

Remarks of Mitch Friedman  
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A year from now America will have a new President. Not long after we'll have a new Undersecretary of Agriculture and perhaps a new Chief. I am hopeful that the Forest Service's policies and budget, perhaps even its statutory authority, will more rapidly evolve toward a restoration mission that can be efficiently executed. I want to talk about this future, mostly in field terms of generating and implementing quality projects.

My adult life has been largely dedicated to political advocacy to put in place policies to sustain biodiversity in large-scale terrestrial ecosystems, mostly those of Washington and southern British Columbia. That's the mission of Conservation Northwest. I have been part of great conservation successes in terms of establishing reserves for old forests and wilderness - changing the colors on maps to recognize special places. But in the long term game of sustaining biodiversity, the goalposts are being moved by climate change, exotic species and other factors. I'm not sure anybody knows the score at this point.

For years I viewed the Forest Service as an adversary. Now people like me can't afford that view, with the ecological health of our public lands at stake. So I dream of a Forest Service as effective as the one Herbert Kaufman described, working collaboratively, yet vigorously, to restore and sustain ecosystem health at landscape scales.

I will talk first about the mission, what I call a Restoration Marshall Plan for our national forests. Then I will share specific thoughts on how that mission can better be carried out.

I believe there is a much greater sense of agreement these days about the primary purpose of the national forests and the Forest Service being ecological. I recall more than a decade ago, Senator Craig held hearings to advance ideas that he, or actually his staffer Mark Rey, had on reforming NFMA. In testimony, Chief Jack Ward Thomas pointed out the need to clarify in Forest Service law and policy whether biodiversity is an objective or a constraint.

Seems like a lifetime ago, filled with false start initiatives like New Perspectives, Ecosystem Management, and many more.

Today, the case for biodiversity being the primary objective is so compelling that no coin need be tossed, no swami consulted, no sheep

entrails deciphered. A couple years ago, former Chief Bosworth put it this way: “Our focus today is on restoring and maintaining the ability of ecosystems to furnish services that people want and need.” He asserted that 75 to 80% of timber now cut from national forest is byproduct to restoration objectives. Recently he brushed aside what he calls “hand-wringing over the Forest Service’s mission” as coming from “those who are disturbed by the Forest Service’s shift in focus from commercial resource extraction to ecological restoration.”

I tend to think that the agency would actually benefit from an overhaul of its guiding statutes. But for the purposes of this talk, it’s enough to accept likely agreement that after decades of excessive livestock grazing, road building, industrial logging and misguided fire policy, the central purpose of the Forest Service now is to repair ecosystems.

You know, I was one of the very first tree sitters. I organized the first spotted owl protests. How do I come to be the guy talking about collaboration for common purpose? If I seem to have veered toward the mainstream, it’s fair to also say the mainstream has veered to meet me at least half way. The context in which the Forest Service and activists like me operate has changed due to a changing climate, changing forests, and changing society. We no longer challenge one another on whether to repair ecosystems, but how.

In fact, our ecosystems need more than to be *repaired*. They also need to be *prepared* for the effects of climate change. Chief Kimbell, with her present emphasis on Climate Change, Water and Kids, points out that among the needs are:

- establishing landscape-level forest conditions most likely to sustain forest ecosystems in a changing climate;
- preventing and reducing barriers - like forest fragmentation - to species migration; and
- making forests more resistant to fires, insects, and disease, and making forests more resilient to major disturbances such as large wildfires.

As we set out to both repair and prepare our ecosystems, perhaps a corollary can be found in the Marshall Plan by which societies came together after World War II to rebuild a ruined Europe for a common future. It’s a handy analogy, serving as a call for previously warring factions to come together for what will surely be an expensive but essential and ultimately worthwhile undertaking.

I have old friends who would rather emulate the mistakes of the Versailles Peace, trying for unconditional surrender of the Forest Service and timber industry. I like to point out that Churchill said that the first step in rebuilding Europe required collaboration between France and Germany. The Marshall Plan worked to bring common purpose and rebuild Europe, which is the lesson we must extend to our forests.

Chief Kimbell says that, "...forest health restoration, open space, managing recreation and invasive species will still serve as a way of focusing and prioritizing our work. Second, strong community relationships, partnerships, and collaborative work will be more important than ever in delivering the Forest Service Mission."

Some of the most gratifying work in my 20 years of conservation has included recent collaborative projects across Washington. Conservationists are indeed finding common ground with new high-tech mills that want small diameter wood, communities that want in equal measure both jobs and ecologically healthy forests, and Forest Service personnel that want to make productive use of their field expertise and conservation values.

I have learned that collaboration need not amount to duping or being duped, in which one interest prevails over another. It is indeed possible under the circumstances of our present forest concerns for diverse parties to sustain mutual respect and, through time and effort, find agreement on actions that are within our respective interests while advancing the common good.

I am impressed by the work of the Montana Forest Restoration Committee, a diverse group that was able to find agreement on 13 principles to guide restoration efforts here in the state. Identifying such common ground up front allows collaborators to focus their efforts on areas of agreement and at least putting off until a better time those areas in which there is not ready agreement. For instance, we have more than enough work to do restoring dry forests and watersheds that we can ill afford the contentious distractions of aggressive salvage, thinning of high elevation forest, or anything else for which there is not a clear scientific case for restorative impact.

Collaboration has a pleasant ring, but its challenges should not be underestimated. Chief among them are basic people problems: There are conservationists who remain skeptical of even the thinning of small-diameter trees in dry forest types. There are timber folks who don't agree that the logging of old growth or roadless areas should be off the table. There are other interests, such as off road motorized recreation, which turn

a blind eye to its harm to wildlife and solitude. There are local elected officials who aren't ready to get past yesterday's war. And there are agency personnel who are less than eager to cede control to stakeholders.

Accomplishing our Restoration Marshall Plan requires us to work through these problems.

The benefits of successfully collaborating to pursue common ground are vast. Conservation Northwest is part of a cutting edge collaborative process called the Northeast Washington Forestry Coalition, which has gone beyond negotiating specific restoration projects. The Coalition is in advanced stages of developing a blueprint for management planning across a landscape larger than the entire Colville National Forest.

The Colville has been gridlocked in familiar timber war for decades. On its roughly million acres, only 30,000 are protected in designated wilderness, and recent years have seen just a few million board feet logged annually. The blueprint that the Coalition has put forth would add several hundred thousand acres to the wilderness system, restore a couple hundred thousand more acres of dry forest toward old growth Ponderosa pine with natural fire regimes, and maintain fuel loads in the wildland urban interface with excellent silviculture. The 80 mmbf that could be generated annually under this plan would meet the needs of local mills.

This blueprint is now receiving substantial, though not universal, support from local communities. I doubt such a plan could have been arrived at by the agency on its own via the old approach of centralized, internal forest planning. And even if that miracle had occurred, pushback from the community would likely have been overwhelming.

Can our blueprint be implemented? There are definitely challenges, including money and agency staffing. Legislation recently introduced by Senator Bingaman and others to direct funding to high-profile collaborative pilot projects would help, but that probably means that non-pilot areas will get even less funding for probably a decade.

The core problem is that the Forest Service budget has been stood on its head. While static overall for the past several years, the percent going to fire suppression has grown from 22% to 45%, meaning \$750mm less annually for timber sales. The President's '09 proposal would make it worse yet.

I don't think that anybody can make a straight-faced case that dry forest treatments or watershed restoration projects are occurring at anywhere near the needed pace or scale. Even projects created by popular

collaborative groups struggle for the federal dollars needed for implementation while fire suppression eats the lion's share.

Agency leadership is also a challenge we face on the Colville. I have mostly been impressed with that leadership, as our collaboration could not have gotten as far as it has without it. But there is need to reward success and avoid giving life support to anachronisms of the old timber wars.

While it is remarkable the degree to which major players, most notably conservation and timber leaders, are singing Kumbaya, not everyone has joined the choir. ORV interests have not engaged in good faith discussion, choosing instead to try to polarize the situation in hopes of getting more access to the back country than they could ever find agreement on at the collaborative table. Of course this is red meat for some county commissioners who can't resist an opportunity for old-fashioned grandstanding. This is all to be expected. But Forest Service leaders must shield collaborative processes and products from political intervention, instead of conceding to the squeaky wheel of malcontent politicians or special interests. Otherwise it will be hard to break from the gridlock of the past.

We also occasionally find that the challenges to collaboration come from within the agency itself. Standard bureaucratic reasoning applies: power, turf, grudges, budgets and performance evaluations that reward the wrong things, as well as the hubris of many foresters and the difficulty they have in incorporating new ideas from non-professionals. Many of the institutional signals and inertia of the Forest Service still run contrary to a restoration mission, and I surmise that only the finest agency leaders are making progress swimming against that stream.

I encourage each of you to challenge yourselves and your staffs to regard community collaborative groups as a resource rather than a challenge to your discretion. Yes, they take up time and effort. But they may also add to your efficiency if you use them as early indicators of what projects are likely to succeed.

For instance, the Tripod Fire of 2006 burned a lot of lodgepole in the eastern Okanogan National Forest. Conservation Northwest went to work collaborating with others before the fire was even out, challenging ourselves to agree on volume that could be salvaged with minimal ecological impact, therefore circumventing the need for a NEPA process that would take more time than it would for the small trees to rot. Our collaborative group succeeded. But contrary to our recommendations the Forest Service undertook a full NEPA analysis and ultimately produced a

sale that was too big, too late, too expensive and too controversial. It never went out for bid. Money, wood, and community good will were squandered.

Collaboration and innovation are not easy, and they are inherently unfamiliar. Perhaps we should be less surprised by the challenges than by the successes. Nonetheless, I have seen enough progress to be encouraged and to remain committed to the idea that a Restoration Marshall Plan is possible.

In 2006, Chief Bosworth said that, “Increasingly our role in the Forest Service is to bring folks together to articulate their concerns and values, hammer out some agreements based on mutual goals, then work together to restore ecosystems through on-the-ground community based projects.”

If the Forest Service, from Chief Kimbell down to each of you, can stick to that spirit, there is good reason for hope. While I believe the next Congress will need to help with both policy direction and more money committed directly to collaborative restoration, there are things we can do on the ground in any case. In fact, I believe that the goal of a large scale Restoration Marshall Plan cannot be accomplished without widespread community-based collaboration.

Collaboration itself does not equate to a Restoration Marshall Plan, but I believe its an essential part of it. Given the role you rangers play in leading the day-to-day field execution of restoration projects, I'd like to offer eight general principles that, in my experience are helpful to advancing collaboration:

1. **Establish and respect clear sideboards** - such as avoiding new roads, roadless areas, or cutting old trees - to keep attention focused on likely common ground. An important sideboard for restoration projects is that timber is generated only as a byproduct of restoration objectives.
2. **Walk before you run.** Pursue first the more obvious common ground, like treatments within young plantations and wildland urban interface, or strategic fuel reduction in dry forests to breakup fuel continuity and reduce risk to key resources from large fires. Put off to later challenges like fire salvage or any silviculture in mature forest. Use small Stewardship projects to test new ideas or different approaches that come from collaborative partners. This time allows a group to build relationships that will pay off in the future.

3. **Strong leadership.** Strong leaders help collaboration survive both substantive challenges and tugs from naysayers.
4. **Embrace stewardship.** Stewardship contracts allow for much more flexibility and collaborative involvement than traditional timber sale contracts. While they take more time up front, efficiency and results are gained in the long run.
5. **Relationships, field knowledge, and new ideas are assets.** Agency personnel, especially district rangers, should be transferred less frequently so that a link to the land and community is more stable.
6. **Training needs to keep step.** Think about ways to give your staff more training in the skills needed for collaboration, like how to better work with stakeholders, collaboratively use science to build common understanding and reduce ideological differences, employ more efficient NEPA tools, and accept the risks of new approaches without succumbing to fear that good projects will be appealed. Sharing these experiences across districts, forests and regions will speed progress.
7. **Performance standards also need to keep step.** Line officers and leaders need credit for collaborative work, identifying opportunities outside of project boundaries, and for quality restoration treatments.
8. **Be Leaders in Restoration Forestry.** Restoration forestry is a new paradigm and not just a reshuffling of management objectives. It requires deep appreciation and understanding of the complexity of natural systems and re-examining the traditional views of disturbance, forest health, and decadence. While the tools and knowledge of production forestry are still relevant and useful, embracing the latest science to develop new, more complex approaches to silviculture and landscape management is critical to successful collaboration.

Collaboration cannot solve every problem, and win-win will not always replace real life trade-offs. But there is much value in the act of working together, as the massive challenges that face our world require us to resolve as much as we can in ways that bring us closer together, rather than divide us. Trust, risk-taking and momentum build as challenges are overcome, bringing to collaboration a culture of candor, problem-solving, and collegiality that builds community.

Our focus is to find the common ground that leads us effectively forward, in a Restoration Marshall Plan that can, with a minimum of conflict and maximum efficiency, lead to a future of forest ecosystems and watersheds that are repaired from the past and prepared for the changes of the future.