Role of Federal Forest Land in the US
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Dale Bosworth
Today’s Presentation

• History of US tenure/land ownership

• What worked well

• In retrospect, what might we do differently?
Five Themes of US Tenure History

1. Tenure policy emerged from our history as a nation, has evolved over centuries.
2. A public forest system (70 M ha) was formed 100 years ago out of public outrage over land degradation; continues to change due to public demands.
3. Private forests (170 M ha) have produced wealth for the nation & are generally well managed.
4. Rights of indigenous peoples were repeatedly ignored—yet tribal forests today are some of the best managed in the country and are key sources of wealth for tribes.

5. National Forest lands (public forests) management is shifting from an industrial to a community-based model.
Early History
Forest Land in US: 1620, 1850, 1920

Figure 1 Area of virgin forest: top to bottom 1620, 1850, and 1920 as presented by William B. Greeley, "The Relation of Geography to Timber Supply," Economic Geography, vol. 1, pp 1-11 (1925). The depictions of U.S. forests in the later maps may be misleading in that they show only old-growth forest and not total tree cover.
US Westward Expansion
The US Forest Estate Today
Public Forests (US National Forests)

- 192 Million Acres/70 Million Hectares
- Boundaries continually changing; acreage added each year
Private Forests Tenure Experience

- No federal law directs private forest management—that is left to State government—each with their own forest protection laws.
- Private Land owners have immense rights
- Results are overall very positive
  - Wealth was created for private owners and nation: Contribution to GDP: $277/per acre more than public lands ($318 vs $41).*
  - Provided important recreation, wildlife, and watershed resources to the nation.
- Future Challenges: managing whole landscapes
- 2009 Forest2Market, Inc

![Chart showing 66% Private and 34% Public]
American Indian Rights and Tenure

- Treaties signed and promises broken
- *Reservations* created and Indians re-located in 1800’s
- Last 30 years: new assertion of *Customary Rights* for fishing, hunting, small enterprises from/on public lands
- Indian Forest Lands are well-managed and make significant contributions to livelihoods of tribal members, the nation:
  - “Striking a balance between quality wood products and ENVIRONMENTAL PRIDE” (Warm Springs Forest Products Industries)
Historical Approach

- **Large scale**, long-term (30-50 yr) timber concessions
- **Purpose**: timber production
- **Primary product**: commercial timber
- **Who benefits**: highest bidder in timber industry

- **Methods**: Top-down agency prepares and executes

Today’s Approach

- **Small scale**, shorter-term stewardship contracts
- **Purpose**: forest restoration
- **Primary products**: recreation, wildlife, wood for biomass, small diameter wood
- **Who benefits**: communities, tribal groups, new restoration industries.

- **Methods**: collaboration with public.
The Forest Service Today: Ecological Restoration, Thinning, Prescribed Burning
What Worked

Public lands:

• Consistent set of laws and regulations regarding management of public lands across all states
• National Forests lands have been a demonstration for good forestry (may not say this today....)
• Relatively Stable budget
Public lands:

- Allowed for both economic growth (private concessions) and environmental protection
- Recognized that close ties to local communities leads to more economic opportunities
- Provided recreation and solitude for millions of people (respite from a busy society)
- Maintained a strong tie with forest research: management based on best science
What Worked

Private Lands:

• Created economic opportunities and wealth creation for the country
• Engaged the private sector in expansion of the country, by granting private land ownership for transportation (railroads), lands for households (Homestead Act), and mineral development (Mining Law)...all conveyed federal lands to private ownership
What We Would Do Differently....

• On balance, the percentage of public and private land ownership works in the US, each has a different purpose, former benefits ALL people...

• Best indicator of success: stable forest land base for 100 years.
What We Would Do Differently....

• Might have conveyed from the land from Government to Private differently:
• Corruption was intense (*elite* often benefited the most, e.g. railroad and mining companies)
• Pattern of ownership are problematic for large landscape management
• Management by different government agencies/ministries a challenge
American Indians: treaties would have been recognized and promises kept.

Still today there is no political consensus about how the public lands are managed. (Lawsuits, state law challenges to take over federal management, civil unrest/demonstrations like “sage-brush rebellion” and environmental activism)
Thanks very much!

Questions?