



LAND STEWARDSHIP ETHICS

FOREST STEWARDSHIP MANAGEMENT NOTE #35

There is no glory in being a land steward. But there is another kind of satisfaction. A grounding that comes from the connection to place and a commitment to protect. Though they do not have a high profile, land stewards are guardians of the future.

- Joan Bird (#1)

WHAT ARE ETHICS?

Ethics are principles or values based on standards of rightness and wrongness (morals). In relation to land management, two types of ethics are particularly important:

1. PROFESSIONAL ETHICS - are principles governing the conduct of the members of a profession. Such rules usually require attention to the good of society as well as to fair business practices. Increasingly, professional ethics in natural resource fields also include some form of land stewardship ethic (see examples below).
2. LAND STEWARDSHIP ETHICS - are principles acknowledging responsibility for maintaining the overall ecological health of the land. The most famous expression of a land ethic is probably that of Aldo Leopold:

"A thing is right only when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability and beauty of the community; and the community includes the soil, water, fauna and flora, as well as the people."

WHY ARE ETHICS IMPORTANT?

1. PROFESSIONAL ETHICS - are an important means of avoiding conflict, innocent or otherwise, between landowners and the people they employ to help them manage their land.
2. LAND STEWARDSHIP ETHICS - are important because they encourage people to carefully consider the effects of their actions on the long-term health of their land, the larger environment, and ultimately their descendants and society at large. Society needs wood. The challenge is to grow wood efficiently, but to do so in such a way that the full array of forest resource values are maintained.

Historically, there have been two mutually exclusive views of human-nature relationships: dominion over the earth, and unity with the earth. Dominion means to dominate, use, and change at will. Unity suggests that human life has no more value than any other part of nature. Stewardship is a philosophy that blends aspects of both views (#2).

Stewardship is "caring for," "caretaking," "taking care of," "nurturing" something that is entrusted to the individual. Land stewardship is seen by many as a responsibility - a moral responsibility (#2). Moral attitudes have many origins, but religion is one of the principal sources. Thus, it is not surprising that the growth of a land stewardship ethic in our society coincides with a strong trend in many religious groups today to integrate theology with environmental issues (#3,5,7).

As a formal expression of the emerging land stewardship ethic, the Forest Stewardship Program (FSP) and the Stewardship Incentive Program (SIP) are designed to consider all resources for both their amenity and commodity values. The stewardship practices supported by these programs are based on a land ethic; a long-term view of the forest community (#4).

HOW CAN ETHICS BE INCORPORATED INTO PRIVATE WOODLAND MANAGEMENT?

Private landowners can promote ethical forest management practices by:

1. Following applicable laws concerning, lakes and streams, wetlands, soil erosion, etc.
2. Hiring practitioners who subscribe to professional codes of ethics (see examples below).
3. Adhering to landowner codes of ethics (see examples below).

EXCERPTS FROM PROFESSIONAL "CODES OF ETHICS"

1. SOCIETY OF AMERICAN FORESTERS (SAF):

Preamble. Stewardship of the land is the cornerstone of the forestry profession... Compliance with these canons demonstrates our respect for the land and our commitment to the wise management of ecosystems...

Canon 1. A member will advocate and practice land management consistent with ecologically sound principles.

2. AMERICAN FOREST AND PAPER ASSOCIATION (AFPA) - Member companies support the following principles:

To practice a land stewardship ethic which integrates the growing, nurturing, and harvesting of trees for useful products with the conservation of soil, air, and water quality, wildlife and fish habitat, and aesthetics.

To manage its forest to maintain and improve their health and productivity.

To promote successful reforestation of forestlands, thus preventing deforestation or the loss of forest productivity.

To manage its forest in biologically, geologically, and historically significant areas in a manner that takes into account their special qualities.

To support research and employ state-of-the-art scientific and silvicultural knowledge to enhance forest resources.

To protect the health and productivity of its forests from wildfire, insects, diseases, and other damaging agents.

To provide a safe, healthy work environment for its employees and continue to improve management of its operations to better protect public health and safety.

To strengthen educational and communication efforts to improve understanding of the wise use of forest resources, and to respond to public concerns.

3. THE DULUTH MANIFESTO (drafted by informal group of forestry leaders, #6):

PREAMBLE. Forests play a vital role in meeting fundamental human needs and in sustaining a healthy environment.

Without healthy, productive forests, the quality of our lives would be poorer and life itself would be in jeopardy.

Forest are places for exercise, reflection, recreation, study, and spiritual renewal...The integrity and stability of human life is dependent on maintaining the integrity and stability of the plants, animals, and other components of forest ecosystems...

PRINCIPLES...Landowner rights must be based on responsible stewardship. At the same time, society must exercise its interests with due respect for landowners' rights... Sustainable development means securing current benefits from forests without compromising their ability to meet the needs of future generations.

EXCERPTS FROM LANDOWNER "CODES OF ETHICS"

1. MICHIGAN FOREST ASSOCIATION (proposed Stewardship Pledge):

Michigan is my home: It is a special place in the land of the Great Lakes where fresh waters lap at the edges of two great peninsulas. I will work to keep the beaches clean and the water pure. Some of the land is used for cities and industry where families live and work. I will help people learn how to keep these uses from damaging the air, water, and ground. Some of the land is used for agriculture, providing food and clothing for us all. I will support the kind of farming that is good for the soil and does not pollute the water. Some of the land is used for forest - a renewable resource - which is home for wildlife, produces wood and fiber for our needs and beauty for all who pass by. I will be considerate of all the values of the forest. I shall strive to live in harmony with my family, my neighbors, and the natural environment which surrounds us. I want to learn how to be a good steward of this land and to insure for future generations that all the benefits I enjoy now will also be theirs, when Michigan is their home.

2. NATIONAL WOODLAND OWNERS ASSOCIATION

As woodland owners we agree to:

1. Follow Best Management Practices when harvesting trees.

2. Show, by deed, a practical concern for other resources, including water, wildlife, soil, and natural beauty.

3. Share our knowledge of good forestry with others.

4. Use only "certified loggers" when available.

5. Open our land to hunting and other uses by the public, either for a fee or at no cost, when it is practical and at our discretion.

6. Manage our forest resource in a way that benefits many people, including that segment of society that makes a living harvesting and making products from trees.

REFERENCES

FSMN #'s refer to other Forest Stewardship Management Notes in this series.

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- #2 Coufal, J.E. and Z.J. Cornett. 1993. The ethics of forest stewardship. Journal of Forestry, April 1993.
- #3 Ebersbach, K. 1994. Faith in action. National Wildlife EnviroAction, June 1994.
- #4 Lacy, S.E. 1991. The Forest Stewardship and Stewardship Incentive Programs: new programs for technical assistance and cost-sharing for private non-industrial forestland. Forest Management Update No. 13. USDA Forest Service, Northeastern Area State and Private Forestry.
- #5 Lerner, S. 1994. The gospel of the green. Audubon, Jan./Feb. 1994.
- #6 Shands, W.E. 1993. The Duluth Manifesto: principles to guide decisions on forests. American Forests, Jul./Aug. 1993.
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