

## Conservation Leader Larry Jahn Remembered

**L**aurence R. Jahn, the father of the Water Bank Act and former president of the Wildlife Management Institute, died on August 15 after a long illness. He was 74. For many years his was the voice of reason and good sense in the Washington, DC, natural resources conservation community. At the time of his death, he was head of the National Association of University Fisheries and Wildlife Programs.

He was perhaps best known for his creation of a cost-sharing program for farmers that discouraged the draining of prairie potholes that are critical habitat for migratory waterfowl. *The Outdoor News Bulletin* of the Wildlife Management Institute said of him, "No one could have invested more time, energy and passion than Larry did in the pursuit of sound, scientifically based management of natural resources....He was an inspiration to more than one generation of resource managers." *The Bulletin* called him a conservation hero.

He began his career as a student in Aldo Leopold's department at the University of Wisconsin. He worked at the Wisconsin Conservation Department, and then he went to work with Daniel Poole and C.R. Gutermuth at the Wildlife Management Institute. He became president of the Institute in 1987 and Board Chairman in 1991.



## Defining the Terms of Conservation and Sustainability: The Role of Foresters

*Peter Pinchot*

**T**his year the Society of American Foresters is celebrating its centennial. Looking back, it is clear that the forestry profession played a key role in defining the terms of conservation in the United States, and has made great contributions to improving the protection and sustainable management of forests. Today, we have a much more profound understanding of the many ways in which forests sustain life on this planet, including our own, and the enormity of these issues seems at times to have overwhelmed the forestry profession. In the course of a century, however, the forestry profession has made great strides in both research and forest practices. With due consideration for other sources of experience and expertise in forest science and practice, foresters can still play an essential role in defining the terms of conservation and sustain forest management.

My grandfather, Gifford Pinchot, helped found the Society of American Foresters one hundred years ago, while he was the chief of the Department of the Interior's Forestry Division – the predecessor of the USDA Forest Service. The Pinchot family has not always been a champion of enlightened forest management. In fact, Gifford Pinchot's grandfather, Cyril Pinchot, made his living in the Pocono region of Pennsylvania, by buying up forested tracts, timbering them, and sending the logs down the Delaware River to help build the cities of Philadelphia

and Camden. He was a successful entrepreneur who cashed in on the original oak, chestnut, and pine forests of the region. By the time James Pinchot, Gifford Pinchot's father and Cyril's son, was ready to enter the business world, much of the Pocono region had already been deforested by this kind of exploitative clearing. What remained was poor, stony soil, and a largely treeless landscape unsuited for much beyond subsistence agriculture.

James Pinchot, who made his living in New York as a businessman, returned frequently to his family home in Pennsylvania and observed the esthetic, economic, and ecological consequences of the loss of forests and wildlife. He, along with a number of naturalists, had begun to rethink the human relationship to nature, and to reject the certainty of his father's generation that the forest and land were a commodity to be sold at the highest short-term profit with little thought for the future. In New York James got to know conservationists such as John Muir and Charles Sprague Sargent and learned that the destructive deforestation he had seen first hand in Pennsylvania was also sweeping across much of the nation as the west was being settled.

James had traveled extensively in Europe, and had seen forests that had been managed sustainably for generations. He observed rural communities that coexisted with working forests and reaped continuing economic, ecological, and esthetic benefits from them. It was with this understanding that James encour-

aged his son Gifford to take up a career in forestry and conservation and to travel to Europe to get trained as a professional forester.

When Gifford Pinchot returned after his studies in 1890, the situation he found in American forests was staggering. The closest comparison is the rapid deforestation that is now occurring in the Amazon basin and the rainforests of central Africa. In our modern era we can see satellite imagery showing tremendous blocks of tropical forest being transformed into agriculture and we can view nighttime photographs of forest fires spreading throughout the landscape as colonists desperate for land are pushing farther and farther into the primary forests.

In the late 1800's, American forests, especially the western forests, were in the midst of a similarly rapid and destructive transformation. Railroads had opened the western states to rapid settlement, and settlers were rushing to claim the remaining available lands. Railroad and timber corporations were consolidating tremendous landholdings at the expense of small landholders. Wood was still the primary fuel and building material, and yet timber was being felled with no thought for regenerating new forests. Vast wildfires were common, some burning millions of acres of cutover lands as well as intact forests. This was the first major environmental crisis America had faced.

By 1890, despite a growing awareness of the problem, and several landmark studies of forest conditions, little had been done on the ground to stem the loss of forests. However, there was an emerging consensus among scientists and conservationists that establishing forest

reserves before the remaining land was distributed to settlers and corporations should be the top priority. Gifford Pinchot threw himself into this issue shortly after returning to America. The big question, then as now, was what was the purpose of the forest reserves and how should they be managed. Many naturalists and scientists argued that the reserves should be closed to commercial uses such as timbering. Their primary purpose should be to preserve the forest for the future.

But Gifford Pinchot proposed a very different paradigm of conservation, one based on the sustainable use of natural resources. To Pinchot, foresters could both protect the integrity of a forest reserve and produce a sustainable flow of timber, water, and wildlife for the economic and social benefit of American citizens. In his book *A Primer of Forestry*, he wrote: "The object of practical forestry is precisely to make the forest render its best service to man in such a way as to increase rather than to diminish its usefulness in the future. Under whatever name it may be known, practical forestry means both the use and the preservation of the forest". With only two professionally trained foresters in the nation, Pinchot and Bernhard Fernow, the chief of the Forestry Division in the Department of Agriculture, convincing the nation of the merits of sustainable use of resources was an uphill battle.

Gifford Pinchot, equally comfortable in politics and practical forestry, moved rapidly to the center of the public lands issue. He served on the National Forest Commission, which influenced President Cleveland to more than double the size of the forest reserves. He replaced Fernow as the chief of the

Forestry Division and fought to bring the reserves into the Department of Agriculture where they could be managed scientifically under the principles of sustainable forestry. And eventually he became the first Chief of the Forest Service, and with President Roosevelt, presided over building the National Forest System up to its present size of 191 million acres.

One of the great challenges to bringing sustainable management to the public lands was the dearth of trained foresters in this country. Without foresters, the claim of sustainable management was impossible to realize. Consequently, by 1900 Pinchot and Fernow had established the first major forestry schools at Cornell and Yale to build a cadre of American-trained foresters who could lead the new conservation movement. Also in 1900, Gifford Pinchot joined with six other foresters to create the Society of American Foresters in order to help define the nature of the new forestry profession. In his autobiography, *Breaking New Ground*, Pinchot says: "the purpose of the Society was 'to further the cause of Forestry in America by fostering a spirit of comradeship among foresters; by creating opportunities for a free interchange of views upon Forestry and allied subjects; and by disseminating a knowledge of the purpose and achievements of Forestry.'" He goes on to say: "... the little group of members of the Society was welded together to become the vital core of the Forest Service."

In looking back at this period in which the profession of forestry was established, it is clear that forestry was at the vanguard of conservation. Foresters as the first professionally trained natural resource managers

defined the terms of sustainability. Foresters were ultimately successful in providing a new paradigm of conservation that provided the justification for building one of the largest public land systems in the world. And there is good reason to believe that the culture of who we are as foresters and what we define as our fundamental mission was largely formed in this great battle over the public lands that spawned the Society of American Foresters.

Today as one hundred years ago, we are facing a staggering set of policy issues in managing our forests. A rapid decline in global biodiversity, an urban population that hungers to protect nature while consuming ever-greater amounts of natural resources, an overwhelming array of environmental laws and regulations, and the cry from rural communities for a greater role in governance – the sheer complexity can numb our sense of purpose. As professional foresters it is vitally important that we remind ourselves that, because of the central importance of forests to human society and the ecology of the planet, we still have the capacity to help define the terms of conservation and to set the standard for sustainability.

*Peter Pinchot is Director of the Milford Experimental Forest in Milford, Pennsylvania, and vice chair of the board of directors for the Pinchot Institute for Conservation. This article is based on remarks given at the centennial of the Society of American Foresters in Washington, DC, November 17, 2000*

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