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With Vision There is Hope

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## WITH VISION THERE IS HOPE

By Bruce Vincent

### INTRODUCTION

Twenty-nine years ago, I made a decision to move my family and myself back to Montana. I moved back for two *environmental* reasons: the natural environment and the cultural environment. However, I quickly learned about a third environment that is dictating the future of our rural cultures – the *political environment*. I learned that the last best people are being sacrificed in a misguided attempt to save the last best place.

If I were asked to imagine what the logging industry might look like in another 30 years I have a short answer – damned if I know. I also have a long answer – it depends upon whose vision the public accepts for protecting their interest in their environment and how quickly reality seeps in to help foster a vision of common sense.

Let me explain the short answer – damned if I know.

Will Rogers once said, “it ain’t what you don’t know that is a problem, it’s what you know that ain’t so.”

I used to know a lot that wasn’t so. I used to think that science would dictate the future of natural resource management, the future of forestry, the future of logging, the future of the rich heritage in this room. I was so naive. I would have been counted in the ranks of those who would say “no way” twenty years ago if asked whether or not I thought the Forest Service timber sale system would collapse. Completely.

No way would the public believe the science of forestry as explained by Dr. Woody Harrelson over the science of Dr. Jack Ward Thomas. It’s not just public lands where I was wrong. I thought that there was no way the land around Libby, Montana would be separated from the mill at Libby. That Libby would not have a sawmill in our little town.

It also wasn’t just forest management that I was wrong about. I would have said:

- No way would the discussion of water and aquatic ecosystems include tearing out dams.
- No way would mining reform *not* be used to promise clean air and water while we provide strategic metals and minerals for a consuming public, but instead be used to drive mining companies out of states like Montana and into nations like Venezuela.
- No way would grazing reform not be a promise of good forage and clean water for grazing families and communities, but instead be successfully used to drive grazing families out of places like New Mexico and into places like Brazil.

- No way would groups that disagreed with human existence be allowed to practice eco-terrorism against rural people in a misguided effort to dehumanize and depopulate our landscape.
- No way would the discussion of forestry get so hot that a forestry executive would be killed by a bomb dropped from the sick mind of an anarchist.
- No way would professional public and private resource managers of our nation lose or abdicate their ability to manage our resources to professional special interest litigants and activist judges whose agendas have more to do with greed, power control and social engineering than environmental stewardship.
- No way would our nation run down the path of the Soviet Block – centralizing all power into one city, disempowering our people by removing their property rights *and* expecting an outcome different than their failed social, economic, political and environmental systems.
- No way would the insanity that was invented in California find it’s way into the reasonable living rooms and town squares of the great state of Montana.
- No way would we ever, as a nation, come within 400 pregnant chads of having a president who wrote a book in which he calls humans “a cancer on our planet.”

No way.

I now know that my view forward from years ago was a bit flawed. And now, to look at the next 30 years? It is with certain knowledge of my fallibility that I come to the conclusion, “damned if I know.”

I can, however, offer a vision of the future of logging based upon what I have learned, what we have learned in the last two decades. I will offer a worst-case and a best-case scenario.

## **A WORST CASE**

The worst-case scenario involves American companies fleeing to developing countries that are long on resources and population, and short on cash. In this scenario, private land begins to enjoy the same management gridlock as our public lands, private lands continue to be swallowed into the realm of public domain through outright purchase or aggressive anti-management easement regimes.

Andy Kerr, of Spotted Owl Lawsuit fame, claimed that 80% of the American landmass needs to be managed by the government as wilderness. He and others like him want islands of humanity surrounded by oceans of wilderness in order to protect “biodiversity.” In a worst-case scenario his elitist project is incrementally closer to fruition.

In this worst-case scenario, the smell of sawdust on work clothes is replaced with the smell of smoke on espresso cup holders. Nature manages our forests to the ground and the rich come to watch the hangers-on fight for our homes in our natural habitat.

In this scenario, in timber area after timber area, the onerous management requirements of top-down command and control environmental regulatory regimes will yield sell-outs to the federal domain by those who can't or won't keep up the fight, and 5-, 10- and 20-acre mini-ranches in those areas where the owners found salvation in subdividing more convincing to the bankers and stockholders than long term forest stewardship. In this worst case, we have not found the necessary incentives designed to provide a commodity over time rather than a profit next quarter.

For loggers, *thriving* in this scenario means moving to another country, and learning a new language (Spanish, Portugese or Russian were suggested to my son at the end of his freshman year of forest engineering at Oregon State.) *Surviving* in this scenario means pecking out an existence on micro-stewardship sites within the viewshed of our urban areas. A few, in a few areas, will find enough work to pay for the increasingly expensive mechanized management machinery. Most of the survivors, however, will find themselves taking steps back in time – back to the days of horse logging, back to the days of labor intensive, low production salvage only operations and will make it only if their spouses have a real job.

## **A BEST CASE**

Well, enough of this groaning and moaning. It is, after all, the worst case scenario. This is where many in the deep ecology movement would like to see us move toward. It is not, however, where I think we will be in thirty years. Certainly, I think we have a few more rough years in front of us, with a mountain of challenges but, that said, and even with the ugly picture I've painted of where we are today, I have more hope for the future of forest management and this profession we call logging right now than I did when I first started speaking out two decades ago.

Earlier I said that where we are headed depends upon whose vision the public accepts for protecting their interest in their environment and how quickly reality seeps in to help foster a vision of common sense. I think that the public is getting a taste of reality, a taste of the vision of those who would like nature to do all of the managing, and they are not liking the taste very well at all.

We have long talked about fire. About forest health. About the inevitability of nature cleaning up the overstocked forests that surround our communities throughout the northern Rockies. And, it is happening. Last summer 9,000,000 acres burned in the west.

The public is figuring this out. They are coughing, hacking, rubbing their eyes, standing on their million dollar homes with \$6 hoses watching their million dollar view sheds burn up their driveways and they are asking one simple question... "Isn't there a better way?" We all know that there is a better way. We all know that to keep healthy ecosystems they must co-exist with healthy social and economic systems. We have known this for a long, long time but we've had a

heck of a time of getting our message out to the public. Will this change for the better? Will we be able to get our message out to the public soon enough for our profession to survive in this state.

Yes. In fact, our ability to speak to the public has already changed for the better. Part of what has changed is our knowledge of how to make our arguments. We know a lot now that we did not know 20 years ago. What we have learned in our battles.

Important things have been learned like:

- We now know that common sense is not going to “break out.”
- We now know that if we win in the court of law, but lose in the court of public opinion, we will, ultimately lose in the court of law.
- We now know that reality has nothing to do with politics, only the public’s perception of reality that is defined by decades of Disney movies.
- We know that playing “reverse jeopardy” with the public and answering questions they are not asking will not help our cause. We need to ask the public what they want to know and give them answers in English and not in white-papers they can’t or won’t read.
- We now know that being the third ring of a three ring circus only makes money for the people taking gate receipts.
- We now know that our jobs do not matter to the public outside of our home town – and then our jobs only matter if we tie them to the public’s interest – taxes, schools, healthy environment, etc.
- We now know that there is a big difference between fighting and leading.
- We know that part of leading is engaging in the political process.
- We know that the public will not accept and we need not foster an end to the environmental movement – it doesn’t need to be destroyed. What it needs is a heart and a brain put back in it, it needs a new leader, it needs us.

We also have some tools for engaging the public that we didn’t use to have. In our industry we have things like the Evergreen Foundation. Helping talk to the public in terms they understand about the choices we face in providing them with wood and wood fiber products and protecting their environment. We have the Sustainable Forestry Initiative to help put our science to work for the forest and to meet the public’s expectations.

For the political arena, we have the potential to stand together with other resource managing cultures and form a single issue (rural values), multi-sector (farming, ranching, mining, logging)

voting block that coalesces our rural minority votes into a political force that makes the difference in local, state and national elections.

We now have the Provider Pals™ project for reaching yet another important audience – our children.

We aren't the only ones who have learned some things the last few years. County governments have learned that they can level the playing field with federal agencies if they have a local management vision and plan. The Forest Service has learned that if we are not going to manage the forest, we sure don't need many foresters. My speaking gives me constant hope that the thought processes of the public are changing. I am now asked to speak to bankers, chambers of commerce, legislative bodies, university students and a plethora of other non-timber groups.

## **CONCLUDING REMARKS**

What does this mean for logging in the future?

I think the vision that will be adopted by the public will more closely resemble ours than Andy Kerr's. Reality is indeed a dictator and I don't think it will be acceptable to lock us out of our forest and burn it to the ground. The public will not like the reality that includes pumping millions of tons of CO<sub>2</sub> into the atmosphere and importing our wood fiber from nations using methods we abandoned thirty years ago. Instead, I think that the public will, in time, come around to our vision of the future for their forest landscape. A vision that uses the tools of management judiciously with an eye on providing from the forest and protecting the ability of future generations to do the same. Forest management will be biologically defensible, socially realistic and in concert with natural laws.

To implement that vision, logging companies of the future will be:

***Professional:*** The leader of the company and all employees will have forestry backgrounds from either an institution of higher learning or through involvement in rigorous and continual continuing education through their association. The public will view us as the professional caretakers of their interests in their forest landscapes.

***Niche oriented:*** Some will find a business niche in being multi-faceted, capable of working both the production harvests required in plantation settings and the visual and the fuel reduction harvests in micro-estate sites. Forestry professionals must be able to service the full gamut of forest stewardship contracting, from controlled burning to site preparation and tree planting. Some will find niches with laser focus, such restoration forestry in the urban interface or biomass production on public and private ground.

***Environmental Leaders:*** All of us practicing the science of forest management will become even more light on the land. Our ergonomically sound, low ground pressure machines will be able to operate for even greater distances over un-roded areas and will make our jobs even healthier, safer, and more environmentally sensitive than they are today. Mills will not

want to buy their own logging equipment but they will pay a professional rate for a professional job. Third party auditing of forest practices will be more than window dressing – it will force the hand of those wanting to sell boards and needing a quality job done on the land.

***Engaged:*** Most importantly, we will be constantly engaged in the dialogue over the future of our culture, the future of our industry, and the future of our forests. We will have a line item in our business plan that allows time and resources for association business. We will be involved in things like the our political PACs, and part of our business will include running for office, or working to get someone elected, or unelected. No longer will we be seen as or act as if we are politically impotent. We will have a line item in our business plan that allows time and resources for educating the next generation about who we are and what we do for them. Loggers will be adopted through the Provider Pals™ program and introduce our culture to students – and future voters. In short, activism will be part of our daily business. We'll be engaged with the American public and we will be seen as the green choice for forest products by the environmentally responsible.

I was asked at a meeting just last week how we can ever get this done with the left bend of the media. I suggest to you that the media is going to become more and more irrelevant in getting our message out to the public. Instead, we'll go around them by using the internet. The internet is the new committees of correspondence. We don't need the major media to get our message across to each other and to the public. The battle for our forests will be won in living rooms and over back yard fences rather than through Madison Avenue advertising and the prime time news.

I also submit to you that the picture I have just painted of logging in the future is not far-fetched if we commit ourselves to pursuing a vision of the future of our nation's forests that includes loggers as a professional, fundamental management tool in achieving forest health and providing green wood products for our consuming public. I also submit to you that America is ready for a new vision of environmentalism. They are tired of the doom and gloom messages of an environmental apocalypse. They are tired of hearing what is wrong and ready to hear about what can be right. They are also ready for a discussion about the role our industry can play in rebuilding our economy.

What we do in the next five years will define, to a great extent, where we will be in twenty-five years. I know it is cliché but we are at a critical juncture in our history and the road taken now, by each of us individually and by our profession collectively, will define forestry in our nation for several decades to come. During the difficulties of these years, it will be easy to get tired, to get dispirited and to want to give up. The job we have in front of us can seem monumental if looked at as a whole. My mom left me with something that I use to keep me focussed on moving forward one step at a time and not losing sight of the forest for the trees.

Bobby Kennedy, in South Africa, 1966 said:

*“It is from numberless diverse acts of courage and belief that human history is shaped. Each time a man stands up for an ideal, or acts to improve the lot of others, or strikes out against injustice, he sends forth a tiny ripple of hope, and crossing each other from a*

*million different centers of energy and daring, those ripples build a current that can sweep down the mightiest walls of oppression and resistance.”*

If each of us commits to being a ripple, the wave we make will assure that logging in 2033 will not look like logging in 2013. It will, I pray, be better: Better for our businesses, our families, our communities, our nation – and our forests.