

# A Canadian forester questions New Zealand forestry

The Commonwealth Forestry Conference, September, 1989, Rotorua. The request posed by many delegates: please explain to us what has happened to New Zealand forestry. Slowly and carefully the numerous New Zealand delegates courteously explained the changes. Yes, the native forests have been taken away from the New Zealand Forest Service and locked up. But why? We heard stories of disastrous beech schemes, unregulated logging, lack of research on stand dynamics and regeneration processes, slow growth rates, complicated ecology and too little and too late multiple-use planning. We went to see podocarp forests and saw 19-year-old attempts at selection cutting with under-planting. More questions, many more questions. The Canadians were listening carefully, very carefully, especially those from British Columbia because there is a close parallel in some aspects. B.C. foresters have effective control over a vast native forest estate, including spectacular coastal rain forests. The environmentalists are pressing hard on B.C. Coastal forest issues. Would the B.C. Government take the forests away from the foresters because the public sees

them to be a destructive force rather than effective managers. Was this the problem in New Zealand? Did the foresters in New Zealand Forest Service fail the public, or did the history of massive native forest destruction in New Zealand make the lock-up inevitable? Must foresters be more outgoing and ensure themselves a broad basis of public support? Does multiple-use planning avoid the lock-up? What were and are the forestry students taught in school about these issues? We received answers and opinions. The lesson to Canadians seemed clear – smarten up our act.

New Zealand foresters are not registered professionals, but they are in B.C.; professional status is required for all forestry planning and silviculture plans must be signed by a forester.

Does forestry professionalism bring more rigour and avoid some of the problems? The B.C. Forest Service thinks it does because it has thrown the gauntlet of management into the hands of the profession and the licensees because it has been down-sized to the point where it can hardly manage it all.

The sale of the plantations. Extraordinary! How can a Government sell off its forest estate for two rotations cash for each to pay its foreign debt? Don't only third-world countries do that? Are there not multiple-use values attributable to these plantations which are endangered by selling them off? Do New Zealanders really think of radiata pine plantations as

a crop like cabbages? Why do they not just lease the forests or enter into management agreements like Canada? Canadians would never allow these forests to be sold off; never, but never! The Canadian forests are a public resource; there is even much public opposition to more leases. Why are radiata forests different? Why aren't the New Zealand foresters complaining?

When all the answers and opinions to the many, many questions are provided to the delegates what do they think about New Zealand forestry? This one thinks that, in the enthusiasm for national economic restructuring, it looks as if some serious mistakes will be made. Forests once sold are hard to buy back. It is clear that the public perception of forests and foresters is quite different in New Zealand and Canada; the practices are different. Gifford Pinchot's dictum "greatest good for the greatest number in the long run" can be interpreted in many ways. Those differences in public perception are very important – foresters should remember that. The price may be loss of your forests.

Yes, we enjoyed the conference. We really did learn a lot, probably as much about ourselves, our attitudes and institutions. That is the value of international travel and conferences. The New Zealanders were great hosts.

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## The importance of debate

(continued)

*should surrender either his rights or duties during the rest of his waking hours. Nor does it absolve him of his responsibilities towards his fellow citizens. And on occasions when what he conceives to be his responsibility towards his employer is in direct conflict with what he deems to be his social responsibilities, he has a moral duty to put the public interest first."*

Later, when speaking of the decisions that foresters are involved in, Jack Westoby said that they are "important for the community. They are often irreversible. Their effects can be much more long-lasting. This is why foresters should speak out.... Above all, they must continually remind contemporary society of its obligation to future generations: foresters are better qualified than most to act as society's conscience in this respect."

We all have a responsibility to become involved. It should not and cannot be left to a few while the majority just talk among themselves.

**D.J. Mead**  
Editor

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