
**WHO IS IN CHARGE
OF THE WORLD'S FORESTS?**
Forest Industry's Role in
Maintaining a Sustainable Society



Carlton N. Owen

Arkansas Forest Resources Distinguished Lecture Series

ARKANSAS AGRICULTURAL EXPERIMENT STATION

Division of Agriculture

University of Arkansas

August 1998

Arkansas Forest Resources Center Series 001



A University of Arkansas Center of Excellence

ARKANSAS FOREST RESOURCES CENTER

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Editing: Nancy G. Wyatt; Cover design: Elaine M. Williams

Agricultural Experiment Station, University of Arkansas Division of Agriculture, Fayetteville. Milo J. Shult, Vice President for Agriculture and Director; Charles J. Scifres, Associate Vice President for Agriculture - Research. PS1M0898PM.

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April 9, 1998

Arkansas Forest Resources Center
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Monticello, Arkansas

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Carlton Owen is Vice President, Forest Policy for Champion International Corporation. Owen joined Champion in 1990 to develop a wildlife program for the company's U.S. forestry operations. Today he has corporate-wide responsibility for forest environment and forest policy issues on the company's more than 5 million forested acres. Owen comes to his current position with a diversity of professional experiences including five years in Washington, D.C., where he was Executive Director of the American Forest Foundation. He spent seven years with Potlatch Corporation's Arkansas operations in Warren and is the former Executive Director of the Mississippi Wildlife Federation.

Owen is very active in professional affairs with memberships in the Society of American Foresters and the Wildlife Society. He is a member of more than a dozen conservation groups and active in industry associations and has served on advisory councils at five U.S. forestry school and colleges, including the University of Arkansas at Monticello.

FOREWORD

Carlton N. Owen was the Arkansas Forest Resources Center's third Distinguished Lecturer. In his excellent paper, "Who Is in Charge of the World's Forests? Forest Industry's Role in Maintaining a Sustainable Society," he explores the current conflicts between production and protection, and writes about, among other things, a "duality of responsibilities" with regard to production forestry and environmental forestry. He also describes industry's commitment to sustainability through the Sustainable Forestry Initiative.TM

The following quotations should encourage the prospective reader to examine the paper in some detail.

- "We (industry) have to produce more at higher yields. We have to do that profitably. But increasingly, we also have to operate within the broad parameters of what many in the industry call our 'social license to practice forestry'."
- "...companies...can no longer escape the duality of our responsibility. We cannot say we are in charge of only production, unless we are prepared to live with the consequence of having others in charge of protection."
- "...the Sustainable Forestry Initiative...deals with the duality of responsibility up front as it addresses visual quality, wildlife habitat and biodiversity on an equal footing with reforestation, utilization and responsible use of chemicals."
- "...if there is a single lesson in all of this, it is simply that profitable timber operations and responsible environmental practices are not mutually exclusive. They can be accomplished together."
- "...if you create an environment for new ideas and new approaches to develop, reasonable men and women on both sides of a divisive issue can begin to find a common answer."
- "As we take our first steps toward the next century—let alone the next millennium—foresters (especially future foresters) can never again be simple technicians of the forest art. Instead they will be expected to be part philosopher, part economist, part social engineer and part interpreter of the public consciousness...."

Carlton Owen's paper contains material that should be thought provoking for industrial foresters and managers, business leaders, public agency officials, environmentalists and students of forestry and other natural resources. I recommend its careful reading and consideration.

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WHO IS IN CHARGE OF THE WORLD'S FORESTS? FOREST INDUSTRY'S ROLE IN MAINTAINING A SUSTAINABLE SOCIETY

Carlton Owen

WHO IS IN CHARGE HERE?

As in so many instances, where the grounds of debate and the shape of conflicting forces are constantly changing, the old question always arises, "Who is in charge here?"

Sometimes the answer is simple and assertive. Former Secretary of State Alexander Haig, when confronted by the media about the potential foreign policy consequences of one of President Reagan's serious illnesses, simply said, "Don't worry, I'm in charge here!" much to the dismay of then-Vice President George Bush.

On the other hand, being "in charge" is sometimes the equivalent of just showing up. In 1960, after he had been elected president, John Kennedy made the rounds of distinguished Americans to seek their views. When he met with General Douglas MacArthur in New York, he complained about all the foreign policy problems President Eisenhower had left on his plate. He asked the General his opinion. MacArthur replied, "Mr. Kennedy, the chickens are coming home to roost, and you just happen to be in charge of the chicken house."

So here we are, by design or default, in charge of the chicken house: America's forests. Or are we? And when I say "we," am I talking about business? Or about the professional forester? Or about the government? Or about the consumer, whose basic needs and lifestyle decisions dictate the upward escalation of the demand curve?

If you read Paul Hawken's book *The Ecology of Commerce*, you will come away with little doubt that it is business that is in charge. Business, he says, is at the heart of the issue, the primary consumer of record, the major impactor of

the environment and, therefore, the defining force for good or for evil, but above all change.

Others might—and frequently do—argue with Mr. Hawken, putting forth the argument that “No, it is the governments who are in charge. After all, they are the ones who set the policies, write the laws, and enforce the regulations that govern business.”

And then there are those who contend it is neither government nor business, but rather Adam Smith’s “invisible hand,” reflecting the individual and collective decisions of the consumer in an economic computation we cannot see and cannot control.

So the debate comes down to a classic choice among everybody’s in charge, somebody’s in charge and nobody’s in charge—somewhere between “stand up and be counted” and “sorry, everyone’s out to lunch.”

A MICROCOSM–SOCIETY OF AMERICAN FORESTERS

Over recent years, a microcosm of this debate can be found within that august body of which I am happily a member, the Society of American Foresters (SAF).

Jane Difley, in her tenure as SAF President, regularly spoke to the view that business, like all other areas of the forest community, had significant societal responsibilities, including environmental protection and conservation.

Other SAF leaders, most notably Bill Barton, a former industrial forester, and Harry Wiant of West Virginia University, argued to the contrary, believing that the responsibility of forestry is to grow trees and that the protection and preservation issues are largely outside its scope.

It is not unlike the debate over the role of public education in society. Is it the school’s responsibility to teach ethics and moral choices and manners and citizenship, or is it the school’s responsibility to teach the Three R’s, period, and leave the rest to the family and the community?

This is, of course, a continuing debate without fear of resolution, one that waxes and wanes with each year and each generation and in the end satisfies no one because neither goal is met in the all-consuming effort to achieve both.

So, just as SAF has been pulled from side to side, and just as the schools continue to be tugged and pushed, so does the debate over forest management responsibility proceed within the forest industry itself.

BACK TO THE FUTURE OF FORESTRY

Let’s step back for a moment and look at the changing views on forests, foresters and forest management that have occurred over the past 70 years or so.

In the Depression years of the 1930s, it could be said with accuracy that foresters were greatly admired and respected as they worked through the Civil-

WHO IS IN CHARGE OF THE WORLD'S FORESTS?

ian Conservation Corps and other New Deal agencies to restore and rebuild the nation's depleted forests and its park system.

But in the 1940s, we became a nation at war, and all roads led to the massive effort to prevail over the Axis powers. That accomplished, the 1950s exploded with the pent-up demands created by 20 years of depression and war, and when the economy said "jump" to the forest products industry, the only question was "how high?"

It wasn't until the middle of the 1960s that people really began to view the forests as much for their environmental value as for their economic contribution. As this trend continued into the 1970s, foresters and forest products companies began to be seen as insensitive and heavy handed—a latter-day incarnation of Paul Bunyan and Babe the Blue Ox.

The 1980s saw society become ever more polarized in its attitudes and increasingly activist in its demeanor, until here in the 1990s, forests and forest management, for both good reasons and bad, have become a common center of debate in state elections and global summit negotiations alike.

It has been a troubled journey, a struggle between economic realities and environmental priorities, and what has made it unique is that, through it all, the forest resource has remained both plentiful and renewable, defying all dire predictions that the nation would run out of trees.

Indeed, it is fair to state that there are more trees growing in America today than there were 75 years ago. But how they grow—and where they grow—and the terms and conditions of how and when they are harvested remain center stage in the ongoing debate.

BALANCING CONFLICTS: PRODUCTION AND PROTECTION

The confrontation between these two conflicting views and perceptions of the forest is firmly rooted in a single historic proposition: people love trees. They have since the time of the Druids, and they probably always will. And yet, in almost the same breath they covet the products that only a tree can produce, from paper to plywood to framing lumber. What's more, they want these products delivered at prices that yield little or no profit, and they want them resourced in a manner that creates no visual impact and does not cause diminishment of the forest's recreational use.

So the question is the classic one: Can we "have our cake and eat it too"? Can we preserve and protect the forest cover even as we stand in line to consume its economic output?

The first answer must be to shift the debate away from the impossible—that is, whether trees should be cut at all—to the merely difficult. In effect, **who** should be in charge of the forests and **how** should forests be managed to satisfy the demands of all of the conflicting views?

Will they be managed by the business reality that if there are no trees left to cut, there will be no more products to make? Or will they be managed by petition initiative, as in a recent case in Maine, where voters only narrowly defeated a permanent ban on clearcutting?

Will they be managed by the scientific reality that young, growing, healthy trees are the best resource for sequestering carbon to aid our planet's precious atmosphere?

IS CERTIFICATION THE ANSWER?

These are not easy questions. They do, in fact, raise a dilemma of the first order, and square in the middle of it are both the producers—the forest and paper industry—and the self-appointed guardians of that broad confederation of often diverse interests we call “the environmental movement.”

Some elements of this movement have now stepped forward to propose a “certification” program as the solution to forestry issues. “They” will write the rules on how the forests will be managed and then certify the ones that in their judgment are well managed. As the theory goes, the landowner or producer who is certified will then be able to command a premium price for his products, and his or her customers will be able to buy labeled products secure in the knowledge that they are doing their part for the global environment.

As an aside, I don't believe the answer is the Forest Stewardship Council versus industry's Sustainable Forestry Initiative. Take one; leave the other. I would suggest that both can and do have a place. If we look at the world's forests, it is unlikely that any single system could meet local forest conditions, state and national laws, ownership and cultural differences. One size has never “fit all,” and there is no reason to believe that a single certification scheme will change that.

PUBLIC EXPECTATIONS/INDUSTRY'S COMMITMENTS

Against this backdrop—amidst the professional debate among foresters, the economic debate among managers and the philosophical debate among ordinary citizens—in a society where increasingly all rules are subject to the ballot, just what can and should the public expect from the forest products industry?

Let's explore several things the public can and should expect.

I think, right from the outset, that the public may expect the industry to play a leadership role in creating and maintaining a substantial resource base and that it will play by the rules.

I also think the public may expect that industry will manage its forest lands in a manner that

- acknowledges historical precedents;
- respects aesthetic considerations;
- preserves basic ecosystems;

WHO IS IN CHARGE OF THE WORLD'S FORESTS?

protects wildlife habitat; and
maintains the quality of soil and water.

I think they may expect industry to use growing scientific knowledge and technological capacity to improve the effectiveness of emission- and discharge-control systems in manufacturing facilities.

And I think they may expect that industry will pursue every avenue of genetic research designed to improve the yield from each tree and, in our plantation areas, the volume of trees to be grown on each acre.

The capacity to clone merchantable trees is already within our grasp, and the so-called "Dolly Plantations" growing right now in Brazil are producing a "crop" in which every tree in a given section of the plantation looks just like every other tree, right down to the last bent branch.

As a result, one day our industry will be able to shift the greatest burden of intensive management onto the plantation regions and reduce the pressures on other forests to meet production needs.

An aside here too: It isn't fair to assume that the subtropical growth areas of the equator region will become the sole repository of the world's timber resources. Other species, in other areas, will always be in demand and will always be a significant factor. This need to retain productive, economically viable forests isn't important just to industry; it is important to us all if forest cover is to remain.

Another expectation is that industry will work hard to be profitable and globally competitive. After all, a highly recognized "green" company that goes under from lack of profits is dead just the same...and being "green" won't bring it back to life.

Finally, on the list of expectations is the public's desire to know that the forest and paper industry will employ rigorous auditing programs to ensure both the quality of work and compliance with all federal, state and local requirements, as well as progress toward our own commitments. From Champion's perspective, the latter is a simple matter: "If you can't play by existing rules, you won't be invited to the table when the new ones are written."

THE NEW WORLD ORDER

Now I'm sure that many of these things don't impress you as "stretching the envelope." You may think that they are words more than deeds and promises rather than proof of performance. But bear with me as I explore in a little more detail some of the things that are going on within industry today that put spirit and action to these commitments.

To make this case effectively, we need to remind ourselves that we are not shooting any more against a fixed target.

We operate in a world that is adding net new citizens at the rate of one United States every three years. In round numbers, that means 275,000,000

additional mouths to feed, heads to cover and jobs to be created. At the same time, Mother Earth hasn't expanded her productive base one bit to meet the needs created by this ever-increasing population surge. We work with approximately the same acreages today as we did 10 years ago, including some in Brazil, Asia and Central America that have not necessarily been productive lands in the past.

Now, added to all this is the fact that business itself is becoming global, not only in the location and trade of basic resources such as pulp wood and chips, but also in finished products and their end-use markets. Today, the paper supplier in Pine Bluff has to be price competitively with the paper supplier from Indonesia. I wouldn't have to go far beyond these doors to identify a "big box" retail chain that is buying a significant portion of its retail paper products today from Southeast Asia.

Let me say here parenthetically that, basically because of the broadening base of competition, Champion International recently struck a non-equity alliance with the APRIL Groups of Singapore, which has world-class mills in Indonesia. As the authorized North American distributor for paper products produced by those Indonesian mills, we have taken an important step in positioning ourselves as a global player, able to deal with an increasing array of competitive product lines coming out of both domestic and overseas production.

WHAT ABOUT NORTHERN FORESTS: CAN THEY COMPETE?

In a recent keynote address to the New England Society of American Foresters, I spoke about their need to compete in world markets. In short, I said,

Why all this talk about other regions? This is New England, after all, well insulated and long on survival skills. Let's take a quick look at how the northeast stacks up against the world's best.

If we compare current capability of industrial forests in the northeast to produce wood and fiber, we find that Brazil can produce and is producing conifers at five times the local rate. On the hardwood side, the gap widens to more than 25 times. Will the difference in competitive position be offset by lower labor or manufacturing costs? How about tax or regulatory policies? New Hampshire doesn't have to compete with just Maine and Vermont. To survive in our bottom-line world, we all must compete globally.

I'd suggest that all of us—industrial foresters and those in conservation agencies and organizations alike—have far more in common than we think. The extent to which the large expanses of industrial forests remain, providing not only wood and jobs, but open space and wildlife

WHO IS IN CHARGE OF THE WORLD'S FORESTS?

habitats into the future, is dependent upon finding new, collaborative ways to meet that global competitive challenge.

The issue isn't whether Champion or some other company clearcuts and replants a given parcel. The real issue is how much forest—in any condition—will be here in the future. If northern forests aren't competitive, do we really assume that they will become public forests? Where will the money come from for those purchases? What about the tax base, and jobs for rural communities?

These facts are daily changing the face of reality for our industry and for conservation. In short, the old ways of thinking simply will not suffice. What our global competition is doing—how they are managing costs in Washington State or the State of New South Wales in Australia and what steps they are taking to improve environmental standards in Sweden and Norway—all of these things are increasingly critical to our business here in North America and to the future of conservation.

Whether New Hampshire or Arkansas, the issues are the same. Forests and forest product manufacturing operations must compete globally.

A DUALITY OF RESPONSIBILITIES

So let's go back, if you will, to the earlier debate within the Society of American Foresters and the argument between production forestry and environmental forestry.

The answer, in my view, is that they are no longer mutually exclusive—that we have to deal with both. We have to produce more at higher yields. We have to do that profitably. But increasingly, we also have to operate within the broad parameters of what many in the industry call our “social license to practice forestry.” That “license” suggests that we must modify our practices in ways that are acceptable to society. At the same time, however, it also must be a given that our practices are judged in terms of what is globally acceptable and competitive.

So it is my belief that individual companies and the associations that represent them can no longer escape the duality of our responsibility. We cannot say that we are in charge of only production unless we are prepared to live with the consequence of having others in charge of protection.

Life (and the forest) is not that simple any more, and so I find myself more and more often in the position of “mugwump”—you know, the person who sits with his “mug” on one side of the fence and his “wump” on the other. It isn't a comfortable position to be in a lot of the time, but it is a necessary position to be in if our industry is going to survive and prosper through the next century.

INDUSTRY'S COMMITMENT TO SUSTAINABILITY

Let me now turn to a very practical program in which our industry has taken visible and effective leadership.

That program is the Sustainable Forestry Initiative—developed through the American Forest and Paper Association. It is, in effect, a series of operating principles and guidelines, developed on a voluntary basis, that not only set a benchmark for acceptable forest practice, but also go beyond the basic standards of performance to embrace broader stewardship responsibilities and societal expectations.

While I don't have time to go into detail tonight, suffice it to say that SFI—the Sustainable Forestry Initiative—deals with the duality of responsibility up front as it addresses visual quality, wildlife habitat and biodiversity on an equal footing with reforestation, utilization and responsible use of chemicals.

Over the past five years I have had the privilege of being a part of SFI and watching it grow from the idea of just a few people into the performance guideline for a majority of our industry.

Some critics have charged that the initiative has a large public relations component, and I don't deny that. We have to be able to explain ourselves to the general public—especially after many years of explaining very little. But let me assure you here today that you cannot long promote a program that doesn't exist—and SFI most certainly exists.

Is it universal? Not yet. Is it fully applicable to private landowners as well as to the core industry subscribers? Not yet. Does it have flaws that need to be worked out and better enforcement procedures that need to be developed to maintain minimum compliance? You bet. Absolutely.

But let me say that despite controversy and occasional cynicism, enormous strides have been made, and if there is a single lesson in all of this, it is simply that profitable timber operations and responsible environmental practices are not mutually exclusive. They can be accomplished together.

For a company like Champion, SFI has been a galvanizing and aligning force that has sharpened our commitment from top to bottom. To us, SFI is not a maximum goal to be reached some day in the future but a vital work in progress aimed at creating a minimum foundation from which to build that future.

We also know that, while self-policing is important, outside acceptance is essential and maybe even critical. So for this reason we have worked hard, along with others, to bring about an external oversight function in the form of an Expert Review Panel.

This panel now includes the Chief of the U.S. Forest Service, the Dean of the Duke Forestry School and the head of The Conservation Fund, among others. Together, they provide valuable guidance as we work through various industry groups to move the current voluntary program to a recognized, man-

WHO IS IN CHARGE OF THE WORLD'S FORESTS?

datory body of standards with specific performance measures and, in some cases, third-party verification of compliance.

FOREST PATTERNS: MANAGING LANDSCAPES

On a more Champion-specific level, we are moving ahead, pushing the changing standards and evolving industry protocols. We do so out of a firm conviction that leadership is not only an important business strategy, it is also an essential component of social and environmental responsibility.

One major step that Champion has taken in this regard is to look at our five-million-plus acres of forestlands in terms of what we call forest patterns. Under this rather straightforward technique, our managers are categorizing each of our forest tracts into four possible management regimes: high yield, general management, restricted and protected.

As the words suggest, each acre will be viewed as to both its productive capability and its appropriateness and assigned one of the four priorities. What this means is that some acres, most notably our plantation forests, will be designated for maximum yield; some will be managed for multiple use but with a strong yield component; some will be set aside for limited harvesting only; and some, with unique environmental, cultural or historical properties, will be fully protected with no commercial harvesting allowed under any circumstances.

By employing the forest patterns concept, we believe that we can triple our production on intensively managed lands and thus provide maximum flexibility to meet non-production values on the remaining acreages.

This concept of classification is suggested and supported by such diverse authorities as Dr. Malcolm Hunter at the University of Maine, who promotes his triad theory of forest management, and Drs. Roger Sedjo and Dan Botkin in their joint article in *Environment Magazine* under the title, "Using Forest Plantations to Spare Natural Forests."

It is amazing, isn't it, that if you create an environment for new ideas and new approaches to develop, reasonable men and women on both sides of a divisive issue can begin to find a common answer. Now, we are not there yet, and there are many formidable road blocks that lie ahead. But we *are* at least traveling a common road in the same direction and not forever wringing our hands about the forthcoming head-on collision.

INVOLVING OTHERS IN DECISION MAKING

All of us have learned (or at least most of us have) that we cannot make changes alone, that we need to engage citizens and specialists from outside the company for their advice and expertise. Let me provide two quick examples.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service: In a recent meeting with many senior officials of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Dick Porterfield, our executive

vice president of forest products, called the agency “our most important conservation partner.”

Now, these may sound like strange words for an agency that regulates many of our activities, but the truth is that striking a partnering relationship, as opposed to the automatically adversarial roles too frequently adopted in the past, has opened a lot of doors, established a lot of common ground and resolved a lot of potential problems before they became critical.

We have a dozen examples, from the recovery of red-cockaded woodpeckers on our lands in Texas, to jointly produced endangered species guides for loggers, landowners and foresters in Alabama and Tennessee, to Project SHARE, which has become a foundation of Maine’s efforts to restore Atlantic salmon runs down east. Each one demonstrates that a strategy of collaboration is a lot more productive than the strategy of collecting enemies simply because we don’t see eye to eye on every issue.

Amapa, Plantations for the Environment: A second example of this theory is currently taking place in the northeastern Brazilian state of Amapa, where Champion’s subsidiary, Champion Papel e Celulose, has purchased more than 1 million acres for the intensive cultivation of eucalyptus—one of what may well become the model for sustainability in high-yield plantation management.

In order to ensure that the public interests are protected, we have established an Environmental Advisory Council, which in turn is providing oversight to The Nature Conservancy and the Goeldi Museum—Brazil’s Amazonian equivalent of the Smithsonian Institution—to conduct a Rapid Ecological Assessment of the huge property.

We have established a goal of setting aside as much as two-thirds of the million acres in the form of communities, unique habitats and critical ecosystem areas, with the intensive plantations placed selectively across the total landscape in order to maintain full ecological functions.

A CONTRACT FOR THE FUTURE

So place by place, situation by situation, example by example, we are beginning to forge a new Forest Contract for the future. It is a future, let me say, in which all of you will play a major role. This Contract includes

- measurable standards,
- outside participation from conservation partners,
- forest patterns that divide the landscape into areas for maximum and minimum commercial production and
- open policies, openly arrived at, and subject to compromise and debate.

It is through these initiatives, and many others, that we will present credible examples of our commitment to sustainable forestry. But make no mistake: the

WHO IS IN CHARGE OF THE WORLD'S FORESTS?

industry—and by industry I mean all who have a stake in the economic viability of our forest lands—the industry has a moral, practical, ethical and civic responsibility to lead. Only to the extent that we visibly fulfill our stewardship responsibilities to society and to the ecosystems we manage will our voice be heard, our arguments accepted and our legitimacy confirmed.

I must caution you that industry is not an island in all of this, and I would argue that Hawken goes too far in ascribing all responsibility to business.

Yes, we can and must manage our lands responsibly. And yes, we must extend our practices to others with whom we have influence, such as private landowners. But there are many things we cannot do, or cannot do alone, and in these gray areas we need the positive contribution of governments, environmentalists and public advocates who can help ensure that the broad requirements of an increasingly global, increasingly industrialized, increasingly consumer-driven society are met in a rational, practical and achievable manner.

As we take our first steps toward the next century—let alone the next millennium—foresters (especially future foresters) can never again be simple technicians of the forest art. Instead they will be expected to be part philosopher, part economist, part social engineer and part interpreter of the public consciousness. They will be taking charge of a natural resource that symbolically defines our progress as a civilization, even as it challenges our ability to provide shelter and convenience to a rapidly escalating global population.

They will be expected to challenge the conventional wisdom, to build team and collaborative skills, to engage scientific research as a matter of priority and to speak to the social and community issues with knowledge and a sense of dimension and scale.

It is a tall order, without a doubt, and I think I can say without fear of contradiction that the role of newly minted foresters will be the most difficult, most challenging, most complex, most demanding and—with luck—the most rewarding of this or any other time.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Finally, let me come full circle and restate the question: Who is in charge of the world's forests? Is it business or government? Or is it, perhaps, all of us in our role as citizens and consumers?

I think it is the latter, and I believe so because businesses, governments, environmental movements and universities are nothing more, or less, than collections of individuals.

So we, individually and collectively, are the ones who really are in charge. If we don't buy a product because it isn't manufactured properly, the producer will change or he will go out of business. It is as simple as that.

And if we step up to the plate and deal as a responsible community of interests with the issues that both unite us and divide us, then there is hope for both compromise and resolution.

The enemy in all this is not the thoughtful and concerned citizen, even though the debates may be loud and shrill. The enemy is the individual or the groups who abdicate responsibility or who stand at the outer reaches of rational argument and rely on ignorance and invective to scuttle the promise of compromise and the hope of common cause.

In all of this, industry can and will do its part. We will meet product needs, and increasingly we will do this in ways that protect ecosystem function and meet standards of social acceptability.

The forester's role is to capture the trust and the vision of the broader society, to innovate, to sell ideas in the public arena, to be professionals in the *best* sense of the term and citizens in *every* sense of the term.

In short you, just like me; like the industry *I* serve and the community we *all* serve; like the environmental activist and the legislator/lawmaker—we all are in charge.

Abdication is not a strategy, and failure is not an alternative. So, as General MacArthur said to President Kennedy, we are in fact in charge of the chicken house. And how we deal with the issues coming home to roost will determine a lot about how the world community will live on planet Earth in the years and decades ahead.

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