

but the attacks invariably have been directed at the policies. Multiple-use management in the developed world and forestry for economic development in the developing world are cases in point. Although they have, in fact, rarely been tried well or even at all, the failure to live up to the promise has led to them being dismissed, out of hand, as wrong. Unfortunately the attacks are mounted with more fervour than accuracy, and so they are wide open to counter-attack at their several points of technical weakness. Naturally enough this is where the main effort on the forestry side of the dispute has gone. The "unfortunately" in the sentence above simply registers the fact that these technically superior counter-attacks have not even been able to hold the line.

#### **What is the message for New Zealand Forestry?**

Something must be wrong. If the attacks on the environmental and accounting fronts are effective in spite of their technical weaknesses while the counter-attacks are ineffective in spite of their greater technical validity, then the technical points cannot be important points in the issue.

We know that there are some awesome gaps in our knowledge base for managing forests for multiple use and even for some single-use purposes. Surely then the more progress we make in filling them the less vulnerable we are to criticism on technical grounds and the more capable we are of exposing fallacious criticism. The case for more research, therefore, makes itself. But with technical competence no great asset in the forestry – environment debate and technical naivety no great handicap, what is the point?

#### **Specific purpose forests rejustified?**

The attacks from the environmental side arise primarily from the fact that the forests are wanted as forests; any role they may have as a source of wood, especially industrial wood, is secondary at best. From the accounting point of view, on the other hand, forests are seen purely as a means of generating income; if the nett income is not highly positive then the forests are not wanted at all. The practice of forestry to meet the first view would obviously be different from the practice of forestry to meet the second.

At first sight such mismatched views have nothing in common. But they do have. Both lead to the same conclusion that wood production must be confined to plantations single mindedly devoted to that purpose alone. Accidental as the alliance is, the combined effect is forcing the profession out of the forests and away from the practice of forestry as

many in the profession see it – multiple-use management with wood as one of the uses. But what is wrong with that? Plantations could, after all, meet virtually all of the world's wood needs from a land base of little more than 10% of the present area of forest in the world. The remaining 2700 million hectares of forest

would be more than enough to provide all of the necessary non-wood products and services and still allow a substantial area to be released for agriculture.

**Hamish Levack**  
Editor

---

## **Let's stop doing it on the cheap**

Foresters do it on the cheap. I began wondering about this at my first forestry conference many years ago. It was held at a ski resort. It was a beautiful place. The problem was that it was the off-season and there was no snow. There was a great view from the top of the lift on top of the hill, but we had to walk down. It would have been much more fun to ski. But it would have also been more expensive. I was told that most foresters couldn't justify the cost during the peak season.

The point was brought home to me in a recent joint conference between foresters and pulp and paper people. The foresters were the poor relations at the conference. We did not have the fancy satchels that were given to all the pulp and paper folks. Our name tags had special colour codes to restrict the functions we could attend. It is true that we paid a bit less to attend the conference. However, that is what our organising committee had decided would be best to attract the maximum number of our members. We were "doing it on the cheap".

There were both forestry and pulp and paper exhibits at the joint conference. The forestry exhibits were typical for forestry conferences. Content was professional, but they were done on a shoestring and it showed. The pulp and paper exhibits, in contrast, were far more visually appealing and had a greater capital investment.

Why should forestry be that way? Why should foresters play second fiddle to an industry which doesn't even want the material we produce? All the pulp and paper people require is cheap biomass. The only reason paper is made from wood fibre is that it is the cheapest technologically suitable material to come along so far.

We try to promote forest growing by saying: "It only cost \$XX (pick a number as close to zero as possible) to invest in forestry!" Promotions rarely mention the cost of holding and tending, or the opportunity cost of investment. Even if they do, the attempt is to minimise those costs. But forestry is a capital-intensive investment. For example, the capital investment in the forest is at least equal

to that of the pulpmill it supports. And the forest generally has fewer managers. Therefore, each forest manager actually has more responsibility for capital management than the mill managers have! And their training is at least equal to that of the pulp and paper people. So why is there this feeling of poverty?

The problem is one of focus. Most foresters see their job as managing forest land. Production foresters are concerned with wood flows. But neither of these focuses provides any benefit for which there is monetary reward. At best, there is a little benefit in selling wood. But even here, the focus is on price. In any commodity sale, the only person who has any chance of making a reasonable return is the low-cost producer. And given the vagaries in exchange rates, differences in international labour costs, and other factors beyond the forester's control, even with good growing technology and favourable growing conditions, it is impossible to sustain the low-cost position in wood production over the long term. In contrast, the pulp and paper people see their jobs as providing a variety of pulp and paper grades to a variety of clients both at home and abroad. They sell a service. They are rewarded for it and it shows. There is more surplus money in the industry. As a result, their conferences are more fun.

So how do we solve this dilemma? We need to get away from a commodity focus. We need to understand the business of our customers so that we can sell them what they need, rather than what we produce. We need to show them how and why using our products will be the best thing they can do. We need to see our jobs as marketing services rather than just managing resources. While resource management is important, and it is important to be cost effective, we will be rewarded with a premium only if our clients see that we can provide them with something they need and cannot get elsewhere. If we can succeed, price will not be so much of an issue and we will be able to stop "doing it on the cheap".

**E.M. Bilek, Lecturer, School of Forestry, University of Canterbury, Christchurch**