Forestry and the Role of Governments¹

by
Robert E. Wolf²

I wondered why you asked that I address you, since I have earned a reputation for speaking plainly and not prescribing placebos. I shall not discuss Canada. To do so would be presumptuous and gratuitous, and also reveal that, along with many in the United States, I am abysmally ignorant on Canadian matters. But I shall talk about forestry and its role, and government and its role, from my perspective. Thus, you can draw conclusions and fit them, if applicable, to your situation.

To start with, I begin with the premise that Man is a member of the Animal Kingdom, whether he likes it or not. Thus, he is endowed with certain characteristics that he shares with this larger group, as well as those that are specific to *homo sapiens*. Each tribe of people has developed further differentiating characteristics, influenced by its environment and emerging culture. I shall not dwell on these either, except to recite a few that may trigger your thoughts as to whether what I say has a sound base. For whatever it is worth, the anomaly is that some in a tribe adopt a place to live, while some of their fellows are seeking new ground. If this were not true, we would not have spread around this planet as we have, displacing one another from time to time, often by harsh means. Canada, and the United States, as well as the other American countries, are "nations of immigrants." We have subsumed the earlier people. We have attracted settlers. We brought in people in bondage or servitude. We attracted a conglomeration of people on a scale unique to the history of mankind.

My next point is that for as long as there has been recorded history, Man has had a "love-hate" relationship with governance. Put a few people together in any situation and what we naturally do is organize ourselves in some fashion to deal with common goals and purposes, while permitting certain actions to be individually accomplished. In our modern society, we have even gone so far as to define a corporation as a person, in a highly sophisticated rationale for reaching goals for society.

But having organized ourselves into various groups and systems, we spend a remarkable amount of time and energy complaining about what we have created. These integrative and disintegrative forces are constantly at work. I am reluctant to categorize Man as superior to his fellow animals, although I am willing to say we surely are different. As compared to an insect that is plant-specific in its eating habits, or an animal that is a carnivore with selected targets in the food chain, Man's attention and energies have no bounds. We impact all the plants and life forms, we impact the landscape of the earth, we impact the waters and space itself, and we do all this using the systems of governance we have devised as the basis for our actions.

We regulate ourselves in our conduct with each other and the land, by a set of ethics which often reflects unstated but generally accepted and understood styles of conduct. We also regulate ourselves by what we term laws, which we create in a hierarchical arrangement — from national constitutional concepts down to local ordinances and administrative codes. These constitute a remarkable phalanx of guides, so formidable that no one of us knows them all, or understands all that we know.

Yet the uniqueness of the system we have devised is that even those with so little education that they cannot read can function as a part of a Society, along with those whose education is the most advanced and sophisticated. It may well be that the attention that is accorded those who deviate from the norms of their society is one of the means we use that results in most of us following the norms, ethical and legal, most of the time. The growth of the population of the nations on this earth, while not without its own set of concerns, also suggests that our various societal systems work. Some may work too well for their own welfare and the world's.

My third point is that the archeological findings on this earth show that whole societies of men, like whole systems of plants and animals have been extinguished. Often we can only guess at the reasons for their departure. Charles Darwin, barely 100 years ago, opened the windows of our minds to an understanding of this inexorable process. If a person, a plant, an animal, or an entire species cannot adapt to changing conditions and cannot make the necessary modifications in time, a clear risk exists that it will perish from this earth. So, while each of us has an expected life span, we have no guarantee that we can demand it be honored, any more than a whole species or society can expect the same guarantee to be applied to it forever.

So what does this mean for forestry and governments.

There is not a material on this earth that man does not seek to utilize. Those who live in the desert turn the sand into mud and the mud into homes. Those who live where rock and clay abound turn these into stone and brick to make homes. Those who live where the grasses grow, use them for homes and fuel. Those who live in the forests, turn wood into its many products, from fuel to lumber, on to paper and reconstituted wood materials. Our systems of governance play a large and often unrecognized role in these activities. The pattern has been repeated time and again.

If a resource seems abundant and in surplus, a society does not seek to govern its management or use. It matters little whether the resource is held by the State or by individuals or their corporate agents the State has permitted to organize.

In a surplus-resource situation, we find minimal group interest in resource maintenance, whether we live in what is termed a free society or a regulated society. There are no issues in either society's perception to suggest that any group action is needed for the society's benefit.

The local reduction in the availability of a resource or its regional extirpation often call into play two sometimes-related actions. One is to enlarge the drawing area, bringing the resource in from the next nearest source. The other is to regulate extraction, consumption, or both. A good example is found in Sweden where the iron smelters were fueled with wood several hundred years ago. Their initial approach to smelters in excess of wood supply was to regulate the size and location of smelters so that the fuel supply for each would be better assured, along with the other local demands for wood. It was out of these initial efforts that Sweden embarked on a course of forest regulation practice well after iron smelting no longer required wood as its fuel. Here one sees a pattern of actions flowing out of a concern for iron smelters.

With changes in transportation systems and relatively inexpensive energy, we have seen a greater willingness to reach out longer distances to secure resources rather than

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²Fellow SAF

Environment and Natural Resources Policy Division, Congressional Research Service, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. 20540

resort to other devices that would enhance the nearer supplies. The changing energy situation will affect this.

At the same time, over the past century, we revised our thinking. We concluded that wood could be grown as a crop! This has produced a variety of approaches to enhancing wood supplies. Also, we have developed capital-intensive converting systems which require that the raw material be brought to a costly, immobile plant.

It is of more than passing interest that in our two countries we have devised somewhat different, but in some ways parallel, systems assigning ownership of land.

The U.S. system started with a well-defined goal of claiming the territorial land secured by our westward expansion as property of the central government, to be held in common ownership only as a means of dispersing it to private ownership. Jefferson and Hamilton agreed on disposal, but Jefferson stood for giving the land to small holders in small tracts, while Hamilton stood for selling the land in larger blocks to people who would subdivide it, if they wished, and resell it.

The Maryland compromise started us on a route of survey before disposal, with most disposals in small blocks at fixed, relatively low prices. Jefferson managed later to force down sale sizes. It remained for Lincoln, whose family had been frontier preemptors of public land, to put into place a free-land, small-holding policy rooted in the notion that virtually any and all land could be made agricultural. Only minimal efforts were made to protect forest resources and these revolved around early 1800 reservations in the South designed to assure adequate naval stores and masts from our southern pineries for defense and trade expansion via shipping. The motivation was not any fledgling forestry concern.

It was not until the late 1800s (1876) that there began to develop a sentiment for reserving some of the Federal domain from disposal. The moving force was agricultural and the issue was water conservation, as the Nation moved west into the more arid regions. The timber concern was smaller and short-term economics. The industry welcomed Federal and State reservation of much of the forests. So much land was privately held and under heavy private debt to acquire, that the reservation of Federal forests was seen as improving the price and protecting the investments made as we went through the era's boom and bust cycles.

Canada started as separate provinces, independent under Great Britain. It was not until our Civil War, which threatened our dissolution, that nation-hood was bestowed on the provinces. Canada evolved from a disposal policy, which operated mainly in its eastern provinces, to one that, for the West, retained most of the forest land in provincial hands. It provided for the leasing of cutting privileges. In contrast, our initial reservations in 1891 permitted no leasing of timber cutting privileges and no disposal of reserved lands. It was not until 1897 that we adopted a policy of limited timber disposal. One facet permitted farmers, settlers, and miners to get free wood for their own use, with a clear prohibition against its export into even another State. Commercial sales were restricted to dead and mature trees that had to be marked before sale and could not be exported from the State or Territory where cut. While in nostalgic review, we often think of this as our beginning of forestry, and it was; it was hardly a license to practice intensive land management to provide a high level of wood and other forest resources. In fact, the basic act stressed water. Even more, it did not even mention wildlife, fish, recreation, or grazing, while at the same time, it directed examination of all reserved land and disposition of that found suited to agriculture.

What was slowly perceived — and I am not sure it has yet come into focus, although we keep reciting the litany — is that growing wood requires long-term planning, and forests take a long time to develop after they have been cut. This

has even more special meaning in Canada because, while the Ice Age has receded, your climate is unlikely over the next thousand years to warm sufficiently that the average growth rates in your forests will match the average growth rates in the forests of the United States.

From a governance standpoint, these are important considerations. The only long-term planning structures our societies have fashioned are government and corporations. Both have the facility for regulating actions over time, each based on its own structure and goals. In contrast, individual ownerships under our system of property rights and inheritance, has not been viewed as susceptible to societal regulation, and its self regulation shifts with individual dictates. The governing groups in private and public bodies are thus more likely to be guided by different perceptions of effective-life period.

In the eastern parts of both of our Nations — for example, in the States and provinces near the Great Lakes — what dominates are patterns of many small ownerships, except for a few large corporate blocks in the areas with less favorable climates and soils. We have forests that have been cut over several times, each successive cutting changing the resources and the productive capacity of the soil.

What we see is what we have. Thus, for a considerable period, the die is cast as to the composition and make-up of the forest resource. Systems of forestry are going to be conditioned by systems of utilization. Even if we had a societal willingness to wipe the state clean, then to re-establish a forest better able to meet expected future needs of the bulk of our populations which are concentrated in the East, it would be decades before the benefit would accrue. These factors mitigate against having high expectations and applying substantial efforts to make major changes rapidly or comprehensively.

In our South, we have seen a remarkable resurgence in forests. However, we face some problems. Our southern pineries owed their initial existence to the native people, the Indians. Without the wheel or the horse, and with only the most rudimentary hunting tools, they used wildfire to maintain an open forest as an aid to hunting. This suppressed the hardwoods and favored the pines. Our fear of fire, rooted in social and economic terms — the destruction of investments in trees before we could cut them — operates to enhance the reproduction of hardwoods where pines now grow or once grew. As fellow foresters, I know you follow events. The popular view is that public foresters and the timber industry in the South have a mind-set for growing pine — the term used to describe it is "monoculture." But the uncomfortable fact is that if we are guilty of trying, we are failing, because we have lost the Indian cultural bias for regular and frequent burning of the woods. Because our pattern of numerous small ownerships, many in farms and homesteads, and the nature of other manmade investments on the land, wholesale burning is considered unwise. Prescribed burning carries a high risk to the property of others. Heavy annual burning runs into air quality concerns. This suggests that technically effective means for encouraging the more highly sought pines will be expensive and fraught with societal conflicts.

Further, our pattern of small ownerships and the absence of and great distaste for regulation produces individually determined cutting patterns that are not planned from a forestry standpoint. These encourage greater hardwood reproduction than would those that applied the known state-of-the-art in silviculture.

Much forestry is still decided by the chain saw, rather than a plan for regeneration. In the U.S., government plays no real, positive role in private forestry.

In the eastern United States, we are affected by shifts in stand composition to greater hardwoods, as compared to softwoods. In contrast, in the West, in both the United States and Canada, the future remains a softwood scene. The

climatic factor, limited summer rain, makes serious hardwood encroachment unlikely. Also, our West, like yours, presents a situation where public ownership of the forest predominates. However, we have maintained and are likely to continue to maintain significant private industrial ownership of higher site forest land in the West.

But the issue that looms before us in the United States with increasing speed is the cutting of our private industry timber, in relation to a growing demand. There is also the fact that private lands will not have the stocks over a period of years ahead to maintain past or even current cutting levels. At the same time, in your West, much of the more accessible government timber has been cut, regeneration has not been as rapid or as effective as is desired, and future cutting will require reaching out into less accessible and economically less attractive areas.

All of these factors tend to increase, rather than decrease conflicting demands for governmental actions. Many of the proposals advanced, coming from the interest positions of the makers, will be in conflict with each other. But if the thesis is correct that rising demand and shrinking supplies are the near future, then I suggest that one is not being a prophet to suggest that demands for government to act will increase. If, on the other hand, personal self-interest had created a new supply of wood that approximately balanced demand, at least certain types of governmental actions would not be on one's list of likely occurrences.

One could range across the entire socio-economic spectrum and discuss likely actions that might increase or decrease the role of government in forestry. Many of the topics would present peripheral impacts that are possible. But for foresters, I would suggest that, since many of these issues will arise regardless of the forest situation, our concerns will of necessity focus more on those tied directly to the forest and its condition. In the United States, there is a significant disconnection between the relatively smaller timber grower-converter segment and the larger ultimate consumer segment. Our ultimate consumer segment, thus, is totally ignorant of past, current, and possible future relations with Canada as they may affect wood resources. This is not, or should not be, surprising, since that group also knows so little about the situation in the United States. However, today there are far greater ties based on wood between our Nations than existed several decades ago.

Fifty years ago, Canada's posture was to prevent the export of unprocessed wood for newsprint and pulp. Our posture was a hefty tariff on Canadian lumber. Both were manifestations of protectionism and both actions were directed by governmental action to meet issues each country thought met its national interest. Today our tariff on lumber has virtually disappeared. Yet as recently as 20 years ago, a concerted, but totally unsuccessful effort was made by a segment of our producers to institute a tariff of 10% whenever Canadian softwood imports rose above 10% of consumption. The argument made was that a downturn in our housing starts and the continued influx of alleged low-cost Canadian lumber compelled governmental action by the United States to stem it. It was said, but not proven, that the situation was causing mill closures. In the battle that raged, the Government of Canada, acting properly in its role as a Nation, participated with its softwood lumber industry and the U.S. Homebuilders Association to defeat this effort. Our lumber industry's role is interesting. The portion with Canadian ties was either silent or, as a silent partner, aided the Canadians. Our southern industry supported the ban. But this was not an anti-Canadian position. Their private view was that knocking out Canadian lumber was the next best thing to cutting it off from the western United States. Several key Southern industry people involved in the action expressed the view that our West had a rail rate advantage, again a government action, that subsidized it. Western interest in repeal of an act requiring U.S. lumber be sent east

in United States ships was also opposed by the South. The Jones Act, enacted in 1926 to foster a stronger U.S. merchant fleet, was judged by many as having helped strangle it, accidentally. Jones, incidentally, was a Senator from the West-Washington State. Yet the longshoremen, the few U.S. shipping firms, and the southern lumbermen opposed repeal of this act because it would then let foreign ships bring U.S. lumber to the East. The argument that Canada's firms could use low-cost foreign ships fell on deaf ears.

The governmental forum where the matter was debated in the United States, our Tariff Commission, had only limited powers, thus the broader softwood supply-demand and U.S.-Canadian mutual interest issues were never addressed, nor could this governmental body do any more than note them if they were presented.

This leads me to observe that in our large and complex societies, issues are often presented but the governmental machinery is not designed to say that what is being displayed are the symptoms of a problem which, if properly diagnosed, would lead to different actions than those sought. A situation may often develop that is similar to a person going to a doctor complaining he is short of breath and he thinks he may have a heart condition. An EKG is taken, his heart is pronounced 100%, while the fact that he has TB is not sensed or looked for.

The very long time-frame that affects the condition of our forests in terms of species, quality, and volume available for use is such that it is difficult to secure public understanding of issues. The forest land we cut in this decade has a forest formed not less than 5 and often 15 to 30 decades ago. How we treat it will not reveal its effect on wood supply for at least another 5 decades. Thus, the wood we will use 2, 3, 4, and even 8 decades from now has already largely been decided. We may, as foresters, make marginal but important changes at the far end of the near term, but the die is largely cast as to what will be on the land.

I do not suggest that we are the only profession with a long-time horizon. I know we are one. Nor do I suggest that debate over the future is so futile that we should not even worry about it, let alone think of it.

Nor can we dismiss or diminish the arguments put forward by those who argue for harvesting more, or harvesting less, for changing harvesting systems and methods, or for land use allocations that change the opportunities for management upward or downward. These issues are going to come on with even more vigor, the strength of each dependent on many factors. Rising population, increased demand for wood, and shrinking supplies will intensify debates and be a force calling for more governmental involvement.

These same factors are going to cause a greater interaction between our two countries. What each of us may do independently and without planning to affect the other — in fact in ignorance of any relationship — may present major issues that will involve us as foresters. If our domestic supplies tightened in relation to domestic demand, then Canadian forest policy — if it proposed to reduce harvest levels slightly to strengthen your long-term supply situation, would certainly be affected. Similarly, if our demand for wood dropped and our supply increased, this would have meaning and impacts for Canada. In either case, some would be judged as beneficial from one standpoint while others would not be. It is likely that within, as well as between, our countries there will be some lack of unanimity.

Political rhetoric will likely continue to simplistically urge that there be less as well as more governmental involvement in our lives. I say simplistically because, while in the abstract each of us would doubtless opt for the minimum, when it comes down to specific cases, we often stand our philosophical position on its head.

When we formed our Union of States, the colony of New York had enacted laws requiring the inspection and stamp-

ing of all products exported. The actual purpose was that the colony stamp on the product was a certification to the British purchaser when he received it that the product was as ordered. Lumber was stamped. New York State continued this until 1848 when a sector of the business community engaged in agricultural exports found that wheat from our midwest was superior to New York-grown wheat. Thus, the New York stamp depreciated it even though it came from Ohio. Contending that the government that governs least governs best, a campaign was waged to revise the State constitution to prevent State grading and stamping. The New York farmers joined in, since no stamp would enable the claim to be made that theirs was not New York wheat. The traders in New York City stood to gain, since "western" wheat would again come to New York rather than Philadelphia.

But the lumber exporters objected. They opposed repeal of the certification act. There were 150 State-paid lumber inspectors up and down the Hudson river. Their services were valued by the lumbermen for they helped promote both export and domestic sales. However, the voters went with the wheat people, and the constitution was amended. Defenbaugh, one of our lumber historians, recounts that chaos struck the industry and it was 25 years recovering. Finally, private lumber grading associations were formed, each with a little different standard. It was not until 1923, when Herbert Hoover became Secretary of Commerce, on his way to the Presidency, that national lumber inspection under a governmental umbrella was created in the United States. But lumber inspection was not the sole area where Hoover fashioned this tool. Industry generally supported the development of government-sanctioned standards applicable to a myriad of products. I suspect that little did Hoover or the business community realize the degree to which their quest for government involvement in their affairs would spread. Nor did the New York wheat merchants and farmers who espoused the view that the government that governs least governs best really believe that this was a universally applicable truth.

I cite this because whether, in the heat of the moment, we have a judgment about lumber inspection, cutting systems, timber harvest levels, silvicultural prescriptions, transportation adequacy, wood for energy, or workers' health and safety, we are involved in an issue that brings us to confront issues of governance.

Every time we seek to push government in or out of the picture, we are going to have to confront some of our fellow citizens here, as well as in other lands, whose actions are going to impact on us. The more critical a society views an issue to be, the more that society is going to turn to governance to treat it.

But we, as foresters, do have real opportunities as professionals to have some impact both as to whether government will have a role in an issue and the nature of that role. Our effectiveness depends on the ability we develop to sense issues and secure voluntary action on issues before they bound out of our grasp. Even when an issue seems to have gone beyond these bounds, we still, as professionals, can develop the means to assure that the societal action is sound. This, I suggest, is one of the real strengths that our type of society has developed. A Lysenko can exist, he can speak his piece, but he cannot direct actions or create a governmental policy which sets back rational management of resources, even though he may influence some.

At the same time, we as foresters, by our silence, can have the same impact as Lysenko had on Russian agriculture. One need not swiftly paddle one's canoe over Niagara Falls to kill one's self: one need only unwittingly let the canoe drift to the point of no recovery.

Thus the issue we confront is not solely the role of government in forestry. Even more fundamentally, it is whether we, as professional foresters, will exert ourselves as professionals so that forestry has the meaning to society that our society wants and needs and that the role of governance constantly supports this goal.

We are a part of our society. We cannot retreat to another planet. We are a part of its governance in our roles as foresters and as citizens, no matter where we work.