

By Lois Fuller

U.S. Forest Service pays lip service to conservation

IN RECENT YEARS, CONSERVATIONISTS, RECREATIONISTS, ranchers, environmental groups and others have increasingly opposed U.S. Forest Service policies. Although "dispersed clearcutting"—a timber harvesting method in which trees are removed in 20- to 40-acre tracts—is the primary complaint, others include destruction of cultural resources, the mining of old-growth and ancient forests and a lack of concern for biodiversity.

According to Mary Kelly, director of the Western North Carolina Alliance, the Forest Service's own data for North Carolina's Nantahala and Pisgah national forests show that recreation and wildlife provide a much greater benefit to the public than timber cutting and all other resource production. Why then, she wonders, does the current 10-year forest management plan (under appeal since 1986) call for 500 miles of new, gated logging roads and not one new campground facility?

The Forest Service's decisionmakers claim to be caught between environmental interests and those of the timber industry. But, according to Kelly, it is the Forest Service's "commodity resource extraction mentality that overrides everything else the forests are supposed to provide. The public's forests should be more than tree farms, and the public is demanding that they be managed for habitat, for wildlife, for rare and endangered species—for distinctive values that aren't available on private lands."

Current logging practices so consistently conflict with the maintainance of other resources that the Forest Service, which continues to operate at an annual deficit of at least \$1 billion, must constantly battle (and often lose) a barrage of legal suits mainly stemming from erosion and habitat destruction. "There are many documented cases of [the Forest Service] losing legal cases for destroying trout streams and some of the last of the grizzly [bear] habitats, for desecration of scenery, for destroying the ancient forests of the Northwest and for endangering the black bear habitat," says Kelly.

The number of legal appeals and lawsuits has increased drastically since the early '80s, according to the Wilderness Society's Peter Kirby. He estimates that there are now about 1,000 administrative appeals of local and regional decisions concerning road plans and timber sales each year.

Additional legal action against the Forest Service stems from the appeals of forest plans that describe how national lands will be managed for timber, grazing, recreation and resources such as soil, water, fish and wildlife. "When the Forest Service completes them all, there will be about 125 plans for the various forests," says Kirby. "As of now 115 are complete, although they were all to have been completed by about 1985. Of these 115, 110 have been appealed. That gives you a flavor of how dissatisfied citizen's groups are with the Forest Service."

The number of conventional lawsuits—now averaging about 30 per year—also has increased considerably. In the past such courtroom battles were quietly waged by large environmental groups such as the Sierra Club and the Wilderness Society. But now smaller local organizations are stepping up their legal attacks. They are also taking their demands into the streets, the logging headquarters and the offices of Forest Service

superintendents.

The June 22 Fish and Wildlife Service decision to give threatened-species status to the spotted owl has considerably heated the debate between environmentalists and timber-extraction proponents in the Northwest. Loggers and their families have staged several protests alleging that the decision discounts their need to protect jobs and communities, some of which resemble ghost towns already.

The owl—one of 200 species threatened by the demise of the ancient forests—requires large areas of old-growth forest habitat, and the Wildlife Service's decision will theoretically preserve up to half the public and private acreage available in the Northwest for timber extraction. In the wake of the decision, pro-timber activists claimed that as many as 20,000 jobs could be cut during the next 10 years. But environmentalists are standing firm on preserving the forests and don't foresee an actual reduction in logging, since enforcement of such decisions is weak.

While Forest Service administrators claim their logging practices are justified, they also claim to set policies according to public desire. They argue that timber stands in the forests of North Carolina were weakened early in the century by poor forestry practices and that timber grown after the current harvests will be more productive and profitable. They add that today's high costs of logging (which cause timber sales to fall below cost) mainly result from road building to enhance recreational use of the forests.

The goal of clearcutting is twofold: to quickly sell off a large quantity of timber and to replace the mixed forest with even-aged stands of commercially preferred species of trees. Environmentalists say clearcutting increases erosion, degrades water quality, reduces wildlife habitat and leaves an ugly landscape of stumps and ruffled underbrush. They particularly question the wisdom of planting even-aged trees in place of an ecologically diverse range of species and ages.

"The Forest Service has in almost no cases shown that clearcutting is the optimum [logging] method," says Leon Minckler, a 33-year veteran of the Forest Service. "It might be optimum for the logger—it's not optimum for the forest."

Minckler, an environmental forestry consultant, has conducted research that helped citizens in Illinois create a management plan for the Shawnee National Forest based on group selection—cutting only selected trees in a 20- to 40-acre area. This is the only forest in the country where clearcutting has been extensively limited.

Reforming the forests: At the recent fifth annual Forest Reform Network conference in North Carolina, 200 participants with matching litany of complaints determined it was time to attack the U.S. Forest Service in an organized nationwide effort.

Arthur Cooper, head of the Department of Forest Resources at North Carolina State University, reminded the group, representing 18 states, of the great changes already made in the forestry profession in the last

four or five years. He pointed out the profession's increased emphasis on environmental ethics, public education and public concern and maintains that professionals in and outside the Forest Service are learning to consider the forest more as an ecological entity, valuing its amenities outside of the timber industry. "The profession views the challenge from the environmentalists as a very serious challenge and is attempting to respond to it," said Cooper.

But Kelly disagrees. She says the Forest Service tries to pit users and industry against each other, claiming to want to satisfy both. "The Forest Service folks really have been in bed with the industry for at least 20 years," she adds.

Jeff DeBonis, founder of the Association of Forest Service Employees for Environmental Ethics, wants to reform the value system of the Forest Service—to change the agency's goals from the promotion of commodity output to ecologically and economically sustainable methods. In DeBonis' terms, this means shifting the ecological burden of proof from the environmentalists to the Forest Service. (Currently the Forest Service can effectively block proposed restrictions by insisting that environmentalists prove the service's practices to be harmful.)

"If we are to continue developing, harvesting, building roads, mining and grazing on our public lands, this is the bottom line for us: zero tolerance for additional decreases in biodiversity; zero tolerance for additional increases in non-sustainable practices; zero tolerance for additional sedimentation into our watersheds; zero tolerance for additional loss of wildlife and fish habitat. Zero tolerance for additional degradation, period."

Greenbacks for green matter: Randall O'Toole, an economist with Cascade Holistic Economic Consultants in Portland, Ore., says efforts to stop clearcutting and to alter legislation and value systems are treating the symptoms of environmental degradation of public land rather than the cause. "It's like treating a patient suffering from pneumonia with sore-throat medication," says O'Toole. "The cause is a poorly designed budgetary process that rewards managers for losing money on timber sales rather than for emphasizing recreation, wildlife and watersheds." O'Toole likens the economics of the U.S. Forest Service to the "way the Soviet Union runs its whole economy."

O'Toole, who has reviewed and analyzed more than 70 Forest Service plans, estimates his proposals to market the resources of the national forests could save taxpayers \$2.5 billion per year and more than double the Forest Service's budgets for recreation and wildlife. O'Toole would like to see the nation's public lands run like a successful business, whereby managers would be rewarded for a positive income rather than for selling timber at below cost. "By changing the incentives, you change the cause of the problems," he says.

"Tax dollars go to projects of the highest political value," argues O'Toole in his book, *Reforming the Forest Service*. "Since politi-

cians get kudos for saving jobs and since more jobs are currently obtained through low-cost timber sales than through recreation, the timber sales have more political value."

A pro-timber mindset, an obstinate national bureaucracy and a congressional appropriations process well attended by timber-industry lobbyists would all become extinct under O'Toole's plan, as would the cutting of pristine and ancient forests and other degrading practices such as clearcutting—a costly method not affordable without tax subsidies through below-cost timber sales. Following is a summation of O'Toole's proposal:

- End all government subsidies to the timber industry.

- Begin a system of user fees to support forest lands in place of public land tax appropriations. Under such a system, most forests would get more money from recreation than from logging, and users wanting

ENVIRONMENT

to swim, camp, hike, fish and bird would "outbid" timber demand for forest resources. "This way, you get what you pay for, whereas with taxes, someone else gets what you pay for," says O'Toole.

- Since the demands for recreational use would not eliminate the possibility of biodiversity loss, conservation and other groups could purchase conservation easements. These easements, along with a biodiversity tax of up to 10 percent of all fees, would pay scientists and train field personnel in the protection of public lands.

O'Toole estimates his economic solution could cost the nation 40,000 jobs at most—a "drop in the bucket" when measured against the national economy. "If we took some of that \$2.5 billion [saved by ending timber subsidies] and spent it on training, relocating and other compensation, we could spend as much as \$100,000 per job and pay that off in two years." O'Toole prefers this method over increasing tax expenditures for job compensation, a solution suggested by other forest reformers.

One big problem forest reformers face is the jobs-at-any-cost posture of mill owners. Either the timber industrialists are allowed to continue completely unrestricted, say the owners, or they must shut down their operations in whatever national forest they are cutting and great numbers of local people will be out of work.

Brock Evans of the National Audubon Society likens the destruction of the nation's last few acres of ancient forest to blowing up medieval cathedrals. "There are lots of jobs in blowing up cathedrals, and real high-paying jobs, too. Blowing them up takes lots of skilled labor: carting off the stones, selling the lead window panes, the furniture, the statues, the paintings on the wall. Lots of money in all that. And you could blow up Chartres this week, Canterbury next week and Rouen next week and York, and so on. And then you could start on Monticello and Mount Vernon. Blow them up too. Lots of good paying jobs.

"But in the end, guess what folks? We ain't got no more cathedrals, and we ain't got no more jobs."

Lois Fuller is a freelance writer based in North Carolina.

By David Moberg

HERE'S A PROPOSITION THAT NEARLY EVERYONE from left to right endorses: if the U.S. is going to prosper in coming decades, its workers—new and old—must be far better educated.

Beyond that point, unity disappears.

There is a common belief that jobs in the emerging "post-industrial" service economy will demand much more skill and education. And so, the prevailing wisdom goes, because

LABOR

of an impending labor shortage, even currently disadvantaged workers will likely find better jobs. The flip side is that employers worry they'll have to hire more minority or ill-trained workers.

"Workforce 2000," a 1987 study prepared for the U.S. Department of Labor by the Hudson Institute, concluded that 30 percent of the jobs created between 1984 and 2000 would require a college degree, compared to 22 percent of jobs in 1984. The same study also claimed U.S.-born white males would make up only 15 percent of new workers in 2000, compared to 47 percent in 1985.

But in a recent report prepared for the Economic Policy Institute, economist Lawrence Mishel and sociologist Ruy A. Teixeira conclude that the economy itself is not generating a "job-skills explosion," and that even a slowdown in the labor-force growth rate may not create the predicted labor shortage. Many economists argue that if living standards are to rise, the U.S. must pursue an economic strategy that emphasizes skilled, creative labor.

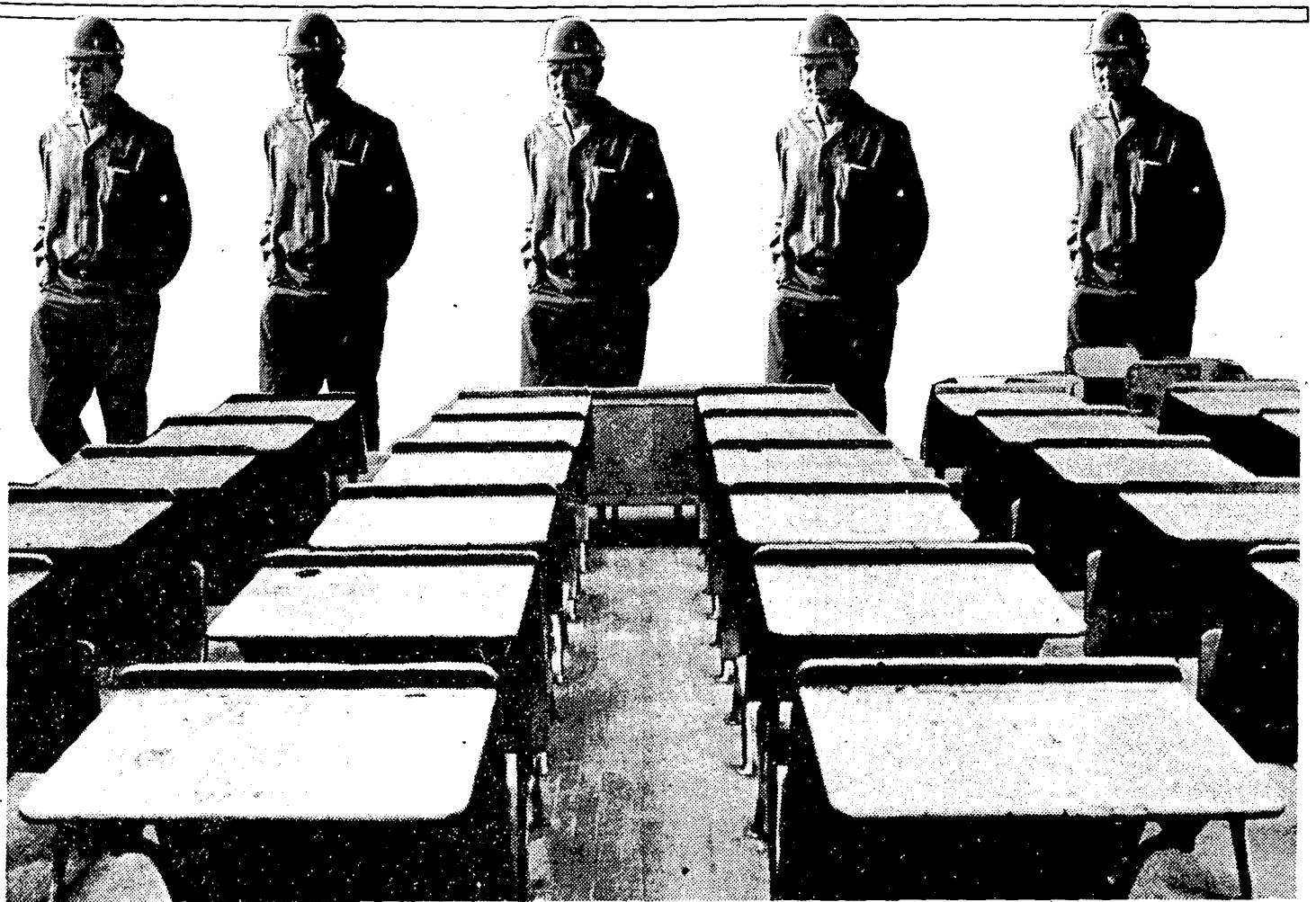
Mishel and Teixeira report that although some of the fastest-growing jobs will require more skill, the overall mix of occupations projected to evolve by 2000 by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics will change little: 10 years from now, workers on average will need only about .04 more years of school. Many workers will also find that although they are more skilled, they will make no measurable wage gains because of rapidly growing lower-wage industries.

Over the college edge: During the past decade the monetary advantage of a college education has grown, fueling the conviction that there's a hot market for scarce, well-educated workers. But Mishel and Teixeira say the rise in the college edge mainly reflects slowing growth in the supply of college graduates and losses to less-educated workers because of shifts to lower-paid industries and a decline of unionization. Also, since the '60s the rate of increase in job complexity has declined sharply, hardly an indication of a looming skills explosion. But there is a rising threshold of basic math and reading requirements for even the low-skill jobs.

Skills often decline even with more complex technology, as Harry Braverman argued in his 1974 classic treatise, *Labor and Monopoly Capital*. Whether skills expand as technology becomes more sophisticated often depends on what strategy management pursues. Management may choose to "deskilling," or simplify, work to minimize both its reliance on workers and their power, or it may choose to train workers to have broader skills (for example, programming computers that run machines). U.S. business, more than its European competitors, has emphasized deskilling.

Citing European experiences with slow labor-force growth yet high joblessness in the '80s, Mishel and Teixeira emphasize that

1990 Terry LaBan



Reading, writing and no economic salvation

slower growth of the labor force will not automatically reduce unemployment in the U.S. In any case, although minorities will constitute a bigger share of the new workforce, they say white non-Hispanic men and women will still comprise two-thirds of the increase in the labor force. There should be plenty of skilled workers, but those who raise their skill levels will probably not raise their wages much, if any.

One implication of Mishel and Teixeira's projections is that even if the country produced many more well-educated workers, it would not reap the potential gains in productivity unless U.S. business changes drastically. Economist Edward Denison concluded that from 1929 to 1982, learning on the job contributed about 55 percent of improvements in the nation's productivity, compared to about 26 percent from pre-employment schooling. Informal job progressions and apprenticeships have since largely disappeared.

Mission unaccomplished: U.S. businesses today provide far less on-the-job training than their Japanese and European competitors, and what training they offer is concentrated on middle management. (In one survey, 60 percent of firms reported courses for managers, but only 18 percent offered anything for non-managers.) About 40 percent of the adult population of Sweden is enrolled in some education or training program, with a result that, a London School of Economics study concluded, Sweden is the most economically adaptable major industrial country and the U.S. the least. Schools in this country are clearly failing their mission: one-fifth of young American adults can't read at even an eighth-grade level. But business is also failing to educate as it should, in part because of its hostility or indifference to workers.

In recent testimony before Congress, the Government Accounting Office concluded

that non-college-educated workers are far worse prepared in the U.S. than in Germany, Japan, Sweden and Britain because U.S. schools, unlike schools in those countries, do not expect a high success rates among their students. In addition, these governments insure that schools and businesses work together to aid the students' transition into the workforce, establish national standards of trade-skill competency (not just course completion), and invest more in post-school training.

But job training in the U.S. lacks more than money. Paul Osterman, a professor at MIT's Sloan School of Management, argued in a

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1988 report written for the Economic Policy Institute that U.S. job training is fragmented and so stigmatized as an extension of welfare that employers discriminate against graduates of many job-training programs. Only a comprehensive training system, perhaps a modification of the famed German system providing three years of formal schooling combined with on-the-job apprenticeship for all non-university youth, could have enough prestige and significance to make employers take it seriously. Expanding and improving job training to cover most young people—not just poor or problem students—would better help those poorest youth succeed in the job market.

In another recent report from the Economic Policy Institute (also published in the current issue of *The American Prospect*), economist Barry Bluestone and his colleagues suggest an Equity Investment in America proposal that would provide up to \$10,000 a year—or \$40,000 over a lifetime—in loans for any post-secondary school education.

Although a boon to college students, who are increasingly hard-pressed to finance university education, Bluestone's plan wisely encompasses any accredited post-secondary education (tougher new standards are needed to prevent currently rampant trade-school ripoffs). Recipients would repay the loans at a rate contingent on their income: those making more would pay back faster, thus giving students more career flexibility.

Bluestone's proposal to finance the plan out of the Social Security surplus is a clever gimmick to make investment in education for future productivity more politically palatable at a time of budget gridlock. But such linkage is a mere accounting device and has one disadvantage: Social Security taxes supporting the plan are more regressive than income taxes.

Food for liberal thought: Behind both Osterman's and Bluestone's proposals lies an increasingly important lesson for liberals: in order to make programs work for the poor, let alone gain political acceptance, it is crucial to make them part of a more universal program that wins broad working- and middle-class support.

There are two caveats worth keeping in mind about these eminently sensible proposals. First, in the country's mad rush to find economic salvation through education, it is important not to forget that schools don't exist just to feed the factory and office maw. They exist also to educate self-governing citizens and well-rounded people, whatever economic stations they may occupy. Second, all the best schooling in the world will go for naught if U.S. business is not reshaped to permit these better-trained workers to flourish and to foster continued expansion of their skills. As so many underemployed and overqualified workers and graduates around the world have learned, training without opportunity means nothing. □