

# WOOD AND FIBER SCIENCE

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## PINCHOT, LEOPOLD, AND THE CELESTINE PROPHECIES

### Where Does Wood and Fiber Science Fit?

When one arrays the philosophical "tilt" of foresters and engineers in a land ethic continuum ranging from the Navajos, John Muir, and Aldo Leopold on the left to Gifford Pinchot and the early colonists on the right, where do they stand? A recent survey (Brown and Harris 1998) indicates that, in general, they stand somewhat to the right of center, while many of those in the disciplines newer to the broad field of forestry, such as natural and social scientists are inclined more to the left of center. Those surveyed were employees of the Forest Service, USDA, a rather far-ranging population of natural resource professionals. The authors conclude that this is not necessarily indicative of stronger short-term trends toward non-commodity values in Forest Service policy, but note that, as more natural and social scientists have joined the Service, its land ethic has changed more to the left. James Redfield, a vigorous advocate of wilderness preservation, in his book *The Celestine Insights* (1997), takes a strong position for non-commodity values of forests. He stands somewhere to the left of Muir.

Wood and fiber science has always been related to forest policy regarding utilization and conservation, especially of the timber resource, and dedicated to the effective use of forest resources for human benefit. I am intrigued, therefore, by the question "Where do we fit?"

Both Pinchot and Leopold had a close tie to wood science. Both worked for conservation and utilization of the forest resource.

Pinchot led federal forestry efforts from 1898 until 1910. He was a strong promoter of scientific forest management and worked with President Theodore Roosevelt in greatly expanding the National Forests. He led in the establishment of the Forest Products Laboratory in Madison, WI, as a means of conserving the nation's forest by "wise use" of the timber resource. When Theodore Roosevelt became President in 1901, Pinchot got into Roosevelt's first message the words:

The fundamental idea of forestry is the perpetuation of forests by use. Forest protection is not an end in itself; it is a means to increase and sustain the resources of our country and the industries which depend on them. (Pinchot 1947).

Leopold is best known for his "land ethic" and for applying ecological principles to wildlife management. His introductory statement in "*A Sand County Almanac*" (1977) is often quoted as a statement of his philosophy:

There are some who can live without wild things and some who cannot. These essays are the delights and dilemmas of one who cannot.

It is less well known that Leopold served as Assistant Director of the Forest Products Laboratory during the late 1920s and formulated the Laboratory's research objectives as (1) increasing the value of forests, (2) increasing the quality of merchantable timber by utilizing waste, and (3) assisting in the development of improved timber utilization on the National Forests (Nelson 1971).

Redfield condemns Forest Service land policy and has developed a popular following for his "World Vision" of a heavenly

world where *"It would be commonly understood that every remaining site of beauty must be saved for the benefit of future generations. Cultivated plant fibers would replace the use of trees for lumber and paper, and the remaining public land would all be protected from exploitation . . ."* (Redfield 1997).

The effort to both use the forest and conserve it, begun in this country in an organized way at the turn of the century, goes on today. The definition of "forest" is broader and the effort is global. Wood and fiber science is a key element in providing the options for both "use and conserve" and its alternatives. We are an essential part of forestry, whether or not we face the issue of the land ethic in our daily work. We serve the key role of bringing to bear on alternative land policy options some of the finest minds in the biological and physical sciences and

engineering. Thus, while we may, and probably do, have individual views on the continuum I mentioned above, or on the Celestine prophecies, our work applies to all of it. We are part of implementation of the land ethic, and of the "World Vision" of natural fibers, because we make those possible.

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