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6 OCTOBER 1998

# Natural Resource Agenda



"We can leave no greater gift for our children, show no greater respect for our forbearers, than to leave the watersheds entrusted to our care healthier, more diverse, and more productive."

—Forest Service Chief Mike Dombeck, 1998

## Speech Material

# A Gradual Unfolding of a National Purpose: A Natural Resource Agenda for the 21st Century

### Introduction

I'd like to begin this speech by thanking Secretary Glickman and Under Secretary Jim Lyons for their continued leadership and support of the Forest Service. Their efforts within the Administration on our behalf are essential to advancing our agenda.

I also want to thank my leadership team and all Forest Service employees. Our jobs are not easy and I am very proud of your performance. We often find ourselves caught in the midst of social changes, shifting priorities, and political crosscurrents.

I wish that I could tell you that what I have to say today would change all of that. It likely will not. Social values will continue to change. New information about how to manage sustainable ecosystems will continue to evolve. Political interests will continue to intersect with resource management decisions.

What I can do today is lend focus to our efforts. The agenda that I will outline for you will help us to engage more effectively in what I think is one of the noblest, most important callings of our generation - bringing people together and helping them find ways to live within the limits of the land.

We have two very basic choices. We can sit back on our heels and react to the newest litigation, the latest court order, or the most recent legislative proposal. This would ensure that we continue to be buffeted by social, political, and budgetary changes.

Or, we can lead by example. We can lead by using the best available scientific information based on principles of ecosystem management that the Forest Service pioneered. And we can use the laws that guide our management to advance a new agenda. An agenda with a most basic and essential focus - caring for the land and serving people.

The answer is clear, we must lead. Just as we always have - from concepts of sustained yield, to multiple use, to ecosystem management. We have a proud tradition of responding to new information and adapting to change. In fact, as a former Chief said in 1930, "A federal policy of forestry has been evolving for almost 60 years. It has been built up by successive legislative enactment's and the resulting activities. It is not a specific and limited program but rather is a gradual unfolding of a national purpose."

"A gradual unfolding of a national purpose." That is the premise of the agenda I have developed with other Forest Service leaders and I will outline today. We

have developed with other Forest Service leaders and I will outline today. We will not be complacent. We have an obligation to lead. My expectation is that you will share this with, and learn from, your colleagues, local communities, interest groups, and others to further refine and promote an agenda that is sensitive to the needs of people and implemented within the limits of the land.

Our job is to care for the land and serve people. On the lands we manage, this means complying with the laws that protect, and help us to manage, our natural resource inheritance. On lands outside of Forest Service management, our role is to provide leadership, technical assistance, and support for all forests. With your leadership, what we talk about today will help the nation set a course that will leave our children a rich - and I hope, even richer - natural resource legacy.

Our agenda will focus on four key areas:

- Watershed health and restoration
- Sustainable forest ecosystem management
- Forest roads and
- Recreation

### **Returning to Our Roots**

Before getting into the specifics of our agenda, let's take stock of where we are and where we've been. This new agenda will guide future policies and decisions. But in reality it is as old as the Organic Administration Act of 1897. Over 100 years ago, through the Organic Act, Congress directed that:

No national forest shall be established, except to improve and protect the forest within the boundaries, or for the purpose of securing favorable conditions of water flows, and to furnish a continuous supply of timber for the use and necessities of citizens of the United States.

In recent years, much has been written, said, and done about the Organic Act's provision for timber production. What is far less understood is the Act's strong focus on watershed maintenance and restoration. In fact, the need to protect and enhance water supplies, including flood protection was the driving force behind the Organic Act and other early forest legislation and later laws such as the Clean Water Act. The emphasis on watershed protection was both prophetic and well deserved. For example, today over 900 municipal watersheds are within national forests.

Watershed maintenance and restoration are the oldest and highest callings of the Forest Service. The agency is, and always will be, bound to them by tradition, law, and science. The national forests truly are the headwaters of the nation. Congress recognized this well over 100 years ago and in the intervening years repeatedly reinforced that message. Our agenda places a renewed emphasis on ensuring that our watersheds are protected and restored for the use and benefit of our citizens.

Our agenda builds on this historical and legal foundation and affirms that we must do more to sustain and restore the fabric of the whole landscape. All of our laws - from the Organic Act to the National Environmental Policy Act through the Clean Water Act - are based on a fairly straightforward premise. We must do more. Our collective challenge is to find ways to involve more people, to provide cleaner water, and to make decisions that afford even greater protection of, and benefits from, our natural resources as we carry out our multiple use mandate.

We cannot simply preserve our wilderness areas and national parks and by extension hope to protect our natural resource heritage. We cannot afford to manage our national forests and other public lands in isolation of state and private lands. We must work with state and local governments and communities to link neighborhood creeks and tree-lined streets to the sea-bound rivers, state and national parks, and forests.

Our agenda takes the not-so-new position that we must do more to sustain and restore the fabric of the whole landscape. If we are wise enough to understand the physics of splitting the atom, advanced enough to communicate instantaneously around the globe, if we can feed billions of people, surely we can act with enough foresight and wisdom to protect and restore our lands and waters. If this nation, of all others, cannot demonstrate how to live in harmony with the natural world that sustains us, what hope is there for other nations?

### **Watershed Health and Restoration**

So our first priority is to maintain and restore the health of our ecosystems and watersheds. Healthy watersheds are resilient in the face of natural events such as floods, fire, and drought and are more capable of absorbing the effects of human-induced disturbances. Watersheds absorb rain, recharge underground aquifers, provide cleaner water to people, and reduce drinking water treatment costs. They provide wildlife and fish habitat and connect headwaters to downstream areas and wetlands and riparian areas to uplands. Healthy watersheds dissipate floods across floodplains increasing soil fertility and minimizing damage to lives, property, and streams.

We must protect our healthiest watersheds and restore those that are degraded. We must also continue our long tradition of protecting wild areas such as wilderness so they can remain important sources of clean water and biological diversity.

How we manage our forests has a profound effect on the quality of our drinking water and the ability of our watersheds to perform their most basic functions. Recognizing the countless benefits that healthy watersheds provide to the American people, we will:

- Make maintenance and restoration of watershed health an overriding priority in future forest plans and provide measures for monitoring

priority in future forest plans and provide measures for monitoring progress.

- Propose to increase stream and riparian area restoration by 40% by 1999.
- Propose a 30% increase in habitat restoration and conservation of threatened, endangered, and sensitive species.
- Propose increasing by 50% the number of abandoned mine reclamation sites.
- Improve efforts to prevent non-native species from entering or spreading in the U.S.

Although most of these actions and proposals are specific to national forests, their benefits transcend boundary lines. We will seek voluntary and non-regulatory partnerships with other private, federal and state land managers. For example, we will:

Work with other state and federal land managers, interested private landowners, and community groups to conduct watershed analysis and assessments to better understand the effects of management activities on the landscape.

There are approximately 40 million acres of national forests that are exposed to abnormally high risk of fire, disease, and insect outbreaks. Though insects, disease, and fire are part of the natural cycle, the vulnerability of these forests is unacceptably high. To respond to this need, we are asking Congress for funding to:

- Increase prescribed fire and forest fuels treatment in critical watersheds from 1.1 million acres in 1997 to 1.5 million acres in 1999 and
- Double the amount of thinning in unnaturally dense forest stands particularly along the urban-wildland interface over the next five years.

### **Sustainable Forest Ecosystem Management**

Let's turn now to sustainable forest management. The basic point of our sustainable forest management strategy is this - not only do economic stability and environmental protection go hand in hand - economic prosperity cannot occur without healthy, diverse, and productive watersheds and ecosystems.

To keep our watersheds healthy and productive, we must better understand their status and condition across all ownerships. Most of the public interest focuses on management of the national forest system. Yet, state or private owners manage over two-thirds of the nation's forests. They help to meet our country's need for wood fiber, drinking water, habitat for fish and wildlife, and recreation. We must look across boundary and fence lines and work together to practice sustainable forest management.

By fully funding forest inventory and monitoring programs and using measurements of sustainable forest management such as the "criteria and indicators" that were endorsed by 13 countries in 1995, we would have a common language to measure our effectiveness at managing sustainable forests and grasslands. The Forest Service is committed to:

and grasslands. The Forest Service is committed to:

Working with state, local, and other partners to use criteria and indicators of sustainable forest ecosystem management to report on the health of all forested landscapes across the nation by 2003.

Protecting our environmental capital requires maintaining healthy and productive forestlands whether they are in urban or rural areas. From 1978-94, the number of forestlands owned in parcels of 50 acres or less has doubled. The increasing diminution of forest tract size can diminish wildlife habitat, reduce access, and degrade water quality. We must share our expertise with landowners and help them to consider long-term objectives. Thus, we will:

- Work with State Foresters and others to increase the number of non-industrial private forest landowners that complete long-term forest stewardship plans. We will emphasize tools such as the Stewardship Incentive Program that could enable more than 3,000 landowners to develop scientifically based stewardship plans.
- Work with other federal agencies and Congress to develop policies that encourage long-term investments in forests and discourage their conversion to other uses.

Eighty percent of Americans live in towns and cities. We must literally bring forestry to the people by building on programs such as the Urban Resources Partnership and Community Forestry programs to increase the health of urban forests. Urban forests contribute an estimated \$400 billion in economic benefits through reduced storm-water treatment costs and energy conservation. Urban resource stewardship helps to ensure that all people - regardless of where they live - can share, enjoy, and benefit from a healthy environment.

As more and more people place greater demands on our forests, it is naïve to think that we can restore ecosystem and watershed health without active management based on sound science. Forest management has changed significantly over the years. We know today that healthy forests do far more than grow trees and provide timber. For example, they "grow" water, wildlife habitat, and recreation opportunities. Sustainable communities and economic prosperity depend on the full array of products and values from a healthy forest.

And as we learn more, we are continually adapting our management. For example, clearcutting on national forests declined by 84% in the past 10 years. The use of timber sales whose primary objective is to restore forest ecosystem health has increased by 70% in the past five years.

Even with these improvements, we hear calls increasingly for a "zero-cut" policy for national forests. I am opposed to this proposition. Both science and common sense support active management of national forests. A stable timber program from national forests is essential to many rural communities. We need to help provide stability so that companies can make needed investments in new equipment and technologies and provide jobs. National Forests should be a model for demonstrating how active forest management can meet economic

model for demonstrating how active forest management can meet economic needs and maintain and restore watershed health.

Ensuring sustainable forests requires the involvement of communities that benefit from, and care for, these forests. Our efforts to restore healthy forests can help to sustain rural communities by providing a stable wood supply and jobs to communities. To make this possible, we will work with Congress to:

Increase the amount of research and technical assistance to forest products industries so that they can more profitably harvest small diameter wood, increase the use of secondary markets for wood products, and market more finished wood products.

Find new ways to use an in-place, highly skilled workforce to accomplish much needed forest management and restoration.

As long as our incentive system ties the production of commodities from national forests to funding needed services such as schools and roads, state and county governments' face economic instability. Presently, 25% of many of the revenues generated from national forests are returned to states and distributed to counties. These payments have decreased as timber harvest from national forests has declined. To help remedy this situation, we propose to work with Congress and local communities to:

Provide stable and predictable state and county payments that support public schools and roads.

### **Forest Roads**

Our new agenda also emphasizes management of the forest road system. Few natural resource issues in recent years have captured as much political attention and public scrutiny as management of the national forest road system. Forest roads are an essential part of the transportation system in many rural parts of the country. They help to meet recreation demands on national forests and grasslands. They provide economic opportunities by facilitating the removal of commodities from the national forest system, which in turn provides jobs and revenue. Forest roads provide access to conduct needed management.

The benefits of forest roads are many. So too, are the ecological impacts on our watersheds. There are few more irreparable marks we can leave on the land than to build a road. Improperly located, designed or maintained roads contribute to erosion, wildlife and fish habitat fragmentation, degradation of water quality, and the dispersal of exotic species.

Building a new road requires a short-term outlay of cash. Funding its maintenance over time entails a long-term financial commitment. The failure to maintain the forest road system limits public access and does tremendous environmental damage. So long as road management is unaddressed, public support for needed forest management will disappear.

For these reasons, I recently proposed development of a new long-term forest road policy. The proposal has four primary objectives. First, more carefully consider decisions to build new roads. Second, eliminate old unneeded roads. Third, upgrade and maintain roads that are important to public access. Fourth, develop new and dependable funding for forest road management.

The President's budget recognizes the need to address these issues. It proposes to increase:

- Road maintenance funding by 26% and
- Major improvements to forest road bridges and culverts by over 66% in FY 1999.

Much of the existing forest road system was built over the last 50 years to facilitate timber harvest and removal. Roads that were built to accommodate logging trucks are increasingly carrying people seeking outdoor recreation opportunities.

Approximately 80% of all public use occurs on about 20% of the forest roads. Where it makes sense, we can manage many of our forest roads as public roads as a full partner with the counties and local communities. This policy shift could qualify these roads for Highway Trust Funds and accelerate improved management of the existing road system.

Because of our increased scientific knowledge about the social and ecological values of roadless areas, we recently proposed calling an 18 month "timeout" on new road construction in roadless areas. We propose to use the time to develop new scientific tools and analytical procedures that our managers can use to decide when, or if, to construct new roads.

Our overriding objective is to work with local people to provide a forest road system that best serves the management objectives and public uses of national forests and grasslands while protecting the health of our watersheds.

## Recreation

The final piece of our agenda recognizes that recreation is the fastest growing use of national forests and grasslands. It provides the link - a window through which an increasingly urban society can enjoy and appreciate the natural world. Forest Service managed lands provide more outdoor recreation opportunities than anywhere else in the United States. We are committed to providing superior customer service and ensuring that the rapid growth of recreation on national forests does not compromise the long-term health of the land.

Our recreation agenda will focus on four key areas. First, providing quality settings and experiences. Second, focusing on customer service and satisfaction. Third, emphasizing community outreach. Fourth, strengthening relationships with partners, communities, and others.

relationships with partners, communities, and others.

Our priority is to provide premier settings and experiences for recreation users. From downhill skiing at Vail, to wilderness expeditions into the Frank Church wilderness, to family outings in the national forests which surround California's 20 million residents. National forests and grasslands provide incredible outdoor opportunities.

We expect to have over one billion recreation visits in the coming years. Such growth poses both serious management challenges and tremendous opportunities. To take advantage of these opportunities, we will:

Improve the quality and quantity of public information about recreation opportunities on national forests. We will use the Internet and the National Recreation Reservation Service and others to highlight the many recreation opportunities from forestlands such as the 2002 Winter Olympics.

Collaborate with state and private landowners that wish to benefit from public recreation use of their lands.

Establish quality standards for the recreational services and more effectively evaluate customer satisfaction and feedback.

Nearly half of this year's recreation visitors will encounter a facility or a service below Forest Service standards. This is unacceptable. My goal is that every visitor to the national forests leaves with a deeper appreciation for, and understanding of, how important their natural resource legacy is to them. As public demand increases, the Forest Service must ensure that facilities are properly maintained and that people can enjoy a safe and high quality recreation experience. We propose to:

- Increase funding for recreation management by \$20 million dollars in 1999.
- Increase funding to enhance opportunities for fishing, hunting, wildlife viewing, and conservation education.
- Accelerate the conversion of unneeded roads to trails.

Partnerships with the recreation users, concessionaires, permittees, and local communities help us to more effectively deliver quality recreation experiences. The private-sector can often teach us new ways to deliver better services at a lower cost. We will expand the use of such partnerships and encourage more Americans to volunteer time, labor, and experience in helping us to improve interpretive services, trail maintenance, facilities, and conservation education.

## **Conclusion**

This is an agenda that can help us to chart a new course in conservation. I believe that it is a course that will benefit the communities we serve, the resources we are entrusted to manage and the children who will inherit the results of our stewardship. Concern for our natural and cultural resources spans

results of our stewardship. Concern for our natural and cultural resources spans races, religions, generations, and economic backgrounds. This helps to explain why so many people care about our public lands. Indeed, conservation has moved from a "special interest" to a national priority.

Our goal is to help people to live in productive harmony with the watersheds that sustain us all. We cannot do it alone. The issues are too broad, the land base too large, and resources too scarce. So my instruction to you today is to go out and engage your communities, colleagues, friends, and neighbors; work with them to refine and implement this agenda. We can only redeem our role as conservation leaders by working with, and learning from, others.

The German philosopher Goethe once said, "Every man has only enough strength to complete those assignments of which he is fully convinced of their importance." We can leave no greater gift for our children, show no greater respect for our forefathers, than to leave the watersheds entrusted to our care healthier, more diverse, and more productive. That is my vision for this great agency. And with your help, it can be our most important and lasting legacy.

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Contact:  
Chris Wood  
USDA Forest Service  
202-205-1083

## Healthy Watersheds

Watersheds are vital to ecosystem health. Watersheds absorb rain and recharge underground aquifers. They serve as habitat for thousands of species of fish, wildlife, and rare plants. They dissipate floods across floodplains, increasing soil fertility and minimizing damage to lives, property, and streams. Downstream communities depend on the clean water that flows from watersheds for consumption, food production, agricultural development, employment, power generation, and recreation.

Most watersheds on our Nation's forests and grasslands are healthy, supporting a variety of thriving ecosystems. In some areas, however, watersheds are deteriorating at alarming rates. Symptoms of poor health include declining water quality, increasing insect and disease outbreaks, and decreasing stocks of native fish and wildlife.

### A New Agenda for Watershed Protection and Restoration

More than a century ago, through the Organic Act of 1897, Congress directed that:

"No national forest shall be established, except to improve and protect the forest within the boundaries, or for the purpose of securing favorable conditions of water flows, and to furnish a continuous supply of timber for the use and necessities of citizens of the United States."

The critical issues facing our watersheds now are: *invasion of exotic species, risk of unnaturally severe wildfire, changes in vegetation, loss of species viability, degradation of aquatic ecosystems, road location and condition, air pollution, private land, abandoned mines, and scientific uncertainty.*

In recent years, the focus has been on the Organic Act's provision for timber production. Less well understood is the Act's strong focus on watershed protection. In fact, the need to protect water supplies and to control floods was the driving force behind the Organic Act and other early forest legislation. The emphasis on watershed protection was both prophetic and well deserved. Today, the national forests contain a multitude of municipal watersheds, and 80 percent of the Nation's freshwater sources originate on national forest land.

Our natural resource agenda builds on this historical and legal foundation. Our first priority is to maintain and restore the health of our ecosystems and watersheds. Based on sound science, the Forest Service will implement a policy and strategy for restoring, protecting, and maintaining healthy ecosystems at the watershed level.

### Policy

Forest Service policy is to restore and maintain healthy watersheds for use by current and future generations. We will give watershed protection and ecological restoration the highest priority in decision-making processes, including budget and program planning, land management planning, project implementation, and watershed assessments for forest and interagency plans. This policy is built on the premise that we simply cannot meet the needs of people without first securing the health of our lands and water. Our policy goals are to:

- ◆ Understand the relationship between land uses, watersheds, and ecosystem health.
- ◆ Complete ecosystem analyses at the watershed level to determine existing conditions and potential landscape capability.
- ◆ Use results from sound scientific analyses to make land use allocations and project-level decisions and to set priorities for watershed restoration.
- ◆ Ensure that land management decisions meet watershed and ecosystem management objectives.
- ◆ Collaborate with all interested parties and stakeholders to achieve healthy watersheds and ecosystems for current and future generations.

### **Actions**

To realize our vision for healthy watersheds, the Forest Service will implement a nine-point strategy based on the best available science and implemented in collaboration with States, local communities, other Federal agencies, and interest groups. Each planned action will have quantifiable, measurable goals that will serve to focus our activities and keep the Forest Service accountable to the American people. Restoration needs assessments will determine the type, amount, location, and time of restoration work. In particular, we will engage local communities, giving them ownership in the outcomes.

Specifically, the Forest Service will:

- ◆ *Make watershed restoration and maintenance the highest priority in land management plan revisions as appropriate.*
- ◆ *Restore degraded ecosystems and attain desirable plant conditions.*
- ◆ *Prevent exotic organisms from entering or spreading in the United States.*
- ◆ *Reconstruct, relocate, and decommission roads to help restore degraded watersheds.*
- ◆ *Restore degraded riparian areas.*
- ◆ *Fully implement the Forest Health Monitoring Program established by Federal and State agencies in 1990 to collaboratively monitor and report on the Nation's forest health by 2003.*
- ◆ *Conserve and recover threatened, endangered, and sensitive species and their habitats.*
- ◆ *Complete assessments of watershed conditions.*
- ◆ *Help communities restore and maintain healthy watersheds through community programs.*

### **A Vision for America's Watersheds**

The Forest Service's policy goals for healthy watersheds on the national forests will be attained when:

- ◆ Healthy, diverse, and resilient aquatic systems support a variety of conditions and benefits.
- ◆ Forest and grassland systems support all biological and physical components, functions, and interrelationships and their capability for self-renewal.
- ◆ Rangeland systems include robust riparian systems and a variety of conditions and benefits.
- ◆ Populations of threatened, endangered, and sensitive species are abundant and thriving.
- ◆ Watersheds provide the timing, quality, and quantity of water needed for beneficial uses and to sustain desired conditions.
- ◆ Soil is productive enough in the long term to support healthy, diverse, and resilient terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems.

## Sustainable Forest Ecosystem Management

The Forest Service will encourage all parties interested in resource management to collaborate in describing and measuring sustainable forest management. We will act in three broad areas: forest ecosystem health, accountability, and community partnerships.

### Forest Ecosystem Health

The area of forestland in the United States has stabilized at 1920 levels. Each year, more trees are grown than harvested. Although most of our forests are healthy and productive, there are seven areas of concern:

- ◆ *Fuel buildups.*
- ◆ *Exotic pests.*
- ◆ *Biodiversity loss.*
- ◆ *Wildland-urban interface.*
- ◆ *Air pollution.*
- ◆ *Riparian areas.*
- ◆ *Disturbance patterns.*

Working with State, local, and other partners, the Forest Service will use the criteria and indicators of sustainable forest management to help assess the state of our forests and restore healthy, thriving forest ecosystems.

Specifically, the Forest Service will:

- ◆ *Promote collaborative partnerships for sustainable forest ecosystem management.*
- ◆ *Work with partners to establish inventory and monitoring mechanisms for measuring the condition of the Nation's forests.*
- ◆ *Use principles of sustainable forest ecosystem management to guide Forest Service activities, and encourage other land managers to do the same.*

### Accountability

Sustainable forest management is a key strategy in fulfilling our mission of caring for the land and serving people. To gauge our progress toward our goal of sustainable forest systems, we need reliable performance measures. These measures—the criteria and indicators of sustainable forest management—tell how well we are doing as stewards of the land. To ensure our accountability to the American people, the Forest Service will link performance by Forest Service managers to the framework of sustainable forest management.

Specifically, the Forest Service will:

- ◆ *Integrate sustainable forest management criteria and indicators into our resource assessments, strategic plan, and associated analyses.*
- ◆ *Use principles in our annual performance plans that measure performance in terms of sustainable forest and rangeland ecosystems.*
- ◆ *Establish annual performance contracts to make top Forest Service managers accountable to the Chief for healthy ecosystems and link these contracts to our annual performance plans.*

## **Partnerships With Communities**

Urban and rural communities depend on the national forests for a wide range of values and services. Stability in commodity-oriented programs as well as aesthetic-based ones are essential to many rural communities. We need to help provide stability within the ecological limits of the land so that companies will make needed investments and provide jobs.

Ensuring sustainable forests requires the involvement of communities that benefit from, and care for, these forests. Our efforts to restore healthy forests can help to sustain rural communities by providing jobs and recreation opportunities. The Forest Service will work with communities to make sustainable forest ecosystem management real in the lives of those who live and work in them.

Specifically, the Forest Service will:

- ◆ *Help communities through community-based planning and stewardship.*
- ◆ *Encourage individuals to accomplish resource stewardship and conservation on an areawide or watershed basis.*
- ◆ *Promote environmentally sensitive economic development and jobs based on forest resources.*
- ◆ *Build urban-rural links to address forest ecosystem health and integrity.*
- ◆ *Expand information, education, and outreach efforts to increase public awareness and understanding of sustainable forest management.*

## Forest Roads

*"There are few more irreparable marks we can leave on the land than to build a road....Our overriding objective is to work with local people to provide a forest road system that best serves the management objectives and public uses of national forests and grasslands while protecting the health of our watersheds."*

—Forest Service Chief Mike Dombeck, 1998

Almost all visitors to the national forests use forest roads. Roads not only make our Nation's wildlands accessible, but also shape the wildland experience for most forest visitors by determining where they will go and what they will see. Even wilderness areas on our national forests would be generally inaccessible without roads leading to trailheads.

### Changing Forest Road Uses

Much of the existing forest access was built over the last 50 years for timber harvest and log removal. In the decades after World War II, logging traffic tripled, peaking in 1990. But when timber harvests on the national forests declined in the 1990's, logging traffic plunged to 1950 levels. Logging now accounts for only one-half of 1 percent of all forest road use. By contrast, recreational forest road use has soared to 13 times its 1950 rate, dwarfing logging traffic. Driving for pleasure is the single largest recreational use on Forest Service managed lands, constituting 35.8 percent of all recreation in 1996. In summer, recreational drivers on the national forests account for 13.6 million vehicle-miles per day. The outlook is for recreational road use to grow by an additional 64 percent by the year 2045.

### Forest Road Issues

Few natural resource issues in recent years have attracted as much public scrutiny as the management of the forest road system. Though less costly to build and maintain than most public highways, forest roads can have adverse impacts on watersheds, especially if poorly maintained. Few marks that we leave on the land are more lasting than the roads we build. Yet roads are needed for the goods and services that Americans expect from their national forests. Managers today must wrestle with several complicated forest road issues:

- ◆ *Funding shortfalls.* Roads that were originally built to accommodate logging trucks are increasingly carrying people seeking outdoor recreation opportunities. A \$10.5 billion reconstruction backlog exists for the most highly traveled roads. Sixty percent of all forest roads are currently *not* maintained to the public safety and environmental standards for which they were built.
- ◆ *Environmental damage.* Poorly maintained roads can promote erosion and landslides, degrading riparian and wetland habitat through sedimentation and changes in streamflow and water temperature. Roads can also block fish and wildlife passage, modifying animal behavior and preventing healthy regeneration.
- ◆ *Substandard roads.* Many roads on the national forests do not meet current standards for safety and environmental protection. A complete inventory of substandard roads is needed to identify unneeded roads for decommissioning.

- ◆ *Roadless areas.* Building a road in a roadless area has an irreversible impact. Of the 62 million acres of national forest land classified as roadless in the 1970's, 22 million acres have been designated as wilderness, 6 million are recommended for wilderness, and the remaining 34 million are designated for other uses. Only 9 million acres in roadless areas are designated as suitable for timber harvest, and about 1 million of these have been entered for timber harvest. There is strong public concern that no new roads should be built in the remaining roadless areas.

**Vehicles Per Day on Forest Roads**

	<b>1950</b>	<b>1990</b>	<b>1996</b>
Timber harvest	14,000	42,000	15,000
Recreation	137,000	1,315,000	1,706,000

### **A New Forest Road Agenda**

Clearly, we need a new approach to managing forest roads. We need sufficient funding to restore necessary roads to a safe, environmentally sound condition and to close and stabilize unnecessary roads. We need to protect and manage cautiously the relatively few remaining roadless lands. Our new forest road emphasis in the agenda will improve access for all forest road users while protecting healthy ecosystems through four primary actions:

#### **Actions**

- ◆ *Determine the best way to provide all Americans with access to the national forests.*
- ◆ *Accelerate the pace of decommissioning unneeded substandard roads that damage the environment.*
- ◆ *Selectively upgrade forest roads.*
- ◆ *Seek additional funding sources for the transportation system.*

## America's Wildland Playground

America's national forests and grasslands offer the single largest source of outdoor recreation opportunities in the United States. From downhill skiing at Vail, to backcountry expeditions into the Frank Church Wilderness, to family outings on the national forests that surround California's 20 million residents, our national forests provide an incredible range of outdoor opportunities.

Recreation on the national forests also has an important economic dimension. The Forest Service anticipates that, in the year 2000, national forest lands will generate \$110.7 billion from recreation, compared to just \$3.5 billion from timber harvest. Recreation on our national forests thus serves our Nation in two key ways:

- ◆ Recreation is the window through which most Americans experience their wildland heritage and learn about the land.
- ◆ Recreation plays a large and growing role in the Nation's economy.

### Our National Forests—America's Playground

Americans are visiting their national forests in record numbers for life-enriching wildland experiences and for the spiritual renewal that accompanies them.

- ◆ In 1997, the Forest Service hosted more than 800 million recreation experiences, including skiing, hiking, camping, hunting, fishing, and pleasure driving.
- ◆ The national forests offer visitors:
  - 4,385 miles of the National Wild and Scenic River System.
  - One-third of the National Wilderness Area System.
  - About 8,000 miles of Scenic Byways.
  - 133,000 miles of trails.
  - More than 18,000 campgrounds, picnic areas, and visitor facilities.
  - 2.3 million acres of fishable lakes, ponds, and reservoirs.

### A New Recreation Agenda

The Forest Service must meet the Nation's growing need for outdoor recreation in a manner that protects the health, diversity, and productivity of the land. Over the next 50 years, we expect demand to go from 800 million to 1.2 billion visits to the national forests per year. In addition, people are asking for an ever broader spectrum of benefits and services to enrich their experiences. As we head into the next millennium, our challenge is to concentrate on five key areas: 1) improving the settings for outdoor recreation and enhancing visitor experiences, 2) guaranteeing visitor satisfaction with our services and facilities, 3) reaching out to rural and urban communities to capitalize on the social and economic opportunities associated with recreation on the national forests, 4) strengthening our relationships with those who cooperate with us to improve outdoor recreation for all Americans, and 5) ensuring that recreation use does not impair the land's health.

### Settings and Experiences

The primary goal of the Forest Service is to protect and restore the settings for outdoor recreation experiences that millions of Americans have come to expect and enjoy. We must reduce our substantial maintenance backlog while preserving and expanding the spectrum of outdoor recreation opportunities available.

We will accomplish much through better coordination among program areas and from better interpretation of existing research to anticipate recreation trends and to identify the settings and experiences most valued by our visitors. We can then focus on improving the opportunities that Americans care most about.

Specifically, the Forest Service will:

- ◆ *Better utilize existing tools*, such as the Recreation Fee Demonstration Program and Public-Private Ventures.

- ◆ *Prepare a land management planning guide for recreation, heritage, wilderness, and tourism.*
- ◆ *Select models and laboratories of excellence.*
- ◆ *Improve professional recreation skills.*

### **Service and Satisfaction**

Today, information technology offers innovative ways of telling Americans about the rich recreation opportunities available. The Forest Service will tailor our services to meet visitor needs, using tools such as the Internet to effectively reach targeted audiences. We will improve the availability of information so visitors can better plan trips, and we will develop a strategy to reach inner-city youth.

We will work closely with partners to give people recreational information and services when and where they want. Through cooperative projects such as the National Recreation Reservation Service, people will be able to obtain information and make reservations through comprehensive channels.

Specifically, the Forest Service will:

- ◆ *Use a strong marketing and research-based approach.*
- ◆ *Continue using the customer report card, third-party assessments, and other tools for continuous improvement.*
- ◆ *Improve our presence on the World Wide Web.*
- ◆ *Establish an advisory group to the regional recreation directors.*
- ◆ *Charter a public-private consortium.*

### **Community Outreach**

Rural communities are diversifying their economic base and expanding their uses of the national forests. Communities that once depended on timber production are now capitalizing on a wider range of goods and services. The national forests will work closely with rural communities to recognize and capitalize on forest values in their community and economic development plans. We will better understand their needs and expand their input in planning the management of public lands. Heritage and recreation tourism is also important to urban and suburban areas. The Forest Service will provide a wide range of services, education, and experiences for urban Americans on the national forests and even in the cities. We must pay increasing attention to the needs of urban Americans and to their impact on our national forests.

Specifically, the Forest Service will:

- ◆ *Collaborate with communities, the private sector, and other agencies.*
- ◆ *Encourage efficient delivery of recreation services.*
- ◆ *Showcase outstanding partnerships.*

### **Strengthening Our Relationships**

The key to success in outdoor recreation lies in strengthening and expanding working relationships. The Forest Service has long relied on partnerships to provide recreation opportunities. As the private sector found ways to get the job done at a lower cost, we learned that these partnerships enhanced the quality of services. We must improve and expand these partnerships to enhance dispersed recreation experiences. Closer coordination with natural resource schools for curriculum development and continuing education partnerships will help us maintain a cadre of professional and technical leaders at all levels of the agency. We will also expand our cooperative efforts in technology and development through our Technology and Development Centers.

Specifically, the Forest Service will:

- ◆ *Help develop tourism conferences.*
- ◆ *Reestablish regional tourism program links.*
- ◆ *Develop and implement a new national recreation strategy.*

