A FOREST RECREATION WORKSHOP

A. W. BIGNELL*  

ABSTRACT

In May 1978 the New Zealand Forest Service held a 3-day workshop on forest recreation at the Forest Research Institute (FRI), Rotorua. The objectives of the workshop were to examine current Forest Service approaches to forest recreation from the policy, planning, management, and research viewpoints; and to contribute towards policy making and the development of guidelines for management and research. This report summarises the proceedings of the workshop.†

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The Research Advisory Committees for the Production and Protection Forestry Divisions of FRI viewed the need for research in forest recreation, but found it difficult to draft specific proposals. The appointment of Dr J. Kennedy as a visiting National Research Advisory Council Fellow at FRI provided an opportunity to consider proposals and offer guidelines for recreation research in the New Zealand Forest Service.

Dr Kennedy believed that Forest Service recreational policy required definition, and recreational management procedures required development. Hence a workshop was planned to examine Forest Service approaches to recreation; to explore the status quo, consider what might happen in the future, and provide a base-line of thought which could be used when approaching other bodies involved with recreation.

ATTENDANCE

Attendance was primarily from Forest Service personnel (at all levels of management) who had specific experience or expertise in recreation, as well as in other facets of forestry. In addition, three non-Forest-Service participants were invited: Dr L. F. Molloy (Federated Mountain Clubs of New Zealand, Forestry Council, and the South Island Beech Forest Management and Utilization Council); Dr R. A. Aukerman (Professor of Outdoor Recreation at Colorado State University, a visiting Research Fellow at Tussock Grass-

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*New Zealand Forest Service, Private Bag, Wellington.
†The full proceedings (including recommendations resulting from the Workshop) are available from Forest Research Institute, P.B., Rotorua.
lands and Mountain Lands Institute); G. Wilkinson (Cawthron Institute).

PAPERS PRESENTED AND ASSOCIATED DISCUSSION

The workshop was divided into five sessions, each to examine a different facet of forest recreation.

Session One: Review of the Forest Service's Performance in Forest Recreation

A. Kirkland began with a paper entitled “Historical Perspective of Forest Service Involvement in Recreation”. He pointed out that Forest Service involvement is a reflection of statutory powers, policy, management plans, and operations and budget plans. The Forests Act 1921 was oriented to production forestry, but in practice recreation was an accepted use of forest lands, although little effort was made to foster it. The Forests Act 1949 accepted that forests could be used for scientific, recreation, and amenity purposes but only if such uses were not prejudicial to forestry. “Forestry” in this context was assumed to be the production-oriented functions prescribed in the earlier Act. The 1949 Act, in effect, recognised an expanded role for forests. The problems associated with the development of the recreational use of forest land in the Tararua Ranges led to the Forests Amendment Act 1965, which allowed the creation of State Forest Parks.

The next significant step, said Mr Kirkland, was the Forests Amendment Act 1976 which arose from discussions at the 1974-5 Forestry Development Conference. This Act provided for the “balanced use” of forests, defined as embracing the production of timber or other forest produce, the protection of the land and vegetation, water and soil management, the protection of indigenous flora and fauna, and recreational, education, historical, cultural, scenic, aesthetic, amenity, and scientific purposes. A section of this amendment repealed the part of the Forests Act 1949 entitled “State Forest Parks and Recreation Areas” and substituted a new part entitled “Use of State Forest Land for Public Recreation”. This section greatly expanded the provision for public use of State forests. In recognition of the 1976 amendment, a new zoning scheme for State forests has been promulgated which recognises recreation as a primary land-use.

Discussion following Mr Kirkland’s paper revolved around policy, planning, and the role of State Forest Park advisory committees. The role of the advisory committees was widened in the 1976 amendment and the regulations are now being revised to accommodate this expanded role. The lack of an
overall policy for forest recreation and the arbitrary division between indigenous forests and other State forest lands were noted. Planning for recreation at the regional level was regarded as essential. The influence of the Town and Country Planning Act 1977 on forest planning will not be known until later in 1978 when mechanisms for its implementation are established.

The discussion of Conservancy statements began with a consideration of the questions relating to recreation policy. It was felt that separate policies for different classes of State forest land were not desirable. While one policy should cover all land types, its interpretation might vary with the land type under consideration. A call was made for a national recreation policy, to apply not only to the Forest Service but to other government agencies and interested bodies. Such a policy was desired because of the multiplicity of bodies interested in recreation and the subsequent opportunities for overlap, duplication, and conflict in dealing with recreation matters. The total Forest Service approach to recreation was typified as being cautious and timid (i.e., "reacting to public pressures"). The caution at the planning and management levels was seen to be, in part, a consequence of not having a recreation policy.

Much discussion was devoted to the assessment of public demand for forest recreation. The distinction was made between "use" and "demand" for recreation, with their need for separate assessment methodologies. Public surveys to assess forest recreation demand were favoured, provided that reliable and valid methods are used. The view was expressed that the Forest Service had never fully measured public demand for forest recreation because it might find that there was a very high level of demand which it could not satisfy.

The use of zoning schemes in management planning was widely discussed. The consensus was that zoning is essential to forest management in the multiple-use setting, particularly to help resolve conflicts in use. The zoning exercise provides a disciplined approach to assessing the suitability of the resource to withstand a particular use, but planners should not feel compelled to zone every piece of land. If the information base is inadequate, an "unclassified" zone is appropriate.

Session Two: Present Performance of the Forest Service

The purpose of this session was to allow forest managers the opportunity to examine various planning and management methods currently being used in dealing with recreation. Case studies began with a field trip through Whakarewarewa
State Forest Park, a production forest with substantial recreational usage. Vehicular access for recreation is restricted to the perimeter and one internal picnic site. The forest has a regional park role for Rotorua. With the completion of the new visitor centre, more of the Rotorua tourist trade may be attracted to the forest.

The session then moved to the consideration of seven other case-studies. Stewart Island was shown to be a unique resource with use confined mainly to the track system and the huts. User attitudes and preferences are being sought to guide management, and a comprehensive series of interpretive pamphlets has been produced. Service is the main aim of management, although not all services are free.

Coromandel State Forest Park has a very high level of use. User surveys carried out to date have assisted Park management by indicating preferred developments. Previously developments had been intuitive and may not have been what the public truly desired. Thoughtless damage to easily accessible kauri dams is occurring and their quality is deteriorating.

The availability of finance to run Tararua State Forest Park was crucial to its successful management. The suggestion was made that the number of State Forest Parks be reduced nationally, while retaining the present total budget. Although present forest park staff are enthusiastic, concern was expressed at their lack of formal recreation training and the lack of retraining opportunities.

Craigieburn State Forest Park was managed as a forest park for some time before being officially recognised as such. It is unique in that research is a major objective of park management, and it is the only forest park to contain skifields. There were some initial problems over the leases of huts associated with the skifields but these have been overcome. The need for co-operative planning with adjacent land-managing bodies was recognised.

Catlins State Forest Park is geographically scattered, which initially caused administrative problems. The advisory committee decided on the Park policy after its first few meetings, resolving that as wide a spectrum of recreational use as possible should be catered for within the Park. The policy is now being implemented with development of facilities such as a trail for people confined to wheelchairs. Through recreational use of forest lands, the public can be exposed to forestry practices. This can be used to advantage to achieve public understanding of the aims of forestry.

Hira State Forest, adjacent to Nelson city, is an example of public use of an exotic forest in a region with a surfeit of
alternative recreation opportunities. When it was initially developed the usual rationale based on productivity and forest economics prevailed. But in time the public began using the young forest. A recreation plan has not been formulated for the forest. The management philosophy being adopted is to allow the public to discover for themselves the recreational opportunities the forest can provide.

Naseby Forest was the final case-study presented. A brief history of the area was sketched showing the rise and fall of the town with gold mining, and its subsequent build-up as a resort centre influenced by the adjacent forest. A “Survey of attitudes and interests” was carried out in the township. The survey highlighted the values arising from the lack of commercialism in the town, the peacefulness of the setting, and the scenic value of the larch/Douglas fir stands. Concern was expressed at the decline of some services within the town, but a larger population-base was required to maintain these. Hence a plan was drawn up that reinforced the containment of the town by the forest, allowed for intensive crib (bach) development within the town boundaries under a forest canopy, allowed vehicular access to the boundary of the forest with foot access to the interior, and maintained the visual diversity of the forest.

Session Three: A Critical Review of Problems and Methods

A panel, composed of those people who had presented case studies earlier, discussed points arising from the preceding session. Staff training for recreation was felt to be lacking. This must be rectified by giving all forest managers a general appreciation of recreation, and by training some personnel to specialist level to act as advisers to forest managers. The ability of Forest Service personnel to deal with planning matters raised in the Town and Country Planning Act 1977 was questioned, and a possible solution was seen in employing town planners to advise forest planners. Public surveys were seen as necessary to determine public desires with respect to recreation. They also have a public relations role in allowing the public to be involved in forest management. The need for specialists in survey techniques, to work alongside forest officers, was seen as essential.

Session Four: Outsiders' Views of Forest Service Performance

This session gave the non-Forest-Service people attending the workshop the opportunity to present their thoughts formally. The session was opened by Dr L. F. Molloy giving a classification scheme of forest users; namely, those people
who know what recreation experience they want and where
to get it, and those who have a vague idea of the recreation
experience they desire but do not know how or where to ob-
tain it. The first group is small but well organised and quite
articulate. The second group is larger, may be dominated by
family groups, and is less well organised. In many instances
there is a love-hate relationship between the user groups
and forest managers.

In the planning and management realm, Dr Molloy saw
several differences in philosophy between users and forest
managers, particularly with respect to multiple use. Users
often believed their particular use should be dominant, while
managers seemed to have a concept of "optimum productive
land-use". Even though the Forest Service is changing its
stance, it will need a large public education programme to re-
establish a level of trust. Often the public "reacted" to plan-
ing issues rather than put forward new ideas and, although
the reaction may be emotional, the feelings expressed are no
less genuinely held for this, a fact the Forest Service must
recognise. There is a great need for the Forest Service to
further improve its communication with the public.

Forest officers are not trained in dealing with the public, a
serious shortcoming which needs rectifying. This becomes
more important as the development of facilities is increased.
By having more empathy with the public some bad develop-
ments could be avoided. A final point made by Dr Molloy was
the need to consider landscape values in all phases of forest
management.

New Zealand forest managers' attitudes towards recreation
and multiple use, and the changing United States Forest Ser-
vice approach towards recreation and multiple use, were
explored by Dr J. Kennedy. Drawing on his survey of members
of the New Zealand Institute of Foresters, he then high-
lighted the general acceptance of the need for multiple-use
forest management. However, the survey showed a low level
of confidence by forest managers in their ability to manage
for recreation-amenity values as compared with traditional
forest values such as wood production.

The U.S. Forest Service of 1960 was described as dominated
by production forestry and a military style of command. This
began to change as the outdoor-recreation movement of the
mid-1960s brought forest managers into the "realities of
twentieth century urban America". A diversification occurred
in the types of people employed. The National Environ-
mental Policy Act 1970 forced Federal agencies engaged in
land-use planning to look at several alternatives, analyse
the socio-economic and environmental impacts, use an inter-
disciplinary approach, and involve the public in an active and meaningful way.

Traditional attitudes said this could never work. After various other avenues had been tried the requirements were finally accepted and are now working, although data by which to judge the magnitude of the impact are frequently lacking. It is necessary to adopt a flexible management approach, especially at the public involvement level, and it is necessary to respect people, both the public and co-workers.

The situation with respect to intergovernmental co-operation was explored by Dr Aukerman and Mr Wilkinson. Both pointed to problems at the planning level brought about through the different internal organisation of the major land-administering departments. Problems at the management level were highlighted, resulting from a lack of communication and interdepartmental rivalry. Both speakers believed the present situation to be far from optimal, and considered that it must be improved in the future if wise land-use planning and management for recreation are to come about.

Session Five: Future Requirements

Around Dunedin, Mr Purey-Cust believes the present low-use situation provides the opportunity to gain experience in recreation management which will be useful as pressures increase. The most pressing need is to recognise landscapes and recreation sites of value and set them aside for future use. Coordination with other land-administering bodies needs boosting, as does communication between planners and decision-makers.

Anne Gillman set forth her experiences with user-surveys in Canterbury: changes in survey techniques and the use of alternative methods of data collection were suggested. The role of a survey as a public relations tool was important for it gave people the opportunity to feel involved in the planning of State forests.

The need to assess accurately the demand for forest recreation, and a system of stratifying demand into four levels was presented by Bignell. This stratification can be used in recreation resource inventories.

Forest Service recreation research was reviewed by Tustin and Kennedy. When the proportion of the total research vote devoted to recreation research was compared with the proportion of the total Forest Service vote devoted to recreation planning and management, recreation research was seen to be lagging behind. Demand studies were seen to be of highest priority for research.
The management policy for New Zealand's indigenous State forests appears to have anomalies in its recreation content, one being the implicit directive to service present recreation needs without retaining options for future generations. There is no policy on exclusive-use privileges, commercial exploitation of recreation resources, education in outdoor recreation, and the enhancement or modification of the landscape generally.

Hodder suggested that the Forest Service should, as a matter of policy, consistent with the conservation and multiple use of State forests:

— Place emphasis on meeting local and regional public-recreation requirements (in conjunction with other recreation resources, current, potential, public, and commercial).

— Provide for recreational pursuits by all sectors of the public — physically active and disabled, young and old, and ethnic cultures — but not for exclusive interests or use.

— Recognise that forests are a distinct component of the landscape and that management may either minimise their impact or enhance the visual environment.

— Provide basic facilities for recreation use without charge, but charge for the use of serviced facilities.

CONCLUSION

After three days of discussion, there was a clearer understanding of the status of forest recreation within the Forest Service, and the current difficulties it faced.

Following the workshop, a committee of participants was convened to make recommendations to the Director-General of Forests on matters arising from the workshop. The committee made recommendations in the five general areas of policy, planning, management, personnel and staff training, finance, and research. If the recommendations are implemented, the Forest Service's efforts to deal with recreation as a land use should be improved, as should efforts to coordinate and co-operate with other bodies involved with recreation.