

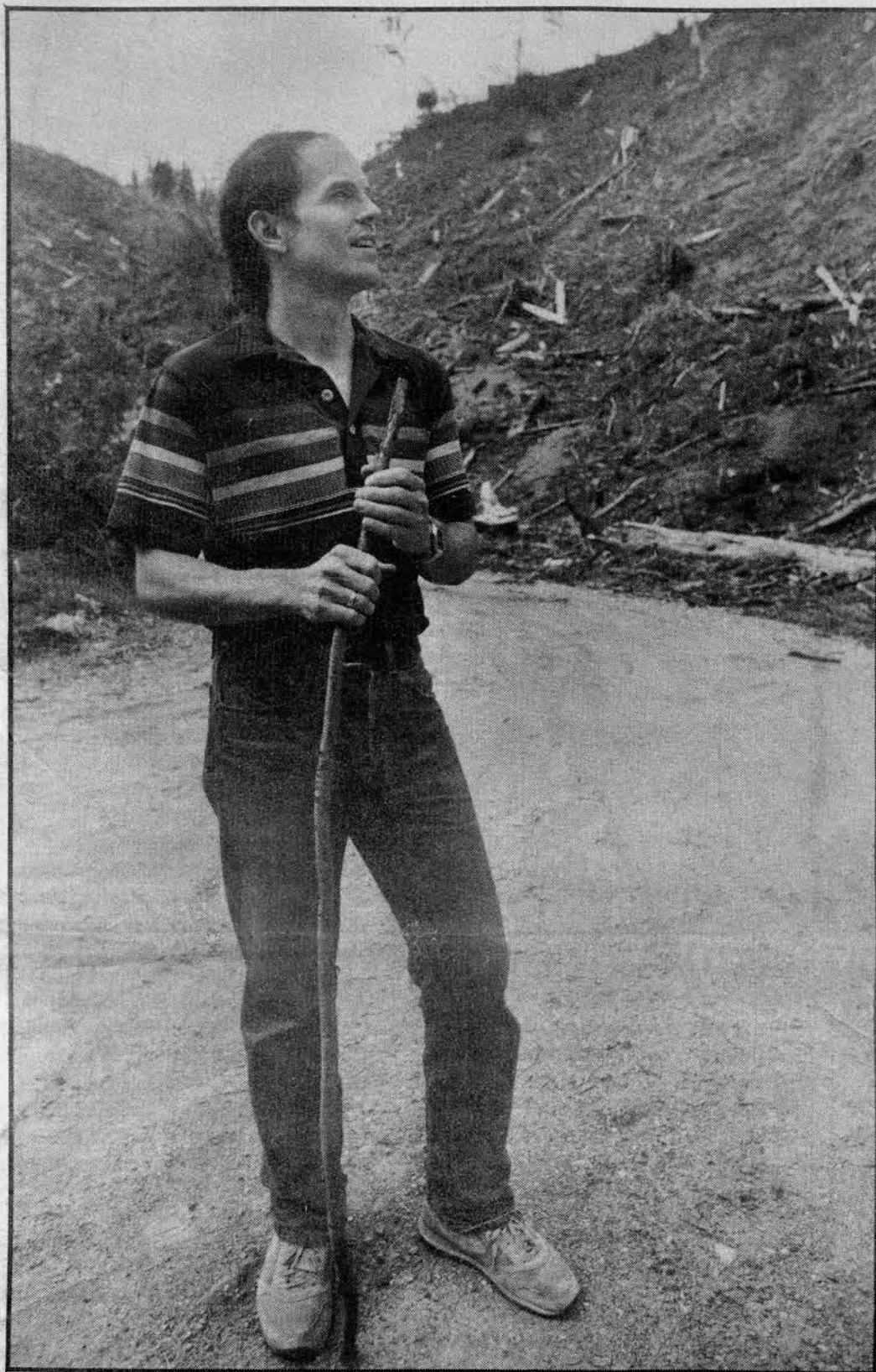
High Country News

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A Paper for People who Care about the West

One dollar



Is the Forest Service changing?

Jeff DeBonis: 'So far it's all talk'

by Pat Ford

Jeff DeBonis, who last year began a movement from within for Forest Service reform, is resigning as a Willamette Forest timber sale planner to devote more time to his fledgling group.

"I'm resigning as a timber planner, and I may leave the Forest Service altogether," DeBonis said in a phone interview. "I'm not being forced out; it's my choice. AFSEEE is growing so fast that I need to concentrate on it close to full-time."

AFSEEE is the Association of Forest Service Employees for Environmental Ethics, which DeBonis founded in Spring 1989 (*HCN*, 6/5/89).

"We have about 1,000 present and former Forest Service employees as members now, and 2,000 associate mem-

bers," he says. The organization has a five-person board of directors, an attorney, and that indisputable mark of progress, a T-shirt. *Inner Voice*, AFSEEE's newsletter, took a major step up in quality with its second issue late last year.

Public attention has also come quickly. *Outside* and various environmental magazines have done stories on DeBonis and AFSEEE; *National Geographic* and *American Forests* have stories soon to run. He appeared on the ABC news show *Prime Time Live*. In mid-February, he spoke to a Congressional subcommittee on freedom of speech for federal employees.

DeBonis launched his work last year with a long, detailed, heartfelt letter to Forest Service Chief Dale Robertson on the agency's direction and environmental practices. Robertson's delayed reply was short and nearly devoid of substance.

"It was about what I expected," DeBonis says. "He's in a tough spot between political forces and his field people who will see through platitudes. It's good the tone was friendly."

Is real change afoot in the Forest Service? "A lot of people are speaking out now within the agency," he says.

"I hear rumors of bold initiatives in the works in D.C. I hear positive things are happening on the ground in, for instance, Region 9" — the upper Midwest.

"But on the ground here in the Northwest, we are consumed in cranking out the targets under Hatfield-Evans," he continues. Hatfield-Evans refers to the bill Congress passed last year to deal with the ancient forest-spotted owl controversy. "There's a lot of pressure to rubber-stamp the sales and get them out," says DeBonis. "The discouraging thing for people here, espe-

cially biologists, is that day-to-day operations aren't changing. So far it's all talk."

As a timber sale planner deeply involved in cranking out those mandated targets, he admits there is also a personal factor in his decision to stop doing that work. "It's a question of conscience over liquidation of temperate-zone rainforests."

One major choice AFSEEE faces now is whether to deliberately expand to include other federal land managing agencies. "Bureau of Land Management employees are asking us to do that," he says, "and so far no one in BLM is moving to do it separately."

Pat Ford covers the Northern Rockies from Boise, Idaho.

Inside the Forest Service: Supervisors see a "dysfunctional family" see page 10

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Forest supervisors memos:

We need internal reform to do our jobs right

FEEDBACK TO THE CHIEF
FROM FOREST SUPERVISORS
IN REGIONS 1, 2, 3 AND 4

Forest supervisors in Regions 1, 2, 3 and 4 have developed a message for you that is viewed by most of us as extremely important.

We support the results of the Forest Supervisors' meeting in Regions 5, 6 and 10; however, we felt our message would have more impact if we generated ours independent of theirs. We believe our message and those resulting from other meetings will have many similarities, which will lend strength to the need for significant changes in our actions.

We are unified in our support of the Forest Service mission — "Caring for the Land and Serving People." We are pleased with many of the changes and initiatives you have personally brought to the agency. These have been well stated by the Region 5, 6 and 10 forest supervisors.

We recognize the complex political environment at the national level and the difficulties in making significant changes.

Public values and personal values of Forest Service employees, including forest supervisors, are changing. We expect value changes to accelerate into the 1990s. New employees bring new values. Half of the supervisors will probably not be at a meeting like this in 1994, and about half of the supervisors here today were not at Snowbird.

We need to be united in a set of common goals intended to regain our status as leaders in natural resource conservation. We are here to help you in every way possible. We want to be a part of the solution, not the problem.

We use the word "public" or "publics" in our paper. We recognize there are many publics and they often have strongly conflicting views concerning national forest management. We attempt to portray our views of the "general" public and recognize the potential for misinterpretation.

Some of the following concerns and recommendations need your personal attention.

PROGRAMS AND POLITICS

We are seeing some much needed shifts in programs led by members of your staff. The emphasis on forest plans in the 1990 RFA program is a giant step as is the direct approach dealing with capability.

Your efforts in Pilot, recreation strategy and recognizing creative employees are definitely moving us in the right direction. There are indicators that more action is necessary.

The emphasis of national forest programs does not reflect the land stewardship values embodied in forest plans, Forest Service employees and the public.

The Administration's program and congressional annual appropriations still emphasize commodity programs. We are making progress in this area as evidenced by the 1990 appropriations bill.

Program/budget testimony is constrained by Administration objectives. Program shifts contained in forest plans and public opinion are not expressed.

Public challenges to the timber program cannot be overcome by additional funding to timber management, nor by simply improving documentation of the NEPA process.

During the first half of this century, we operated in an environment of rural



values. We are now operating in an environment where about 5 percent of the population relates to a rural setting.

Recommendations

- Field line officers should become more effective in working with local, state and national key publics and elected leaders to build support for Forest Service programs generally, and to discourage specific earmarking.
- Work with elected officials to give them a greater understanding of forest plan decisions and implementation

schedules. Provide timely briefings for forest plan monitoring and evaluation results and needs.

- Recognize and accept that public and employee values are changing. Resolve conflicts by being responsive, not by just increasing our efforts to tell our story.
- Use the NEPA process to reach decisions that are acceptable and implementable.
- Encourage forest supervisors and

(Continued on page 11)

Is the agency "an organization out of control?"

AN OPEN LETTER TO THE CHIEF
FROM THE
REGION ONE FOREST SUPERVISORS
November 1989

Dear Dale:

The forest supervisors of the Northern Region identify strongly with the mission of the Forest Service — Caring for the Land and Serving People. The success of the Forest Service in carrying out this mission is vital to all of us. A core value we share is being able to contribute to the survival of the Forest Service during these difficult times in national forest management and to contribute to the achievement of organizational excellence in our future as a natural resource management agency.

Therefore, we are grateful for the opportunity to be a part of future solutions to help you lead us into excellence in the 1990s. We welcome the opportunity to "have your ear" for some "straight talk" about the important issues we are facing in the Northern Region — issues dealing with the survival and success of the organization we love.

These are troubling times for many of us. The values of our public and our employees have been rapidly changing and have become increasingly divergent, increasing the level of controversy surrounding the management of national forests.

We are seeing a drastic increase in

the number of challenges to our land and resource management activities, challenges which are not easily overcome by throwing more money at them or working harder to educate our public or increasing the amount of documentation.

Many people, internally as well as externally, believe the current emphasis of national forest programs does not reflect the land stewardship values embodied in our forest plans. Congressional emphasis and our traditional methods and practices continue to focus on commodity resources.

We are not meeting the quality land management expectations of our public and our employees.

We are not being viewed as the "conservation leaders" Gifford Pinchot would have had us become, despite strong support of the rhetoric in our Mission Statement.

We are worried that if we don't make some major changes as an agency, our mission statement will never move from rhetoric to reality.

Despite these troubled times and the frustrations our employees are feeling, your people in Region One continue to work diligently to keep resource programs moving, to meet targets, and to serve the public. Still, there is a growing concern that we have become "an organization out of control."

Over the past two years, the Region One Forest Supervisors shared many of the frustrations coming from the ground

with our Regional Forester. He listened carefully to the concerns of Region One employees. We know he shared these concerns with you during the past year. We believe that they have been communicated clearly. Region One supervisors have also participated with supervisors in other regions and concur with the concerns and recommendations jointly developed by the Region 1, 2, 3 and 4 Forest Supervisor group.

In general, we feel that the concerns and recommendations of the joint Forest Supervisor group, to some extent, are symptomatic of a larger problem in our organization. We have become a dysfunctional Forest Service family.

The concerns for mixed messages in the Supervisor's report is an example. Another is the feeling that we just can't continue to do more with less. The Ranger District plate is overflowing and the stress on our workforce to continue to crank out more targets, work on more initiatives, work harder on more customer service projects, and work harder to resolve conflicting values at the field level, is becoming too much to ask them to bear.

The stress in the organization is serious. A "can do" attitude will not save us this time. We are spread too thin. It is time that we start dealing with our internal problems, before we crack apart at the seams. It's time to start prioritizing the work we need to do. Excellent organizations "stick to the knitting." As an

organization, we need to figure out what the "knitting" ought to be for the 1990s.

Despite our full platter and the conflicting demands placed upon us, we have been pulling together with our Regional Forester to do the best possible job in meeting these challenges at our level. We will continue to work together as a Regional Leadership Team to prioritize and implement workable strategies that bring us closer to our basic mission and to the resource objectives of our forest plans. However, we feel that it is time for some important self-evaluation as an agency. We would really like to see our chief bring us together as an organization.

We are not asking you to be our Messiah, just let us work with you to identify and implement ways we can improve our leadership for the national forests. Let us be the true conservation leadership that the President needs!

To work toward the resolution of these issues, we would like to invite you to our Region One Regional Leadership Team meeting. In that setting, we feel we could frankly discuss issues of concern and develop a commitment to work together and move ahead. We invite you to our Team meeting on Jan. 30-31, 1990.

Sincerely,
The Region One
Forest Supervisors

Supervisors . . .

(Continued from page 10)

regional foresters to increase grass-roots support through the use of public work groups to help us make "better" decisions. These groups are known by various names — consensus, implementation, advisory, etc. They are often adversaries, but through our leadership they can develop solutions and provide support for programs to congressional delegations.

- Bring our retirees along with our changing program emphasis and work with them to form a national support group similar to the National Parks and Conservation Association.

BUDGET AND ORGANIZATION

We have seen higher budgets in wildlife and fish and soil and water. We are encouraged by more emphasis on forest plans in the budgeting process, but change must come faster.

Our timber program has been 35 percent of the National Forest System (NFS) budget for the last 20 years while recreation, fish and wildlife, and soil and water have been 2 to 3 percent each.

Slightly more than 30 percent of the annual NFS budget goes directly to ranger districts. As a result, districts are not adequately financed to perform quality resource management. Their staffs are often short in necessary skills and experience. Their workload is up to 50 percent more than it should be and stress is becoming more serious.

The present four-tiered functional organization was developed for good reasons, but perhaps we have "outlived" those reasons. There are about 14,000 employees serving in functional middle management positions in the Forest Service. The historical role of these employees and their present and future role in the agency is dramatically different. We have an opportunity in the next 5 to 8 years for a significant cultural role change with the potential for 70 percent retirement. Some forests are already redefining roles of middle managers. Budgets, customer service, integrated

forest plans, efficiency, etc., all demand redefinition of employee roles as well as the four level organization.

Funds are inequitably distributed between regions and forests.

Employees and the public are dissatisfied with the quality of today's resource management. They strongly support our mission statement, but they do not believe we are living it.

The Data General (DG) system appears to be out of control in terms of line officer involvement and providing benefits and efficiencies at the ranger district level. The DG system has been a great communication technology and time saver in many ways. However, as more and more people have discovered additional uses and applications, the burden on ranger district personnel has increased disproportionately. The rapidly increasing number of data bases, systems, application programs, bulletin boards, etc., rely increasingly on input, maintenance and debugging from district personnel.

Recommendations

- Commission an in-depth study of the operational efficiency of the Forest Service.

- Support the Jordan Committee's efforts to resolve budget allocation inequities between regions and forests. Accelerate study so it can be used for the 1991 allocation process.

- Fund ranger districts first in the allocation process taking inflation and forest plan unit costs into account.

- Evaluate decisions and management of the Data General System, especially impacts and benefits to ranger districts.

- Gain support from Congress and the Administration for the principle of quality resource management as defined by standards and guidelines in forest plans. Outputs may vary with budgets, but quality should not.

LEADERSHIP AND COMMUNICATIONS

We are pleased and excited about the leadership in areas such as Pilot,

Beyond Pilot, various initiatives (Rise to the Future, etc.), Change on the Range, and partnerships. We believe we have many opportunities facing us in the areas of leadership and communication.

Many members of the public and many of our employees no longer view us as leaders in environmental conservation.

Past and present forest practices do not meet the high quality land management expectations of the public and our employees. For example — clearcutting, riparian management, water quality and a large percent of western rangelands are in poor condition after 80 years of management.

All organizational levels are not taking a consistent, proactive approach with Congressional delegations.

We continue to maintain strong relationships with commodity groups, often at the expense of developing and improving relationships with other groups.

The allowable sale quantity (ASQ) issue will continue to be a problem for us and some supervisors feel our ASQs are unrealistic even with full funding.

Internal communication needs improvement as we have heard about your decisions from the public before getting them through normal channels. You have a mailing list for all forest supervisors which gets very little use.

Recommendations

- Develop a strategy to become well known leaders in environmental conservation. We want to help develop and implement that strategy.

- Lead the effort to develop the Administration's environmental program.

- Use RPA and forest plans to define realistic outputs that vary with budgets. Send the message that quality management will not be compromised, regardless of the budget.

Develop a process to explain the concept of standards and guidelines and minimum management requirements to Congress, the Administration and publics.

- Provide direction that forest supervisors will use the first 5 years of plan implementation to reevaluate their capability to meet allowable sale quantities and amend plans if necessary.

- Reactivate the environmental education movement. Include programs in urban school systems where we do not have a presence.

- Evaluate your internal communications process and utilize the DG for more direct sharing with forest supervisors.

WORKFORCE DIVERSITY

Your commitment to workforce diversity is visible and understood. The situation in Region 5 is being communicated to other regions.

The reasons to actively promote and work toward a diverse workforce may not be well defined and articulated. We may be focusing on avoiding a consent decree or "just because you said it is important."

No one will openly admit to not being committed to workforce diversity but we may not reach our goal by 1995.

We are making progress, but we need to do more. We are presently competing with each other for candidates already on board and that is not a good practice. Our present work environment and culture may not encourage retention.

Recommendations

- Concentrate efforts and rewards on recruiting new employees and outreach for the future. Reduce the competition between forests and regions for currently employed diversity candidates.

- Improve the work environment and develop a vision for the workplace of the future.

- Focus on the many positive aspects of having a workforce that is diverse in race, gender, age, lifestyle and philosophy, and bring as many people as possible into the solution.

We all have a place in the workforce of the future and some are feeling they have no future.

LETTERS

FALSE IMPRESSION

Dear HCN,

I have greatly appreciated the service accorded by HCN in presenting your recent special issues on the West's fouled waters. One of the articles in particular, however, could create false impressions and be used to justify further destructive forest management practices.

The story on vegetative management (Bringing Back the Range, HCN, 12/4/89) presented a limited and imbalanced view of only the so-called benefits of tree-cutting and grazing for increasing water yields. On larger scales, vegetative management is shown to be impractical and damaging, creating a cycle of diminishing returns through flooding, erosion, regrowth and advance of phreatophytes, siltation, retreatments and costs. The concept has been extensively studied, and according to national forest hydrologist Robert Ziemer in his paper, "Water Yields from Forests: An Agnostic View," "There is every indication that management of vegetation for increased water yield will continue to be impractical."

Arizona's forests are presently under assault and faced with the spectre of intensive "treatments" (clearcuts, chainings, burns and herbicides) to

enhance run-off to Phoenix and the Central Valley, which still resist facing the facts and living within environmental constraints. Arizona's Department of Water Resources is presently presided over by former Bureau of Reclamation water buffalo, Bill Plummer, who characterizes water conservation as a "short-term solution!"

According to Ziemer, the failure of vegetative management has been related to overstated goals and benefits, unrealistic assumptions, political naivete, and the emergence of new interest groups. The naive and imbalanced presentation in your article, which avoids technical and historical discussion of the variables and caveats involved, will certainly be exploited by the water establishment to bypass conservation for the doomed science fiction of "water augmentation." "Success stories" are appreciated, but they must be tempered in proper context.

Bob Lippman
Flagstaff, Arizona

Dear Bob Lippman,

Jim Stiak's article was about the restoration of flows in small creeks by cutting some trees. It never mentioned water augmentation on the scale you are writing about. Blind pessimism is as damaging as blind optimism.

Ed Marston

ACCESS

DENVER-BASED ENVIRONMENTAL consulting firm specializing in environmental impact assessment and planning for energy-related development has immediate openings for one senior- and one junior-level research associate. Master's degree in natural/environmental science and 5 years experience required for senior position. Bachelor's in natural/environmental science with 2 years experience or master's degree required for junior position. Experience in the Intermountain West and familiarity with environmental regulations is desirable. Flexibility and superior analytical/writing skills are essential. Send resume, letter of interest and writing sample to: PIC Technologies, Inc., 1801 Broadway, Suite 920, Denver, CO 80202. (1x4 B)

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SOUTHWEST SOLARADOBE SCHOOL, earthbuilding schools, consulting, books, plans. Joe Tibbets, PO Box 7460, Albuquerque, NM 87194 (505/242-7413).

THE INDIAN PEAKS WORKING GROUP, a nonprofit volunteer organization, is looking for a part-time executive director, a position with limited remuneration since the group is funded by donations and T-shirt sales. For information, contact Anne Vickery, 5255 Pennsylvania Ave., Boulder, CO 80302 (303/499-3001). (1x4)

ENVIRONMENTALLY SENSITIVE Financial Planning and Investing. Fresh, intelligent, broadscope ideas and services for individuals, professionals and business owners whose ethical values and long-range planning demand something more. Contact John Shellenberger, CFP, FTFS, Inc. (Brkr-Dir), Registered Investment Advisor, P.O. Box 13542, San Rafael, CA 94913 (415/461-4300). (4x1 p)

INTERNSHIP: The Aspen Center for Environmental Studies, Aspen, CO. RESP: provide nat. hist. progs for children/adults; nat. hist. writing/art/photography; wildlife rehab. QUAL: educ. backgrd in nat. sciences, knowledge of Rocky Mtn. flora/fauna. June-Aug 1990. Stipend and housing. Send resume with inquiries to: Susy Ellison, Aspen Center for Environmental Studies, Box 8777, Aspen, CO 81612. (2x3p)

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SOON IT WILL BE NO SECRET that Dave Foreman was arrested by the FBI to "send a political message." But he needs your help to prepare for a costly trial. Please send money to the Arizona Five Legal Defense Fund, Box 4666, Salem OR 97302. (1x4)

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