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**FROM “NATURAL RESOURCES” TO “ENVIRONMENT”:
BROADENING OUR MISSION AND MESSAGE**

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ABSTRACT: This important conference (the fourth in a series) addresses higher education in “natural resources.” Indeed, most participants are affiliated with programs, departments, schools, or colleges of natural resources and/or related professional terms such as conservation, forestry, wildlife biology, range science, and park management. By professional standards, these areas of study and practice are relatively young. However, the words we use to describe them (and ourselves) are a century or more old. Gifford Pinchot was America’s first professional forester, and he coined the word “conservation” early in his career (or so he writes in his book, *Breaking New Ground*). The Conservation Movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was founded on the principle that we need to “manage our natural resources more efficiently” through application of

science and technology, and this idea was at the heart of emerging professions such as forestry, fish and game management, range science, and water resource development. However, times have changed and so, perhaps, should our terminology. Development of the science of ecology has emphasized the interconnectedness of living things, suggesting that humans are part of the natural environment and that we may even have moral obligations to other living things. The Environmental Movement of recent decades is founded on the need to restore and protect the integrity of nature and to preserve critical natural areas and processes. Contemporary concerns over social and environmental justice suggest that we must become more inclusive in formulating and implementing natural resource and environmental policy. Based on this evolution of ideas, we respectfully suggest that we consider broadening the name of our academic units to include the word “environment.” (To their credit, a number of institutions have moved ahead in this regard.) We believe this more accurately reflects our contemporary academic mission and broadens our message in ways that strengthen our connections with traditionally underrepresented groups and concerns. Compared with the term “natural resources,” the word “environment” may (1) connote a less exclusively instrumental or anthropocentric worldview that is more in keeping with contemporary society; (2) resonate more powerfully with Native American, African American, “Eastern,” and other non-Western, more biocentric cultures; (3) broaden our prospective and focus from the traditional “big outdoors” of forests, parks, wilderness, and wildlife refuges to communities, homes, and workplaces, along with their attendant environmental issues; and (4) extend our concerns from the natural to the social sciences, and especially to the multidisciplinary interface between humans and nature, the crux of modern environmental paradigms such as sustainability and ecosystem management.

LITERATURE CITED

Pinchot, G. 1998. *Breaking new ground*. Commemorative ed. Island Press, Washington, DC. 522 pp.