## IESSONS FEBRUARY AND A MARKET A



A New Jersey forester visits Montana and is reminded that public forest management, land use planning, and fire policy are national concerns.

By Bob Williams



## That experience only further **CONVINCED ME** that our **URBAN SOCIETY** has become so **DISCONNECTED** from the land and forests that they NO LONGER UNDERSTAND how they fit and are actually part of the **LAND.**

My wife and I recently had the pleasure of spending eight days touring northwestern Montana. We are from the crowded eastern state of New Jersey where I am a forester. The forests we saw in Montana are magnificent, an outdoor paradise. The forests seemed endless and the wildlife abundant.

In our travels, we saw several large sawmill operations and these mills were located in the midst of high-traffic, outdoor and recreational economies. It appears timber harvesting can, and is, compatible with that paradise and helps keep it alive and economically sound. It is my view that Gifford Pinchot's multiple use ideal is alive and well on many areas of that landscape. Sawmills provide a great economic base to build from, and without this, many areas would not sustain themselves economically with only a recreational economy. However - together - the economies are vibrant.

It is clear the forests respond well to active management on state and private lands. We took a horseback ride through a magnificent, mixed species conifer forest where trees are 80 feet tall. However, what the other tourists didn't know or understand was that this is a second growth forest as evident by the stumps of previously harvested trees from early in the last century. When I explained this to the other tourists, they were astonished and thought that logging the forest is bad.

By the end of our ride, most folks began to understand it would be okay to re-enter this forest and remove timber. The ride was magnificent and will continue to be even with some forest thinning in the future. That experience only further convinced me that our urban society has become so disconnected from the land and forests that they no longer understand how they fit and are actually part of the land. They see loggers as intruders - which is not the case at all. If Easterners and recreationists want beautiful landscapes to visit and play in, they better wake up and be supportive of active conservation.

Of course the other issue we paid great attention to was this concern of uncontrolled wildfire. Whether it is here in southern New Jersey in our dense pine forest or in western Montana, we have built and developed a landscape with homes, farms and ranches that now require us to manage the forest in a fashion that protects life and property. In my view, the last one hundred years of federal fire policy has been a miserable failure. Fire has been a part of the ecology of these forests for millennia. Trying to control and suppress all fires has dramatically contributed to the

current serious situation we have today, with tens of thousands of homes and quality of life now placed at risk.

On our trip, we saw the positive aspects of fire in areas such as Glacier National Park. At first, seeing a firescape of that magnitude, one wonders if fire was a bad thing. But when you see the rich renewal of the forest, it should be quite clear these forests have been regenerated by fire for thousands of years. The issue of fire is not black or white. Fire policy now needs to take all information into consideration and allow for the development of forest management plans that use timber







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harvesting as a tool to allow fire to safely remain in some areas as a natural way for forests to evolve and regenerate as they have for thousands of years.

Forests have changed and will continue to change. A vibrant, healthy forest economy is essential. When folks here in the East see bundles of lumber wrapped with the brands of western companies that produce that lumber, they need to know the wood comes from forests that are cared for in a sustainable fashion. Once they understand this, they will support more active management — and yes — lumber production from our national forests.

We need more forest management both here in our pine forests in southern New Jersey, along with Montana and the rest of the country. We cannot do that without great loggers and markets for our wood products.

Those that say "preserve all the trees," or "let it all burn to the ground" are living the "illusion of preservation." Humans are part of the forest, whether riding our horses or cutting timber, and if we all take care of our forests when we do these things, the forests will be here forever. Forests change — always have, always will.

Why was the forest "better" back in the 1700s or 1800s, or whenever? It wasn't. It was simply different. Trying to keep forests preserved in a jar is an illusion. Today's forest science and forest harvest technology is not the same as it was in the past and we strive to do better all the time. As time goes by, more people will come to work, play and live in our forests... not less. Thus, we need to plan for how we live with the forest and be an important part of its perpetuity. We need better forest management, better land use planning, and better fire policy. Taking the easy route of saying no to everything will neither work for the forest nor the people who live and actively take part in our forests.

Montana needs to be proud of its lands and forests. To those who visit, I say enjoy it! For many, it's a once-in-a-lifetime experience.

My one and only word of advice to Montanans: tell your forestry story *louder*. It is a great, positive story, one tourists need to hear more of when they visit.



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