

The Knowledge Guerrillas

Hugh Bigsby

At one time the term 'guerrilla tactics' was something that was reserved for environmental activists in their 'war' against the forest sector. Scenes of people breaking the law by chaining themselves to trees, lying down in front machinery or blockading roads were common. Less common but more destructive were acts of sabotage or destruction of forestry equipment, and life-threatening activities like spiking trees. At the same time, the forest sector and the application of science was generally considered to be 'mainstream' and reflective of societal norms about resource use.

How strange it now seems that recent events have reversed the situation. Many forestry professionals and scientists have now been associated with a camp of activists undertaking guerrilla action against the Government because they support sustainable forestry. Stranger still is the way that Forest and Bird has been portrayed almost as a responsible corporate citizen, alerting the Government to subversive activity. The environmental movement, it appears, has become 'mainstream' and the orthodoxy of preservation a societal 'norm'.

This however is not the first time that the forestry profession has found itself in this position. The forestry profession's insistence on conservation once before brought it into conflict with Government and the ethos of a particular lobby. At the turn of the 19th century, when indigenous forests were rapidly disappearing under the plow or pasture, the profession first made its stance that we needed to conserve (rather than preserve) our forests. Thus began a long struggle against agricultural interests.

Central to the conflict at the turn of the 19th century and again central to the conflict that brought about the latest tag as guerrillas, is the insistence by supporters of

sustainable forestry that science is brought to bear in any decision. A key part of the scientific approach is the development and use of models to make informed decisions about the management of forests. Early inventories and models showed the effects of unrestricted logging and land conversion that resulted in the formation the New Zealand Forest Service and reservation of forests to prevent them from being cleared.

Unlike the turn of the 19th century, the current process of events has sidelined scientific debate. RMA proceedings that would have presented the science arguments surrounding the beech proposal and allowed them to be openly debated have been aborted. The current Government's decisions about sustainable beech forestry were made before the science was openly debated, and apparently influenced on the basis of one set of model results.

Fortunately, although the formal public debate about the science behind beech forestry has been thwarted, much of the information can be easily found on the web, unfiltered by selective press releases. For those who are interested, the model that influenced the Government can be found at <http://www.landcare.cri.nz/science/beechnodel/>. This is a modified version from that which was presented to the Government. The earlier model, which has been removed from the web, showed that the Timberlands West Coast's (TWC) proposal would eventually deplete the forest. This later version shows that the forest would not be depleted, but that the forest structure would be changed over time with larger trees disappearing. Scientific evidence and models for the RMA hearings into the beech proposals prepared by TWC can be found at <http://www.fore.canterbury.ac.nz/euan/beechnodel/beechnodel.htm>. In particular, readers should look at Vanclay's article on modelling at <http://www.fore.canterbury.ac.nz/euan/beechnodel/vanclay.htm>.

More broadly, models are an important part of forestry management across a range of activities. This issue of the Journal highlights software and its use in forest management New Zealand. The results of a survey of software use sent out with the November issue of the Journal show that use of software from Forest Research most widespread, but also that, a growing number of providers are entering the area of integrating decision-making and data management tools.

Arm yourselves well.

CONTRIBUTIONS WANTED

Can you contribute to an important record of our forestry history?

The New Zealand Journal of Forestry intends to publish a special issue to coincide with the Institute's AGM in April 2000.

We are looking for historical articles, recollections and photographs.

Contributions will need to be with the editor by no later than **6 March**, so get working.

Photos also requested

A display of historical photographs and captions is also planned for the AGM/Conference. Do you have any available? If so, board space will be provided; bring to the conference.

Please contact the Editor, Hugh Bigsby, PO Box 84, Lincoln University, Canterbury.

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