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TEACHING CORE VALUES: SOME QUESTIONS

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Education, I fear, is learning to see one thing by going blind to another (Leopold, 1966; 168).

That the discipline of agriculture should have been so divorced from other disciplines has its immediate cause in the compartmental structure of the universities, in which complementary, mutually sustaining and enriching disciplines are divided, according to "professions," into fragmented, one-eyed specialties (Berry, 1977; 43).

In 1996 a New York paper carried the following story:

“NEW YORK – A retired firefighter who illegally cut down seven trees in a case of ‘premeditated arboricide’ was sentenced to 500 hours of community service.

City officials said Andrew Campanile destroyed the trees in Astoria, Queens, to increase the visibility of some billboards.

“Mr. Campanile’s crimes constituted arboricide in the first degree, premeditated arboricide,” said Park’s Commissioner Henry Stern.

—The Associated Press, 1996”

Just as you may be, I was taken aback by the concept of “premeditated arboricide” – especially since there was an actual legal conviction. But laugh, scoff, or be dismayed, there it is; it happened.

I’m not here today to offer many answers about teaching core values, rather I mostly want to ask questions. First, are we as educators ready to deal, except at a superficial level, with the moral values of the kind that lead people to the ethical conviction that “premeditated arboricide” is a crime? Should we be? Second, are we preparing our students to be able to deal with values: their own, their professions, and those of the many-faced publics? Should we and do we explicitly challenge ourselves, our colleagues, and our students to understand the sources, validity, and consequences of the values each holds?

The Society of American Foresters (SAF) has begun a study of the core values of the SAF and its members, and I will use it as a springboard for discussion of teaching core values in natural resource education.

The SAF Study:

Ethics, particularly land ethics, have been a topic of intense interest to the SAF for at least the last 10 years. Much dialogue and debate led to the adoption of a land ethic canon and other changes in the SAF Code of Ethics in 1992 (SAF 1996; I-1). This was followed by the release of an SAF Task Force Report on “The Long-Term Health & Sustainability of Forests” (SAF, 1993). This report came out in favor of ecosystem management, and was such a hot issue that there was talk of a group splintering from the SAF and starting a new association of foresters. Beyond questions of the process followed by the Task Force, and the “correctness” of the science in the report – or some claimed the lack of science, I contend that the real issue had to do with the cherished American *value* of private property rights. Coupled with such flash-point items as spotted owls vs. jobs, clearcutting and ecological reserves, the yet to happen renewal/revision of the Endangered Species Act, and other similar media events, the question of ethics and the values on which they are based has continued to be of real importance to foresters and the SAF. It is in this context that the SAF study of core values was initiated. Specifically,

the Critical Issues Forum (CIF) at the 1996 National Convention included in its list of priority items the question, "Given the diversity of cultures and views within the profession, do we have a core set of values we can proactively articulate as an organization?" At the same convention, the House of Society Delegates, a treeroots advisory group in the SAF, recommended that the SAF Council:

- do a study of core values, and
- study the SAF Code of Ethics to determine its current relevance, especially in light of the results of the study of core values.

Since values are the basis of ethics, and since it is part of the charter of the SAF Ethics Committee to monitor and make recommendations on changing the SAF Code of Ethics, this Committee was assigned both tasks. Before looking at the results of the study to date, some definitions and brief remarks about why we should care about core values are in order.

Definitions & Reasons:

As an operational definition, Xu and Bengston called forest values "...relatively enduring conceptions of the 'good' related to forests and forest ecosystems" (1997; 44). Without going into their level of detail, they identified such *held* values as falling into two broad categories, instrumental and non-instrumental. Under instrumental they included economic/utilitarian values – ranging from needs to preference satisfaction – and life support values, such as air, water, soil, flora and fauna, and genes. Under non-instrumental they identified aesthetic values, such as beauty, rarity, and fragility, and also moral/spiritual values such as respect, love, other, and topophilia, or love of place.

Following a content analysis of a large mass of newsprint media stories, Xu and Bengston concluded that there has been "a shift in forest values away from easily defined and measured economic values toward values that are much more difficult to measure and that have often been neglected or ignored" (1997; 55). They also found that foresters had a lower expression of aesthetic and moral-spiritual values when compared to environmentalists, and see this as related to conflict. Do we let our students know such things? Do we let them know that a simple, pragmatic reason for studying values is that we really have no choice, because without knowledge and appreciation of our values and those of others, and without active involvement in ethical discussions, we are likely to march to the beat of drums played by others?

There is another way that values are defined, that is in what we often call ethical principles. These are captured, at least in part, in Oscar Arias' belief that, "As a basis for ethics, love, along with dignity, justice, and equality/freedom, are core values that transcend cultures and are manifest in leadership" (in Kidder, 1994; 271). These, and other values, are usually held in a hierarchical structure, a structure that may change

with the situation, thus they often seem to be in conflict. Conflicts between equality and freedom are among the best known examples in policy struggles to meet social goals, especially in dealing with societal values in contrast to individual rights. There can also be conflicts involving a single held value, such as loyalty to an employer vs. loyalty to society.

The SAF study seems to imply something more, because it asks about "core" values. Webster's calls "core" the part (of an individual, a class, an entity) that is basic, essential, vital, or enduring as distinct from the incidental or transient" (1967). The philosopher, John Ferguson, says core values, "... are values that are not instrumental to some greater goal but are good in themselves... A core value is something for which no quantity of any other value will compensate its loss," as in "We hold these truths to be self evident" (1997; 1).

For a professional society such as the SAF, a core value can thus be seen as a value that is central to practice, that is enduring, and that does not need justification on the basis of how it can be used but rather is good in itself. Do we know what these values are in the various natural resources professions? Do we specifically set out to teach them?

Each of us has a personal value system, but core ethical values transcend individuality and even differences in culture, religion, levels of socio-economic status, and ethnicity. This becomes evident in looking at international agreements. In discussing core values for sustainable development, Arthur Westing, an environmental consultant, said that "The cultural norms or core values for sustainable development are an amalgamation of core social values and core environmental values" (1996;218). By analyzing United Nations and other international agreements, Westing suggests that these core values include:

Core Social Values

- * all humans are born free and equal in dignity and rights
- * right to life, liberty and security of person
- * right to participate in government to a standard of living adequate to health and well-being of the person and his/her family
- * right to education (free, compulsory elementary education)

Core Environmental Values

- * an environment of a quality that permits a life of dignity and well-being
- * solemn responsibility to protect and improve the environment for present and future generations
- * education on environmental matters to create enlightened opinion and responsible conduct
- * in formulating long-term plans for economic development, due account shall be taken of the long-term capacity of natural systems
- * nature shall be respected and its essential processes shall not be impaired

What kind of education will natural resource professionals need to be able to work effectively in a world undergoing a transition in core values, a transition wherein the value problems of natural resources management are becoming more and more closely related to the value problems of just relationships between persons, societies, and the land, even while recognizing that what is said is important, but what is done truly tells the story. A brief report on the SAF study as completed to date reveals some interesting things regarding forestry core values.

The SAF Study of “Core Values”

The major effort of the SAF Ethics Committee to gather data of SAF core values was at the 1997 Critical Issues Forum (IF). The CIF did not employ a high-powered research design, thus it has limitations. It was, for example, a self-selected sample of SAF members in three ways: first, those who came to the convention; second, those at the convention who chose to attend the CIF; and, third, in the case of what is reported here, those who chose to turn in an individual response form to a set of questions. Still, there were approximately 370 members involved in the roundtable discussions, and 276 of them handed in the personal form. The following set of results covers the first two questions of the individual response form¹.

Question 1. What attracted you to the profession?

Responses fell into three general categories:

1. *The land:* 66 respondents said it was their love of the land/forest/nature/environment that attracted them to forestry; 16 focused on their love of trees; and 35 used words such as “enjoy”, “interest” and “appreciate” to describe their attraction to forestry. The single biggest response was the 96 who said that they wanted to work either in the forest, on the land, in nature or the environment. These closely related responses make it fair to say that over 200 respondents specifically noted their love of and desire to work in the forest as something that attracted them to forestry.

2. *The forestry profession:* 42 respondents noted that it was the chance to manage/ conserve/protect/take action on forests that attracted them to forestry, while 19 noted the diversity, multidisciplinary nature and the opportunity to provide multiple-uses inherent in forestry that gave it appeal. Twenty-two were attracted by the notion of working with renewable/sustainable resources. A variety of other items were noted, but significantly less frequently (e.g., uniqueness, service, aesthetics, God’s creation, wildlife, etc.).

3. *Personal history:* In part, this category refers to “who” or “what” got the individuals interested in forestry. Twenty-nine named family, and another 24 named organizations (Scouts, FFA, 4H, etc.). Other than where family was involved (e.g., a “USFS brat”), only 7 noted that a forester had gotten them interested in forestry. Sixteen noted their rural upbringing, including farm and ranch, while 6 said they were attracted to

forestry as a way to get off the farm or ranch (and 2 more “to get out of the city”). Twenty mentioned hunting, fishing, camping or hiking.

Question 2. What basic values do you think foresters share?

Like the responses to Question 1, and obviously closely related to them, the responses to Question 2 fell into three general categories:

1. *The land:* The single largest response (83) had to do with love of the land/forest/environment/ nature. Thirty-five listed respect for the land, and 19 talked of care or concern for the land. Respondents also believed that foresters share a land ethic (34), a conservation/wise use ethic (19), or a stewardship ethic (40) as expressions of this love of the land.

2. *The forestry profession:* The ethics above call for action, and based on this category of responses it seems fair to say the respondents see foresters as sharing a belief that they are active land managers (71) who seek to sustain/renew forested ecosystems and resources (57) in service to society (34) so that the resources can be utilized by humans (50). Foresters are seen doing this by taking a long-term view (38), and by basing their actions on sound science (39). Fifteen specifically noted their belief that foresters share the view that wood production is a valid use of forests, while 19 suggested that foresters believe that they are the ones who know best how to manage forests.

3. *Ethical principles:* Some respondents took a different approach to “basic values,” listing a range of ethical principles they believe to be shared by foresters. Noting only those principles that received 5 or more responses, 31 respondents listed honesty, 14 integrity, 8 each for loyalty and responsibility, and 7 noted trust. Another 17 suggested that foresters shared a strong work ethic.

Discussion:

The fact that such ethical principles as integrity, honesty, justice, altruism, and freedom were mentioned only in modest numbers by SAF respondents may be taken as indicating that these are expected, givens. They transcend individuals and professions and form the foundation of right relationships among peoples. They form the basis for the largely anthropocentric codes of ethics of most natural resource professions. It becomes a case of bringing them to the attention of our students, giving students practice in wrestling with the gray areas of value debates, and serving as role models in our conduct.

The results of the SAF study confirm the idea that foresters are attracted to forestry by a **love of the forest and a strong desire to work in it**. As much as they love the beauty, the workings, and the wonder of forests, they also recognize that forests are capable of producing a variety of goods and services, and they are willing to accept the challenge of **manag-**

ing forests. They believe strongly in a **land ethic**, although that is expressed in a variety of ways, including ways much more pragmatic than environmentalists who, for example, see only destruction in a clearcut, not renewal. They seek to provide **service**, in the broadest sense, to society, and they do so with a **long-term view**. Despite their love of the forest, they tend to be very **utilitarian and/or anthropocentric**, with management focused on meeting the needs of humans. And their actions are held by them to be based on **sound science**. They highly value **professionalism**, shown in curious ways by some who insist that since foresters know best how to provide societies needs from forests, and should be left along in their scientific expertise to provide what they think society needs. Their valuing of professionalism is also indicated in another odd way, the longstanding concern with **image** and the belief that is we could just educate the public to our views, we would be much more highly regarded.

To summarize, foresters consistently say that they value the beauty, variety, resilience, and especially the usefulness of forests. They hold science, technology, and management in high regard, and wish to apply these in service to humanity, based on the principles of professionalism. They value the same things others do: healthy forests, clean air, pure water, biodiversity, sustainability, and future generations. But the definitions they may have of these, such as what is a healthy forest, and the means they choose to reach these ultimate values (clearcutting) may often be different from those who seem to share the same desired ends as those foresters hold. Trite, but once past the motherhood statement of values such as love, the devil is in the details. One respondent in the SAF study put it this way: Around our table there was "... little conflict on philosophy – perhaps on technical issues we would have disagreed" (1997).

What does this mean for the teaching of core values in natural resources professions?

Implications for Teaching:

Forestry and other natural resource professions have often been accused of being so specialized in our education, training, and experience that – despite our very real love of the forest – we tend to disengage our hearts as we fully engaged our brains (Cornett & Thomas, 1995; Wellman & Tipple, 1990; Williams, 1997, 10). Practically speaking, this means we are equipped to recognize and deal with questions like:

- what are the ecological opportunities for and limits to human use of timber resources; in other words, how much can we reasonably expect to grow and how big can the harvest be?
- What are the comparative costs and benefits of various rotation ages and timber harvesting techniques?
- How much use of related resources (wildlife, water, range, recreation) can be sustained without severely limiting the timber resource?

- What are the yield and cost benefits that can be obtained through tree-breeding programs?

Questions such as these are framed in ecological and economic terms, so that the form of the question makes it likely to be answered in such terms. Each also has value dimensions that penetrate and impinge on the answers while also shaping the role foresters are to play. Thus the first step is to understand that none of us is value free and the second is to understand and challenge the values and ethical principles which form the basis of our answer and decisions. In practice this means that one must recognize that answers and decisions have value and ethical dimensions, and that these occur in varying levels of importance. It is not enough to give our students a tool – like the SAF Code of Ethics or that of The Wildlife Society – and turn them loose with it without any discussion of meaning or consequence, practice, or even of how to use it. We don't do so with our science or our technology, nor should we do it with the core values of our professions.

One thing that I do is tell my students that their professional education is a socializing process; a learning of what is expected, what is accepted, and what is considered out-of-bounds. I tell them that this isn't wrong, but they should recognize that it is happening and that it is challengeable. Because the core values of a profession are taught, explicitly or implicitly, throughout the curriculum, I suggest that the assumptions and the values behind what is being taught must be shared with the students, and allowed to be held up to scrutiny.

I'll close by suggesting some questions that need to be dealt with by our various professions and taught in our various curricula as a means of revealing and understanding core values.

Some Questions to Frame the Teaching of Core Values:

Is science the only way to know the world?

Foresters' faith in **science** as the basis of their profession seems right and unshakable. Yet, in society there is a reemergence of art, intuition, poetry, and experience as ways to know the world and to base decisions on. These can be viewed as emotional, even non-rational ways of knowing the world, or they can be seen as complementary to science and as the foundation of living in harmony with the environment. One might chidingly ask, how can foresters use the non-scientific love of the forest that attracted so many of them to forestry as a foundation for the science they learned only later.

What role should foresters play?

If we have the **professional** expertise to be able to provide the goods and services people need and want, does that expertise somehow give us the right to tell them what they should need and want? On the other hand, have we generally left value judgments to politicians and administrators who had neither

the competence nor the motivation to make balanced judgments about the forest and society?

Professions and individual professionals choose the role they play, whether by conscious choice or by what the sociologist Bella calls “performing an assignment, “ as happens when members of an organization turn responsibility for their perceptions and beliefs over to the system and become “functionaries” (1987; 362). I suggest we are still wrestling with whether the role of foresters is to be apolitical, value free technical specialists or engaged experts with a professional obligation to shape social and political processes and decisions.

What resource is the forester concerned with?

If forestry is the only profession with the interest, education, and experience to grow wood as a crop of the land, how can wood and fiber production not be the core of forestry management? But if forestry is concerned, as its name implies, with the forest resource, how can we escape being timberists even as we make timber first among equals?

Do we let our values cloud our thinking?

Are we, for example, locked into functionally structuring our resource agencies as we have done for years – state parks, state forests, state wildlife refuges, etc. – even as we take up ecosystem management or an ecosystem approach to management?

Who do foresters serve?

Service, putting the interest of others before self-interest, is a long-standing value of forestry. Typically, it has meant starting out with the landowner’s objectives in mind, and then using sound science and economics to reach those objectives. Meeting society’s needs and wants has also been part of the service equation, but it becomes more difficult in the face of multinational companies, global trade, and rapid communications and transportation. As we respond, for example to Re. James Leach (R-IA) who has introduced legislation to end logging on public lands, saying “if we are going to exhort other countries to preserve their forests, we ought to act to save our own” (1997), we should note that the “society” being served is an expanded, global one.

Who is responsible for harmful actions?

To paraphrase civil engineer Elizabeth Anne Taylor, the extent to which we are responsible for the uses of our science and technology has not been well examined (1997). Like the engineers she talked of and to, we *make things happen* and value the action nature of our **management** profession, but do we question who is responsible for the consequences of making it happen? Do we simply supply the demands of society, or is there a proper time to say something about consumerism, population, and trivial demand?

Do we welcome diversity of thought?

Forestry, and other natural resource professions, are marked by a wide range of philosophies and beliefs, often even when sharing the same scientific knowledge. Thank heaven, otherwise we would be possessed of an Orwellian *group think* where there is only one right way to think and to do, and professional growth would be made much more difficult. But, when we ask others for dialogue, whether through public participation or multidisciplinary workshops, do we do so to listen to and understand others, or is the hope that they will adopt our values and beliefs?

There are many other questions that could be framed within the context of forestry’s core values, but these should give a brief flavor. Foresters and all natural resource professions are in a transition from single discipline technical specialists to engaged catalysts and facilitators of resource planning and management. We must teach the next generation of foresters to care about and consciously think about their own and other professions’ values and ethics as much as we teach them about inventory technique, fire management, or silviculture.

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¹There is no statistical analysis, only the number of responses are noted (individuals could list several things in answering both questions).