. In terms of Congress, such micro-management is commonly carried out through the budget process with detailed instructions that change from year to year and election to election. Laws are made and dismantled without much public disclosure in instructions put forth through the budget--including "earmarking" of funds to projects of individual congressmen and senators. If Congress and the public truly want "stability" and "predictability" in land management agency programs, it should be recognized that much--perhaps most--of the instability can be traced directly to Congress in the interaction of the "crazy quilt" of laws and regulations and budget instructions produced. Micro-management exacerbates already serious ills.

The avoidance, or at least diminution, of contrary direction to land management agencies from the executive and legislative branches of government is critical to enhanced stability. Such conflicting instructions put the management agencies squarely between a "rock and a hard place." Unfortunately, the public does not understand the agency's dilemma and puts blame on the agencies for the results of the strife between executive and legislative branches. To the extent that such struggles can be moderated, increased stability and predictability in land management can be anticipated.

Complex processes that have evolved to deal with too much uncoordinated law, too much uncoordinated regulation, that require too much interagency involvement can and should be simplified. Dramatically reducing and simplifying these processes, while maintaining the intent of the laws upon which they were built, will contribute to channeling the energies of natural resource management agencies away from process and toward resource management. Lawsuits that produce losses for land management agencies most frequently focus on the details of adherence to process--with rules that change with the results of each lawsuit. The result has been the evolution of the "appeal proof" or "suit proof" process with documentation covering every possible aspect of consideration in great detail. "Suit proofing" wasn't the aim of the National Forest Management Act nor the Endangered Species Act. The aim was to produce a better job of land management. The original intent has, in my opinion, been perverted. Risk aversion can

be an expensive management style.

So, while "stability" in timber supply (or any other supply) cannot be assured--improvements could and should be made. As natural resource managers, we stand on a slippery slope where we dare not stay. The evolving situation is politically, economically and ecologically untenable. We must seek and find firmer ground.

The assorted frustrations associated with public land management have come to a point that serious consideration is being given by Congress to transferring ownership of these lands or the "development" of their management to the states or other entities. This is a debate that could bear dramatically on stability.

In a hearing earlier this year before a House budget committee, the chairman asked for my opinion as to the appropriateness of "devolving" the ownership or management of the National Forests. I asked for his permission to answer that question from two perspectives--as Chief of the Forest Service and as an individual citizen of the republic. That permission was granted.

Answering as Chief, I spoke of the same ideas and concepts that were put forward by Gifford Pinchot and twelve later chiefs that followed him and preceded me. Their rationale are a clear part of the conservation history of our country and need not be repeated here.

Instead, I will talk about my individual answer. Perhaps each of you can think of what your answer would have been. And, while doing that, consider the stability of other aspects of management on the public's lands--water, recreation, fish and wildlife, livestock, grazing, mining, etc. What is your personal stake in these questions.

I was born and raised in central Texas--a state with minimal amounts of public land. Hunting and fishing and just wandering the woods was my passion--as it is today. But, any such endeavor required asking, even begging permission to go into the woods--or sneaking, I become highly adept at all three.

Once physically grown, I went off to Texas A&M with the dream of being a wildlife biologist. Upon graduation, I found work with the Texas Game & Fish Commission and, for 10 years, was instrumental in establishing and fostering wildlife management on private land--and its commercialization. We were successful beyond our wildest dreams. But, I never set foot on private property to hunt or fish without asking permission or by paying a fee.

Then, I went to work for the Forest Service and, for the first time in my life, set foot on a national forest--land that belonged to me and to every other citizen of the United States. I thought I had encountered heaven on earth. The land was my land and no one and no sign said to me "posted, keep out." The days of begging permission and paying to get past those signs were over.

What an incredible inheritance from our forebearers. These lands are an inheritance like no other people in the world posses. How unique that is in the human experience and how incredibly precious. I ponder much on that as I move closer to the end of my life and farther from the beginning. I think much about what we will leave behind for the people of the United States.

Yet, there are those who say the nation cannot afford to maintain that inheritance. My response is, how can we not afford sustaining that heritage. These lands are part of America's culture--the only such lands that the vast majority of us will ever own. Ten percent of the American people control 90 percent of the national wealth. Is that not enough? Can we have nothing of our great inheritance for the American people at large? Can anyone seriously believe that "development" of ownership or mangement of the nation's land will not bring the day closer of those "keep out" signs springing up around the borders of what was once our land?

When the 191,000,000 acres were placed in the national forest system they were lands of little value. Some of those lands, particularly east of the Mississippi, had been seriously mistreated. Then, over the next 100 years, these very same lands have become incredibly--too valuable, some believe, for the American people at large to own. If these lands have increased so much in value in 100 years, it is not too difficult to imagine how valuable those lands will be in another 100 years. By then, it is likely that our nation's population, given current trends, will have doubled and, perhaps, redoubled. If those lands are worth gold today they will be worth diamonds in another 100 years. That is not the question. The question is who will own and control these lands?

To say we, as a people, cannot afford those lands is to say that we would "devolve" our heritage and our inheritance for a mess of potage. Speaking strictly for myself, I say that these are my lands and my lands are not for sale, not for giveaway, not for "devolvement." I asked my sons and they say the same. My grandchildren are too young to talk much--but they will learn to know and appreciate their heritage--if these lands are still theirs as citizens of the Republic. Of course, my grandchildren and their children to be born in 25 or so years have no voice today. So I speak for them now, for I believe that they deserve a chance to make some choices. The same choices that today's citizens were given by our ancestors.

I ended by saying to the congressman, "Speaking for me, my children, my grandchildren, I object." The congressman asked, "Why do I think your answer as Chief was "no" and your personal answer is "hell no!?"

So, while citizens consider questions of stability and of viable communities, it is well to ponder an even deeper question. What role do the national forests and other public lands play in the culture of our nation and, perhaps more important, in the culture and economy of our region and states? I cannot conceive of America without national forests. The most destabilizing act I can visualize for good wildland natural resource management in America is the "devolvement" of the national forests and other public lands. But, perhaps, I am too steeped in Forest Service traditions and too emotionally and viscerally attached to these lands that I own in common with all Americans. Perhaps, but, I don't think so. I certainly don't feel so.

Every American should consider the facts swirling around the issues of "devolvement" and your feelings and have your answer and response ready as the debate begins.

It is time to realize that assuring a completely stable supply of commodities from public lands is a desire and planning goal that cannot be realized under present circumstances. And, while achieving that goal is not possible, the situation could be improved. Those improvements will require significant changes in present management under present circumstances. But, improvement--significant improvement--is feasible.

In summary, the timber supply from federal lands is one drought, one insect and disease outbreak, one severe fire season, one election, one budget, one successful appeal, one loss in court, one listing of a threatened or endangered species, one new piece of pertinent scientific information, one change in technology, one shift in public opinion, one new law, one loss of a currently available technological tool, one change in market, one shift in interest rates, et al, away from "stability" at all times. And, these changes do not come one at a time, they come in bunches like bananas and the bunches are always changing. So, stability in timber supply from the public lands is simply a myth, a dream that was never founded in reality. It is time to stop pretending.
