

## Forests and Landscapes: Linking Ecology, Sustainability and Aesthetics

...I believe this book proclaims no less than a second revolution in the way we as a society think about, study, and act upon the aesthetic dimensions of forest landscape management.... *The editors and contributors to this volume have gone far beyond my initial attempts at synthesis and application, and their efforts are evidence that the second revolution is well on its way.*

– Paul Gobster, from the Foreword

The public tends to judge forest management by how it looks on the land. What happens then when forest ecologists and resource managers seek to implement ecosystem management strategies and new forest practices intended to make forestry more sustainable? Will the public like what they see? Will they understand it? Will they accept it? In short, do people prefer sustainable landscapes over less sustainable ones?

As the forestry profession and resource managers in general seek to bring their activities more into line with natural processes, under the influence of scientific, political, and public pressure on a local and global scale, these questions assume major importance. Certification schemes for forestry and land conservation seem to be the current great white hope of the resource industry in securing market share and achieving what has been termed a "social license" to harvest resources. Ecosystem management may sound fine to everyone as an overall strategy, but what if the implementation on the ground fails to measure up to popular expectation? What happens when the public becomes upset at the appearance of a certified sustainable forest?

Current conflicts in places like the Elaho Valley near Vancouver, British Columbia - the scene of blockades, violence, and much controversy over timber harvesting in old growth and second growth forests - will become test cases for these questions. It is, however, already clear that public perception tends to equate visual degradation of landscapes with unsound - and, by implication, unsustainable - management practices. Other relationships between forest ecology, landscape aesthetics, and sustainability are less clear.

One of this book's primary objectives is to make some sense out of these opposing views. In this volume, we begin to map out some of the patterns in the relationships between ecology, sustainability, and aesthetics: in short, **are scenic landscapes ecologically sustainable (and if so, under what circumstances), and are ecologically sustainable landscapes scenic (and if so, under what circumstances)?** Put even more succinctly, **if it looks good, is it good, and if it looks bad, is it bad?**

The authors in this volume present and examine a range of views on the underlying theories, research needs, and practical approaches for managing the combination of ecological and aesthetic values, as well as some of the difficulties of dealing with public knowledge, perceptions and preferences. For instance, should the public be better educated to understand that what looks bad may actually be good? Can a new aesthetic be developed to incorporate our current understandings of sustainability? What are the ethical concerns of seeking to impose a new aesthetic?

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