

Lessons and Opportunities in Managing Resources to Sustain Healthy Ecosystems, Communities & Nations

INTRODUCTION

There are many lessons to be learned from a review of the historic use and management of public lands. These lessons can be helpful in developing strategies for the future management of natural resources on which present and future generations depend. This brief paper touches on some of the highlights in the management of public lands in the United States and Alaska. The references cited include many examples of successes and failures in the management of public lands and are thus valuable lessons for everyone.

This paper does not deal with the management of public lands in other nations, some of which have been effectively managing lands and resources for centuries utilizing techniques and practices that could effectively be used in the United States and other nations. Alaska, for example, could benefit by adopting some of Finland's practices in the protection, management and utilization of the boreal forests of that country.

THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A PUBLIC LAND BASE IN THE U. S.

Following the early development of the thirteen original states; the Louisiana Purchase of 1803 and the Expedition of Captains Lewis and Clark during 1804-1806, the nation continued to rapidly expand westward, and then to the northwestern part of North America. As the United States was expanding westward and settled during the late 18th and early 19th century, the vast forests of our young nation appeared to be inexhaustible.

During the first half of the nineteenth century, the U. S. Army explored the western territories sometimes accompanied by civilian scientists. During the 1850's scientists also were involved in the great railroad route surveys. The General Land Office conducted land-parceling surveys. Several states conducted geologic surveys which were forerunners to the establishment of the U. S. Geological Survey in 1879 to classify public lands; to examine the geological structure, mineral resources, and products of the national domain.

The 1862 Homestead Act provided settlers with the opportunity to acquire and develop their own land. The United States government also encouraged the settlement of the western territories of America with large grants of land to newly organized and expanding railroad corporations. As a system of new railroad routes expanded westward, new communities were established along these railroad routes. With the settlement of the west, and the rapid development of new transportation systems and technological advancements, the demand for timber and other natural resources greatly increased.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, increasing concerns were expressed about the potential problems of deforestation, erosion, flood and drought. In 1864, George Perkins Marsh' book: "*Man and Nature; or Physical Geography as Modified by Human Action*" 1/ described the problems of deforestation in Europe and noted the problems from over-harvesting including his home state of Vermont as well as the Great Lakes region of the northern United States. Marsh promoted the idea of "responsible stewardship" and the moral obligation to use resources wisely for future as well as present generations. Marsh's book and the abuses and thefts of public land resources - some of which were later summarized in Puter and Stevens' book "*Looters of the Public Domain*" 2/ generated new laws and programs to bring stewardship in the management of public lands.

With the vast tracts of cut-over forests in the northeast, and mid-Atlantic and mid-west states, the support for a national forest conservation policy and program grew. The National Academy of Sciences, the American Forestry Association, other organizations, states and communities were successful in persuading Congress and President Benjamin Harrison into enacting the Forest Reserve Act in 1891. Subsequently, President Harrison created the Yellowstone Park Timberland reserve and many other Forest Reserves during his presidency. In 1897, the Organic Act more clearly identified the purpose of Forest Reserves to preserve and protect forests and watersheds, while maintaining a continuous supply of wood for everyone. By 1902, President Theodore Roosevelt succeeded the assassinated President William McKinley and continued to expand the number of forest reserves in the western United States and Territory of Alaska. In a 1903 address, Theodore Roosevelt spelled out the purpose of the Forest Reserves. He said:

"...And now, first and foremost you can never forget for a moment what is the object of our forest policy. That is not to preserve the forests because they are beautiful, though that is good in itself, not because they are refuges for the wild creatures of the wilderness, though that too is good in itself; but the primary object of our forest policy, as the land policy of the United States, is making of prosperous homes. It is part of the traditional policy of home making in our country. Every other consideration comes as secondary. You yourselves have got to keep this practical object before your minds; to remember that a forest which contributes nothing to the wealth, progress or safety of the country is of no interest to the government and should be of little interest to the forester. Your attention must be directed to the preservation of the forests, not an end in itself, but as a means of preserving and increasing the prosperity of the nation."

Under President Theodore Roosevelt's leadership, the U. S, Forest Service was established within the U. S. Department of Agriculture. Within the U. S. Department of Interior, the National Park Service, Fish and Wildlife Service, Bureau of Land Management and other agencies were also organized to assure the nation's public lands, resources and special treasures would be preserved and protected for present and future generations. The system of National Parks, Wildlife Refuges and National Monuments developed and managed by these agencies are excellent models of public land protection and management.

LESSONS FROM THE HISTORY OF MANAGING U. S. PUBLIC LANDS

The history of the United States public lands is an extraordinary record of a young nation facing up to the problems associated with the abuse of its public lands. The vision of people like George Perkins Marsh, German born forest scientist Bernhard Fernow and organizations like the National Academy of Sciences saw the need to introduce professional management of forests and related resources in the United States. With the support of President Theodore Roosevelt, the nation's first Chief Forester Gifford Pinchot, organized the United States Forest Service into a professional and technical staff to manage the National Forests and Ranger Districts in accord with a "*Use Book of Regulations and Instructions*" 3/ With clearly defined, science-based, management objectives, delegated authority and accountability standards, the Forest Service, in partnership with forest-dependent communities, became one of the nation's most-respected government agencies.

Dr. John Fedkiw's book "*MANAGING MULTIPLE USES ON NATIONAL FORESTS; A 90 - Year Learning Experience and It Isn't Finished Yet*" 4/, is a very thorough account of the United States Forest Service's management of the National Forests from 1905 - 1995. With the authority of the Organic Act of 1897, and the Transfer Act of February 1, 1905, Agriculture Secretary James Wilson transmitted a practical interpretation of the Organic Act as guidance to the U. S. Forest Service's first Chief Forester. Secretary Wilson wrote that when conflicts occurred in administering the National Forests, they were to be reconciled in the spirit of "the greatest good for the greatest number in the long run." This was the Forest Service's management philosophy until the passage of the Multiple-Use Sustained-Yield Act of 1960 which defined multiple use as the guiding policy for national forests. This Act made the multiple-use purposes explicit, assuring consideration for all resource users in the management of National Forests to the present day.

Lawrence Rakestraw's "*A History of the United States Forest Service in Alaska*" describes the nature and extent of forest management on Alaska's National Forests from 1902 to 1980. The initial years of forest management were basically focused on inventories and potential uses of various forest resources for the benefit and stability of local communities. Conflicts and political controversies were also involved in the establishment and expansion of the Alexander Archipelago Forest Reserve - later renamed the Tongass National Forest. The initial years of forest management were basically focused on inventories and potential uses of various forest resources for the benefit and stability of local communities. During World War I and the Great Depression of the 1930's special programs such as the Civilian Conservation Corps were launched on the national forests. World War II also stimulated activities on many national forests. In Alaska, the harvest of high-grade Sitka Spruce for use in American and British war aircraft became a high priority activity until 1944 when light metal alloys largely replaced spruce in aircraft use. 5/

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During the World War years, the Forest Service also accelerated the search for investors

who could establish pulp mills on the Tongass. On August 2, 1951, the Ketchikan Pulp Company in association with the Puget Sound Pulp and Timber Corporation in Bellingham signed a final fifty-year contract to purchase 1.5 billion cubic feet of timber. The company agreed to build a pulp mill at Ward Cove near Ketchikan to utilize the low quality pulp logs from the Tongass for dissolving pulp and use the higher quality logs for lumber.

Also, as a result of WW II, Japan lost its source of timber from Sakhalin and Manchuria. In United States post-war reconstruction efforts with Japan, negotiations were undertaken to explore the feasibility of a Japanese financed pulp and sawmill on the Tongass. In 1953, a Forest Service contract with a Japanese company Toshitsugu Matusi led to the construction of a sawmill and pulp mill at Sitka, which began operations in 1959.

Throughout the 20th century, populations adjacent to and within the National Forests increased and competition among users intensified. An evolving society strengthened special interests vigorously promoting new legislation and regulations that often led to litigation, limiting road building and halting protection and management activities on many National Forests. During the 1990's, political special interests replaced key leadership positions within the Forest Service; effectively hamstringing and curtailing a number of professional, protection and management activities including the cancellation of the Alaska Pulp Corporation's long-term pulp sale on the Tongass National Forest. The United States Court of Claims later ruled the cancellation of this long term timber sale was illegal.

Over the past three decades special interests supporting the concept that public forests should be undisturbed by humans have been successful in stopping commercial timber removal and vital access road construction on many western forests. As a result, forests became overgrown and more susceptible to insects, diseases and fires - devastating over six million acres of forests, community watersheds and home sites the past several years. 6/

The widespread closure of forest product plants throughout the western United States and Alaska has had an adverse impact on many states and forest dependent communities. The loss of primary and secondary jobs from the closure of forest industries has resulted in serious economic hardships in many forested regions and communities. The decline in household incomes also often results in a reduction in the quality of life and an increase in social problems related to the stress of unemployment and depression.

With regard to forest management on the nation's public forests, the lessons from the past clearly show that withdrawing forests from professional management and protection is not a rational option, but a path to an increase in disease and insect infestations and a build up of fuels that can lead to disastrous consequences in the event of uncontrolled wildfires. Science based management of forests - with the involvement of people dependent on those forests - is the best strategy for sustaining healthy forest ecosystems, communities and nations.

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LESSONS FROM ALASKA; BEFORE AND AFTER STATEHOOD

The purchase of Alaska and subsequent “administration” of this vast territory also has many valuable object lessons. When Alaska was purchased from Russia in 1867, the New York *World* declared “Russia has sold us a sucked orange...”. The minority report of the House Committee on Foreign Relations concluded that “...the possession of the country is of no value...to the United States...”. 7/ At the time Alaska was purchased, the interior of Alaska was largely unknown. Few people realized the U. S. had acquired one of the great rivers of the world - the Yukon. After Alaska was purchased, it was initially neglected by many government and private organizations, but the U. S. Army began a series of explorations. The first, a Reconnaissance of the Yukon River was headed by Captain Charles P. Raymond in 1869, with subsequent explorations and surveys by the military, census bureau and others which are compiled in “*Narratives of Explorations in Alaska*”. 8/ These explorations from 1869 - 1899 generated increasing interest by the federal government and Congress, and in 1895 Congress appropriated funds to the U. S. Geological Survey to explore the coal and gold resources of Alaska. After the gold discoveries in Alaska and the Klondike in the late 1890's the appropriations for assessing Alaska's resources were substantially increased.

Individual scientists and other private parties were also attracted to this vast territory and to the people who had first settled the northwestern region of North America long before Russia “discovered” Alaska in 1741. With Russia's “rule” of Alaska for 126 years, the Greek Orthodox Church became well established in a number of Alaska's villages, and some remain today. By 1877 - ten years after the purchase of Alaska, Catholic, Lutheran, Presbyterian and Methodist Churches and mission programs were operating in Alaska.

Dr. Sheldon Jackson became Superintendent of Presbyterian missions in Alaska in 1877, and sought to establish schools in a number of native villages. By 1884, Congress recognized the need for an education program for children of all races, and Dr. Sheldon Jackson was named General Agent for Education in 1885, under supervision of the U. S. Commissioner of Education. In 1879 and 1880, John Muir traveled to Alaska where he learned of Dr. Jackson's work in Sitka, Wrangell and elsewhere. Muir's book “*TRAVELS IN ALASKA*”, is a classic account of the people, flora, fauna, scenic and wilderness values he observed while in Alaska. 9/

Ernest Gruening's book “*The State of Alaska*” is a well researched history of Alaska from the time of its discovery to the early 1950's when the quest for Alaska Statehood was gaining momentum. Gruening, as Alaska's Territorial Governor from 1939-1953, was at the very center of many federal and territorial issues during those years. His perspectives on Alaska's “era of total neglect (1867-1884); “era of flagrant neglect” (1884-1898); “era of mild but unenlightened interest” (1898-1912); “era of indifference and unconcern” (1912-1932); “era of growing awareness” (1933-1954) contain many lessons regarding federal-state relationships and the management of public lands up to the final drive for Statehood. 7/
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Statehood for the 49th state finally came when Congress passed the Alaska Statehood Act on June 30, 1958 and President Dwight Eisenhower signed the official proclamation on

January 3, 1959. Expectations were high as the federal government pledged to bring Alaska into the Union on an equal footing with other states and enable the new state to have access to and use its rich array of resources to develop a strong economy and improve the quality of life and environment of all Alaskans. If the federal government's relationship to Alaska during its nine decades as a Territory was as Ernest Gruening described as "neglect", "indifference", "unconcern" and a "growing awareness" - the first four decades of the federal government's relationship to Alaska as a State from 1959-1999 might well be described as "intensifying interest", "restrictive" and "controlling".

Claus -M. Naske and Herman E. Slotnick's *"Alaska - A History of the 49th State"* is another excellent history of Alaska. This book discusses the vital Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act of 1971, which compensated the original inhabitants of Alaska with 44 million acres of land and nearly 1 billion dollars and gives native Alaskans a well-deserved role in Alaska's future. 10/ This landmark law also offers the promise of bringing economic strength and improvement in the quality of life in Alaska's two hundred plus rural villages. This book also describes the discovery and importance of oil. Oil had been found in various parts of Alaska many years earlier, but Atlantic-Richfield's gigantic discovery of the 9.6 billion barrel Prudhoe Bay oil fields in 1968; plus additional discoveries of oil and gas made these resources the star of Alaska's economy the past three decades and the promise of the future. The fisheries resources of Alaska will always be important to Alaska, but the seasonal nature of the industry, and competition from farmed salmon are continuing challenges.

Commonwealth North's book *"Going Up In Flames - The Promises and Pledges of Alaska Statehood Under Attack"*, developed by the organization's Federal-State Relations Committee and edited by Malcolm Roberts, describes the legal underpinnings of statehood; the federal state compact to which both the federal government and state is bound; the impact of laws enacted during the 1970s and 1980s, and the strategies that could be taken to resolve federal-state conflicts. This book also defines many lessons that must be learned if Alaska is to achieve equal status with other states and fully realize its potential. 11/

Governor and former Secretary of Interior Walter J. Hickel's book *"Who Owns America ?"* also covers some of the basic lessons involved in the management of public lands/resources from the history of the United States and the history of Alaska. 12/ Among the lessons: (1) The nation's and state's public lands and resources belong to all the people; (2) The nation and Alaska are incredibly rich in resources; (3) Public lands and resources must be managed with a positive vision that assures resources will be sustained for future generations as well as present needs; (4) A healthy economy is essential to sustain a quality environment; (5) A positive vision, sound science, accessibility, affordable energy and public-private partnerships are essential to achieving and sustaining quality objectives; and (6) We must work in partnership with other nations for the mutual benefit of mankind.

With these lessons we can define the opportunities and achieve the promises of the future.
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ABSTRACT

Many lessons can be learned from a history of the use and management of public lands and resources in the United States and Alaska. These lessons can help land owners, policy makers and citizens better evaluate opportunities and strategies for managing lands and resources on which they and future generations depend.

History reveals a remarkable record of a young nation facing up to the problems associated with the abuse of its public lands. With the initiative of visionary leaders, the concept of responsible stewardship was adopted by a young, but rapidly growing country. As a result, a system of National Forests, Parks, Wildlife Refuges and other special categories of land were established for the use and benefit of present and future generations..

Through the vision of President Theodore Roosevelt, Gifford Pinchot and others, National Forests were established to protect forests, help homeowners and improve “the prosperity of the nation.” Through the Forest Service’s century of service, the organization reconciled conflicting uses of the forests and implemented the Multiple Use - Sustained Yield Act. As populations increased and conflicting uses intensified the past two decades, special interests promoted the concept that public forests should be undisturbed by humans and commercial timber sales ended. But the lessons from the land show that withdrawing forests from professional management and use will increase disease and insect infestations and a build up of fuels that can lead to disastrous forest fires. Science-based management of public forests - with the involvement of communities dependent on those forests - is the best strategy for sustaining healthy ecosystems, communities and nations.

Alaska’s history after U. S. purchase in 1867, reveals decades of neglect; but the Gold Rush awakened interest in the territory. World War II proved Alaska’s strategic importance to the nation, and the momentum for statehood grew. Congress passed the Alaska Statehood Act on June 30, 1958 and President Eisenhower signed the Proclamation January 3, 1959. The gigantic discovery of the Prudhoe Bay oil fields in 1968 stamped out any remaining thought Russia had “sold us a sucked orange”. The Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act of 1971, finally compensated the original inhabitants of Alaska with 44 million acres of land and nearly a billion dollars; assuring Alaska natives a well-deserved role in Alaska’s future.

The euphoria of statehood must be tempered with the reality that the federal government retains “ownership” of 60 percent of the state, and continues to erode promises and pledges made under the Alaska Statehood Compact. The opportunities and promises of Alaska’s future are bright; if we apply the lessons of history. With a positive vision, “sound” science, accessibility, affordable energy, public-private initiatives and international partnerships we can sustain healthy ecosystems, communities and nations for the benefit of all mankind.