

A Land Ethic for Resource Managers

"I have read many definitions of what is a conservationist, and written not a few myself, but I suspect that the best one is written not with a pen, but with an axe. It is a matter of what a man thinks about while chopping, or while deciding what to chop. A conservationist is one who is humbly aware that with each stroke he is writing his signature upon the face of his land. Signatures of course differ, whether written with axe or pen, and this is as it should be."

Aldo Leopold

VIRTUALLY EVERYONE INVOLVED IN AND RESPONSIBLE FOR RESOURCE management in BC is bound by codes of ethics that convey the primary obligation of managing the resources entrusted to them in an exemplary manner to the best of their capabilities for the public good. To ensure the fulfillment of this obligation, a properly developed land ethic is necessary to guide them in their lifelong work. Such evolves with time, relevant circumstances and with increasing knowledge and experience.

Natural resource professionals are ethically and morally bound to a continuing, diligent improvement in their code of conduct, their decisions influenced by ethics, morals, values and integrity.

As per the *Foresters Act*, the primary duty of the Association of BC Forest Professionals is "to serve and protect the public interest." By way of further explanation it states that forest professionals must "advocate and practice good stewardship of forest land based on sound ecological principles to sustain its ability to provide those values that have been assigned by society."

As resource professionals make independent decisions regarding the allocation and management of natural resources, they inherently weigh each aspect or area of responsibility involved and decide which has priority over the other(s).

While the weighing varies with circumstances, the following ranking of priorities should almost always predominate:

1. The land and the resources
2. The public
3. The profession
4. The client or employer
5. Other members

The ultimate decision is always made by the individual.

The age-old challenge resource professionals face nearly every day of their working lives is how best to meet and fulfill their highest obligations of serving the public interest by managing the province's natural resources in a manner that best meets the public's environmental, social and economic objectives.

For example, the process of locating a cut-block boundary involves hundreds of small management decisions, including which trees will be cut relative to size and species, how large the opening will be, wildlife and biodiversity considerations, the location of the boundary relative to water courses, aesthetics etc. These decisions indicate the professional's interpretation of the public's interests influenced by their employer's or client's objectives and monetary considerations.



Interest

By Fred Marshall, RPF, PAg, Cert. Arb.

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Professional decisions reflect professional integrity and associated values on the landscape. It is a reflection as to what the individual deems to be most important to best meet the competing interests. The cumulative result for all resource professionals should always favor the environmental values as humanity cannot survive without a healthy, functioning ecosystem.

Aldo Leopold's essay, "The Land Ethic," offers some of his related thoughts:

"All ethics so far evolved rest upon a single premise: that the individual is a member of a community of interdependent parts. His instincts prompt him to compete for his place in that community, but his ethics prompt him also to co-operate (perhaps in order that there may be a place to compete for).

...In short, a land ethic changes the role of homo sapiens from conqueror of the land community to a plain member and citizen of it. It implies respect for his fellow members, and also respect for the community as such."

A land ethic, then, reflects the existence of an ecological conscience, and this in turn reflects a conviction of individual responsibility for the health for the land. Health

is the capacity of the land for self-renewal. Conservation is our effort to understand and preserve this capacity.

Examine each question in terms of what is ethically and esthetically right, as well as what is economically expedient. A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise."

May the ethical reflections on the landscape created by resource professionals always be ones that exemplify the principles outlined above with all choices being those of ultimate value—our complex natural resources residing in healthy, functioning ecosystems.

The full version of Fred Marshall's Land Ethic Statement is available from him. To receive a copy, please email him at fmarshall@telus.net.

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