

WALKING THE TALK

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The preception exists that the forest industry in the United States is the antithesis of the green revolution. For instance, I recently saw the results of a poll that listed three forest products companies among the 10 worst polluters in the United States. That's all there was; their names splashed across the TV screen on the early morning news. That very appearance undoubted resulted in lost sales because some viewer would have immediately determined that those organizations, and thus the industry, were irresponsible members of society.

One wonders on what basis the poll was taken and how the results were interpreted. Did someone ride by a pulp mill on a cool morning and see plumes of water vapor emitting from pipes and stacks and mistake the innocuous condensate for "greenhouse gasses"? Or did they find the smell of hydrogen peroxide, an odiferous gas used in the chemical process of pulping, so disagreeable that the "polling team" gave a red mark to the company? Or perhaps it was the harvesting of a stand of timber that the pollster had long held in reverance as his own veiwsed even though the timber was on someone else's property.

I contend that forest industry is the leader in natural resource management and, for that matter, in industrial cleanup of the environment. What other industry has gone from about 25% to 67% in self sufficiency in energy production since the oil embargo of 1974, and what other industry has spent over a billion dollars annually during the last decade in meeting regulatory requirements? But even with that enviable record, the Environmental Protection Agency has determined that more is needed. It is proposing the "Cluster Rule" which purports to integrate EPA's various authorities over air, water and land pollution sources. The philosophy is to combine regulations, as opposed to the piece-meal approach used heretofore. The proposed rules are to be completed by 1996, and be implemented by 1999.

The American Forest & Paper Association estimates the cost of compliance of the "Cluster Rule", over three years, at \$12 billion, with an additional \$600 million annual operating cost. The conclusion by AF & PA and EPA is that some mills will be closed because they can't meet the standards. Even though the forest industry supports the effort to protect the environment and enhance other forest resource values, they are working to identify other, less costly ways to achieve the same results.

As a natural resource manager, forest industry sets the pace. They have surplanted the USDA Forest Service during the last decade because that agency has been beseiged by greivances, court orders and appeals that have greatly hampered their operation. Morale among its employees has suffered, and so has the management, research and extension for which the agency had worldwide recognition. Only now are they charting their path to the future.

Forest industry is also leading the way for the nonindustrial private land owner. Landowner assistance programs which have been continuously supported by organizations such as Westvaco for the last 40 years, are finding a new lease on life. Organizations without a land base, such as Stone Container and Alabama River, have become very aggressive in contracting with farmers and other nonindustrial owners in managing their forest land. This aggressiveness has caused others of the wood products industry to renew their landowner assistance programs. The reason is simple: a large part of the wood for future manufacturing needs will come from non-industry lands.

In the midst of increased production on their own lands and expanded landowner assistance programs, the forest products industry is implementing a set of principles to assure that the land they manage and, to the extend possible, the land from which they buy timber, is managed in a responsible way. The guidelines, developed by AF&PA, are

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entitled "Sustainable Forestry Principles and Implementation Guidelines". They contain principles on reforestation practices, water quality, wildlife, aesthetics, and, among other items, protecting special places. A checks-and-balance system in which the public is involved, will be used to gauge the effectiveness of the program.

In keeping with the theme of this conference, forest industry is beginning to manage the native hardwood resource much more intensively than in the past. Because of the degraded condition of many of the hardwood stands in the Eastern Deciduous Forest, the best regeneration alternative is nearly always to clearcut when timber production is the objective. However, clearcutting can scar the landscape. Being sensitive to the concerns of the public, the industry has decreed that clearcutting will not be the option of choice in environmentally sensitive areas. Such areas include vistas associated with the Southern Appalachians and buffer zones of major bodies of water and recreational areas. The alternatives, even though more costly to apply and being less efficient for timber production, are to use partial-harvest systems such as shelterwood, group selection, patch clearcuts, and leave-tree cuts. Within our Hardwood Research Cooperative at North Carolina State University, the 13 industrial members and 2 state forest services have committed to the installation of 10 such studies, stretching from Virginia to Mississippi, inclusive of West Virginia. The purpose is to compare the regeneration success of a two-stage shelterwood and a leave-tree cut to a clearcut. Some of those same organizations are already applying these alternative regeneration systems to their timber stands that lie in environmental sensitive areas. This commitment to timber production in combination with environmental ethics is here to stay.

The hoped-for result from all of these actions is a list in which none of the forest products companies are among the 10 or even the 100 worst polluters. AF & PA members propose to do this by "walking the talk".