

September 8, 2009

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Chair Blackwell and Members of the Oregon Board of Forestry:

I appreciate the opportunity to offer input on the "Dynamic Forest Ecosystems Project." The effort related to this project has been well managed and the products useful for discussion purposes. Hopefully, resources will continue to be directed toward this effort over the course of the next Forestry Program for Oregon.

The words that we use related to dynamic ecosystems, such as "disturbance," "recovery," and "protection" limits our thinking about dynamic ecosystems. Indeed, some of the basic terms, definitions and concepts as used in the summary paper reinforce old ideas and reflect the value-laden perspective that "disturbance" to systems is disruptive. For example, the definition of "disturbance" used in the paper (White and Pickett 1985) is "any relatively discrete event that disrupts ecosystem, community or population structure and changes resources, substrate availability, or the physical environment." At this point in time I would argue that the definition needs to reflect upon a new paradigm that in many cases dynamic process events (rather than disturbance) do not disrupt, but rather sustain some and indeed maintain many ecosystems and/or their components.

Similarly, the summary paper continues the belief that "change in forests is typically episodic, with periods of accumulation of 'natural capital' (i.e., biomass, physical structure, nutrients) punctuated by abrupt release of this material and reorganization of the system into a state poised for future change." This belief reflects some dynamic ecosystem processes particularly in wet forests. However, I argue that in many forests change is often frequent and thus, prevents the accumulation of "natural capital" and limits the probability of system reorganization. Furthermore, forest are always in a state poised for future change, thus this concept as described in the summary paper reinforces the belief that change is periodic rather than constant.

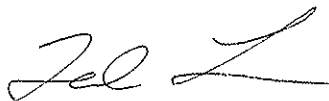
For example, two weeks ago I was hiking near Glacier Peak in Washington State. This is steep rugged glaciated mountainous terrain. The steepest slopes are striped by snow avalanche chutes. Frequent avalanches on some sites "sustain" a brush reproduction community that greatly increases the heterogeneity of the forest.

Conceptually we need to develop words that describe these processes so that the notion that “the disturbance is the recovery” is on equal footing with “recovery follows the disturbance.”

Caution needs to be used when any paper uses statements of opinion as “facts” or “shoulds.” For example, where this is done it would add value to offer the range of beliefs or other options suggested by other scientists. There are a range of other technical matters that need further work. For example, fire management needs to be framed in terms of both risk and hazard management. The distinction is important.

Despite these basic concerns, I believe the project and papers offer a strong starting point for further discussion. What is needed now is to bring a broader range of academic perspectives and expertise to bear on this topic. Hopefully this project can be used to bridge the divisive gaps among the scientists at OSU and elsewhere that seems to be creating “camps” of dissimilar opinions rather than an academic community where diverse opinions can add value to decision making.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ted L", written in a cursive style.

Ted Lorenson