

Alternate Land Uses; the Shrinking Forest Landbase?

A discussion around the pressures on the landbase available for forest management. The role of media, public opinion, NGOs. Conservation vs Protection. The reality of "sustainable development" as a concept and a bunch of other musings (possibly rants) on the topic.

Alternate Land Uses; the Shrinking Forest Landbase?

"Buy land, they aren't making any more of it"

~ Mark Twain

Alternate Land Uses; the Shrinking Forest Landbase?

- What does this mean for forest managers?
- Clearly in some jurisdictions, there is a permanent reduction in the forest land base due to urban expansion and the demands for increasing amounts of industrial and residential lands
- Also in "third world" nations there is a declining forest estate because of the demand for agricultural lands

Alternate Land Uses; the Shrinking Forest Landbase?

- For Canada, with our abundant Crown lands and abundant forest lands, the issue is not really that the forested land base is shrinking; rather it is that there are new demands being placed on it
- Even this is not completely true most of the demands have existed forever it is just that now they are being acknowledged and we are getting far enough along in the management cycle that avoidance of conflicts are impossible

Alternate Land Uses; the Shrinking Forest Landbase?

- In the past, even though we were planning on harvesting throughout the entire forest (in Ontario at least) we simply avoided the conflict areas while maintaining the same level of harvest thereby deferring the problem to a later date; i.e. right now!

Alternate Land Uses; the Shrinking Forest Landbase?

- Mills were built based on allowable harvest levels generated from the theorized normal forest
- No company intentionally over harvested the forest (always limited by the plans, policies and procedures of the day) ...
- But ... the net result of changing the rules and changing the management philosophy is having the same effect as having over-harvested for generations

What are the pressures on the Landbase?

- Government Policies
 - Landscape design
 - Marten Guidelines
 - Caribou Guidelines
 - NDPEG Guidelines
 - Old Growth Conservation Strategies
 - Endangered Species Act
 - Parks and Protected Areas
 - Expansion of the parks system through “lands for life”
 - Pressure to eliminate consumptive uses in the park system – Algonquin

What are the pressures on the Landbase?

- First Nation Demands
 - Land claims
 - Participation in the Forest Industry per the terms of the E.A. decision
 - Traditional Land use areas
 - Treaty rights and royalties
 - Success of road block strategies

What are the pressures on the Landbase?

- Partially-conflicting land uses
 - Recreation and Tourism
 - Trapping
 - Cottage development
 - Recreational trails
 - Mining Development and Exploration

On our public lands allocation and management decisions finally rest with Government

- Governments make laws and take actions in large part in response to public opinion
- Public opinion is shaped through philosophical, moral, ideological, and religious beliefs

On our public lands allocation and management decisions finally rest with Government

- The effectiveness of churches, families and cultures as shapers of public opinion has been reduced by the pre-eminent importance of media
- The ready availability of new-media , social networks, blogs, etc. is re-shaping this playing field as well

On our public lands allocation and management decisions finally rest with Government

- Enter the lobbyist class
- Many NGOs have active participatory roles in social development and governance but there is almost always a major focus on the shaping of public opinion and the lobbying of politicians

On our public lands allocation and management decisions finally rest with Government

- In the field of natural resources management NGOs exist by pointing out perceived flaws in management and by lobbying for change through the support of their membership

On our public lands allocation and management decisions finally rest with Government

- No NGO ever sold a membership by saying that everything was OK; so positions taken are often extreme but in fairness they are often no less extreme than the positions taken by forest industry on the other side of issues

Parks and Protected Areas

- There are few out there who would argue against the value of parks and protected spaces
- These areas are refugia for wildlife, protect rare threatened and endangered species, and theoretically preserve ecological function (remember the issues regarding the fire based boreal ecosystem however)
- They are important areas for outdoor recreation; especially for those who value remoteness and wilderness

Parks and Protected Areas

- They are also simply something different on the landscape; a tangible alternative to the landscape which arises out of development or forest management
- Canada has a long and proud history of parks, probably the envy of most parts of the world

Parks and Protected Areas

- So, how much is enough?
- In Ontario, under the Ontario's Living Legacy program, the parks and protected areas "target" has been established at 12%
- 12% has become a bit of a de-facto United Nations standard for protection but it is not widely accepted or even achievable in some jurisdictions
- The environmental fraternity has really only bought into 12% as a viable target while there was less than this protected; the pressure (in my opinion) for the protection of more land is incessant regardless of where we currently sit.

Parks and Protected Areas

- There is a common perspective that enough is everything (Read the following essay posted at the website)

*Reserves: How Much Is Enough and How Do We Get There From Here?
By John Terborgh, Duke University*

Is the human species doing enough to conserve the rest of the world's species for posterity? If not, then how much is enough? This is a key question, and opinions about the correct answer vary widely. An industry spokesperson is likely to ask, "Don't they (the conservationists) have enough already?" "How much do they want, anyway?" This is a typical but inappropriate response, first, because the issue is really a scientific one, and second, because it puts conservationists in the awkward position of having to say that reserving a certain amount of habitat will be sufficient to save nature. The only correct answer from a scientific standpoint is, "all of it." That is how much of Earth was available to nature before modern man entered the picture. Since then, at least half of Earth's terrestrial environment has been degraded or completely transformed to support the human enterprise. We know that half or more of Earth's native habitat cannot be eliminated without endangering large numbers of species. In fact, more than 100 species have gone extinct in the U.S. alone since the Endangered Species Act (ESA) was approved by Congress. An additional 1200+ species are currently listed as endangered, and an even larger number of unlisted candidate species lurks in the background. This should be warning enough that humans are pushing our luck in preempting Earth's resources for ourselves. Thus, the best answer to the question, "How much do they want?" is "Everything that is left." Admittedly, this is a tall order, but it should be the goal that conservationists set for themselves.

Parks and Protected Areas

- This perspective is grounded firmly in the soil of ecological science while completely oblivious to the other two pillars of sustainability; those being society/community, and economy
- As forestry people, at our core, we normally have an implicit understanding of the legitimacy of sustainable/consumptive use of our natural resources
- Debates around levels of consumption and protection abound within the forestry community but the key aspect of legitimate use is generally not debated; this is not necessary so outside of our community

Parks and Protected Areas

- Our public process of Crown Lands management will bring you in direct conflict with environmental NGOs
- There are groups which take a more moderate position than the one taken in the essay which we read from but often at the core beliefs of many of these groups is the same

Parks and Protected Areas

- Dealing with individuals or organizations who have a fundamental aversion to the continued use of forests and other natural resources is difficult for a forest technician or forester; essentially these philosophical difference are not going to be resolved in a management plan
- Bill's best advise is to spend the most time with persons and groups with whom there is at least some measure of common ground.

Case Study ~ Algonquin Park

- Established in 1893, Algonquin Park is Canada's oldest Provincial Park
- Logging has co-existed in the park since prior to its inception and throughout the history of the park
- <http://www.algonquinforestry.on.ca/history.htm>

Case Study ~ Algonquin Park

- Despite what to me and most of the forestry community seems like an incredible legacy of cooperation and coexistence, there is still controversy
- <http://earthroots.org/index.php/Alerts/stop-logging-in-algonquin-park.html>

Another example

- Cottage dwellers; urbanites with a love for the outdoors but no real stake in the local community or economy; skilled in new media
- <http://mymuskoka.blogspot.com/2009/11/c-hop-chop-chop-timber.html>

Another example

- The old media; CBC archive footage
- http://archives.cbc.ca/environment/environmental_protection/topics/679-3918/
- Clayoquot Sound
- Jobs versus proper forest management
- It is difficult to debate with a professional engineer as to what type of steel is best for a bridge; but everyone seems to feel perfectly qualified to voice their opinion about proper forest practices

Sustainable Development; an Oxymoron?

- Read the article by Hamish Kimmins posted on the website.
- Dr. Kimmins does a great job of defining sustainability, and identifying the requirements that it would take to be truly sustainable.

Conclusion

Sustainable forestry is an imperative, not a choice. The need is driven by the inexorable growth in human numbers and deterioration of the global environment. However, it is much easier to talk about it than achieve it. This is largely because it is such a multidimensional concept. There are so many values to be sustained at so many different temporal and spatial scales.

Sustainability does not imply constancy over time. The challenge is to decide at what spatial and temporal scales we will evaluate sustainability, what balance of values is to be sustained in any particular forest, and what pattern of variation in values over time is consistent with the concept of sustainability. Sustainable forestry is not simply a technical and scientific issue, although to be sustainable, forestry must be well founded in science and use appropriate technologies. Sustainable forestry is also a political, social, cultural and economic issue. Only if all the dimensions of sustainability are considered will we be able to develop land-use plans and management methods that achieve this laudable but often elusive goal.

A Bright Spot?; The Canadian Boreal Forest Agreement

- When the environmental fraternity decided to take on the boreal forest as their next "project" in the mid 90's they may have underestimated the scope of the project and its economic importance
- This was not an isolated area, Temagami white pines, Clayoquot Sound old growth; the boreal forest represents more than 50% of the land mass of the country and is also the absolute engine of its forest economy

A Bright Spot?; The Canadian Boreal Forest Agreement

- An historical agreement was negotiated and signed between the forest industry and the environmental fraternity in 2010 concerning the boreal forest in Canada
- <http://www.borealagreement.ca/index.php/en/>
- Does this represent a maturation of industry and environmentalists and a new way of approaching issues?

Bill's Advice

- Do not be afraid to speak on behalf of the forest industry; the environmental fraternity likes to believe that they have the moral high ground and certainly on some issues they have been right in the past; but you know what you know about forestry, and ecology and silviculture and it is a lot more than most of the country.
- Advocating strongly for this industry will only help bring balance to the debate

Bill's Advice

- On the other hand don't be afraid to criticize the industry when there is something that is not being done well or correctly based on your knowledge
- Limit your comments to your knowledge or experience; if you are going to make comments on the basis of opinion make sure you qualify them as such
- Get some media training before you tackle talking to reporters

Bill's Advice

- You will never change the opinion of some of the most hard core members of environmental groups; there is no point in even trying
- On the other hand many people just want to understand how or why things happen the way they do; you know this and so spend lots of time explaining and working with these kinds of people.

Bill's Advice

- Bring a healthy skepticism to your review of what appears in the media; just because it is on TV does not mean that it is right; what is the source of the information and does it jive with what your education and experience tells you is correct?