Leadership 101

This issue includes stories on a course focused on conflict management and leadership as well as various faculty and student interests. Both are fundamental to student success and progress. Faculty interest in turn can inspire student interest. Leadership itself is more complicated. It is highly valued, yet in short supply. There are natural leaders, however, there are many who can be taught to develop these essential skills. That is evident by the large number of our alumni who lead companies and natural resources agencies and programs.

I have been particularly impressed by the effectiveness of direct and sometimes subtle efforts to develop leadership in our curriculum. For most students, leadership starts out as a word. Then they see examples of leadership, examine the issues, and learn the key elements of leadership. Eventually, though they may not realize it, they have equipped and readied themselves to lead. In practice, that often means stepping forward when there is a need or opportunity to make a difference. A number of students noted in this issue are on that path—you can often tell that from group classroom and field projects and from their efforts in student organizations.

Why do we dwell on leadership in our instruction? Many of the most challenging problems seem to arise at the interface of natural resources and society. With a growing population that is increasingly distant from natural resources, learning to lead is crucial to avoiding gridlock. So while we are training students to be exceptional professionals technically, we are also trying to prepare them to lead in their first year on the job and throughout their career.

Alan Ek, Professor & Head, Forest Resources

Taking the Lead

After taking courses in biology, chemistry, dendrology, math, and ecology, students in both our Forest Resources and our Recreation Resource Management majors are challenged with a course of a different sort. The course is ESPM 3202: Environmental Conflict Management, Leadership, and Planning taught by Professor Kristen Nelson. While the main components of the course are conflict management and collaboration as related to environmental work, leadership is an important topic weaved throughout. The students experience it, read about it, discuss it, and analyze their own capacity for it.

The course includes multiple exercises where students go through simulations and role playing activities. Each class experiences these exercises in a unique way depending on the personalities present and the independent choices the players make. Leadership has not been formally discussed in the course yet, but students begin to see different ways leadership can happen. “They are experiencing and observing opportunities and how things escalate, how they get deescalated, privileging certain types of things, and how to make choices,” says Professor Nelson.

CONTINUED INSIDE
Studying the Family Forest Landowner

There are tens of thousands of family forest landowners in Minnesota, and they are as diverse as the forest land they own. These individuals, families, siblings or extended family members come to own their land by many different means and have many different uses and wants for their land. Family forest landowners, their attitudes, their behaviors, and the values they place on their forests have been a research focus of Professor Mike Kilgore since he began research here at the University of Minnesota.

As a graduate student, Kilgore first conducted a study in Minnesota looking at three types of forest tax policy and the effects of each on landowner behavior. That was the first of over thirty studies he has, so far, been a part of on the topic of family forest owners. "That study really sparked an interest," says Kilgore. "In many parts of the country they own more than half of all forest land. They're an important and a very diffuse land base."

The core of Professor Kilgore's research on family forest landowners has been trying to provide a better sense of what motivates them to be good stewards of the land. His studies ask questions such as why they own the land, what they use the land for, what they value the land for, what programs could encourage certain behaviors, what restraints are there, and how effective specific programs are at changing landowner behavior.

The studies have covered tax policy, financial and technical assistance programs, certification programs, regulatory programs, along with the value of forests goods and services. Kilgore is often focused on Minnesota issues, but he also conducts studies at the regional, national, and international level. "You see similar landowner concerns and challenges anywhere you look," he says. One recent study asked how best to create a forest certification program geared toward the family forest landowner, so Kilgore and his colleagues looked at successful programs elsewhere, including Finland, Sweden, Norway, Germany, and France, for lessons and examples.

Professor Kilgore’s studies cover many areas of land ownership. He says, "For every study there is always a surprising find, but there are also a number of themes that recur mostly across the studies." One common theme is that family landowners, by and large, own their land for things other than timber. They may have purchased the land for recreation, often for hunting, or as a place to escape from an increasingly urbanized life. They may have inherited the land and plan to pass it on to their own children. "The landowner today generally doesn’t own it for timber, but at the same time, we know that many harvest timber regularly."

Landowners who don’t buy the land with intent to harvest timber often hear about it as an opportunity through contact with a neighbor or a forester and become interested. "They realize that it can improve what they’re looking for out of their land, which is typically habitat, and also generate substantial income," notes Kilgore. During the many focus groups that Kilgore has conducted for his studies, he sees landowners sharing information and learning from each other as they sit around the table. "They learn about a program, a management technique, or some aspect of ownership and management they weren’t aware of. That is a real value of participating in these meetings."

While many of landowners do harvest timber on their land, another common theme found in the studies is that few of them have a management plan. Kilgore says, "We know from our research that the number one thing landowners want is assistance on the ground to give them advice on how to manage their land. They understand their land very well. They can tell you where the stands of timber are, the quality of the stands, the type of habitat, where the wet spots are, or where a great place would be to go skiing or put a trail through. What they generally don’t have is the expertise on how to manage the land to get whatever it is they want out of it."

Since Kilgore has been studying family forest landowners, he has reaffirmed many of these common themes. He has also noticed changes over time in these family forests. For one, landowners today are more in tune with the range of values, goods, and services their forest can provide. "They also have better guidance in terms of guidelines and best management practices," Kilgore says. "Landowners are clearly more aware of those types of practices than they were when I started doing research."

For all the commonalities shown in his studies, Kilgore comments that family forest landowners are a large and diverse population. Each plays a unique role as owner of their land. "They all don’t act alike, and we don’t want them all to act alike, but we’re trying to give a better sense of what does motivate them to be good stewards," he says.

Over the years Professor Kilgore’s studies have influenced policy and programs in Minnesota and across the country. He will continue to delve into research that provides information and tools to help policy makers and landowners alike achieve the desired outcomes for their land. The landscape of the forest and of forest ownership is always changing, opening opportunities for new questions and research. ■
The course includes a major role play component where students are put into a negotiation scenario either based on northern Minnesota sulfide mining or salmon recovery efforts in the northwest U.S. Students are given roles to play covering the various organizations, towns, and individuals involved in debate. While leadership still has not been formally discussed, this activity provides many opportunities for students to lead. “There is demand for multiple kinds of leadership interacting with each other,” Nelson says. “They’ve got different actors and different leaders who are leading from behind, rescuing situations, as well as official leadership positions.”

For Paul Swanson, a senior majoring in Forest Resources who took the class last spring, this was his favorite part of the course. “It’s a real issue that’s going on, so I thought that was really cool,” he says. “These organizations were actually doing the same kinds of things.”

With these experiences to build from, Nelson brings the students into a two-week session on the topic of leadership. Now, when they are reading literature or discussing leadership, they are able to refer back to their shared experiences in the class negotiations or other exercises. She says, “It is similar to what I used to do with a nongovernmental organization or a government agency where they are doing more directed training on the concept of leadership.”

During this session, students reflect on what makes an ideal leader, what challenges the members of class faced in leadership situation, what strengths they demonstrated, as well as what are likely common leadership challenges. They also write a personal contract describing actions they will take within the next two years, a realistic timeframe, to enhance their capacity to be a leader.

Nelson prefers this workshop style because it brings more relevance to the students’ personal experiences. Each member of the class brings a unique perspective. Some have never explored the idea of leadership while some have come back to school with professional experience under their belt. Some students are taking the class as part of minor in Leadership while others are international students who bring a unique cultural interpretation of what a leader is. Nelson says, “I use that richness, and I pull from both our common experience but also from their unique experiences.”

All this begs the question; can leadership be taught? “Yes, definitely,” says Professor Nelson. “I think everyone has leadership capacity, and I think you can mentor it.” She also noted there are times when she has to help students relinquish the leadership role. “I actually like helping somebody not accept that role. Let someone else take that role. It can be a real challenge for that person.”

During his time in class, Paul Swanson learned new leadership techniques and how to apply them. “Everyone has the ability. You just have to know how to apply yourself,” he says. “If you are in a leadership position, do what you can do best. It’s important for everyone.”

Swanson notes that natural resource professionals in particular should display leadership qualities. For one, it is important to help the public understand why certain management techniques are being used or certain policies are in place. “Also, it’s important because natural resources is changing a lot right now. There is a big transition from what used to be to what is going to be,” he says. “We need people to be able to adapt and take up those leadership positions.”

Leadership comes to everyone in a different way in different times. What Professor Nelson hopes is that students are able to see a capacity for leadership in themselves and to see what strengths they may have. She says, “It’s very rewarding to see the light bulb goes on and see somebody suddenly realize they can do this. That this is something they are perhaps good at and can gain satisfaction in.”

What sparks your interest?

Our faculty work on a range of topics while teaching, doing research, and providing outreach to Minnesota communities. Of the many topics they are interested in, we wanted to know what they enjoy digging in to right now. Here are some of their perspectives:

**Dr. Rebecca Montgomery, Associate Professor**

Where do I start? Right now, in terms of research, I am really excited about what cues plants to leaf out in the spring, to flower, to start their leaves changing color, and then to drop their leaves. We often think, oh well it gets warm in the spring and then plants leaf out. They get warm, they start growing. It turns out it’s a lot more complicated.

I’ve been delving into all the literature, information, and research on that topic. I’ve also realized that we have a general understanding of it but for any specific species we know practically nothing. Given that, I’m interested in thinking about future climate changes in this area and knowing that temperature, both cold and warm, are really important. Getting a better understanding of individual species and what cues they use to sense the environment and its changes with the seasons is really important.

With this, I became interested in phenology, this timing of biological events, doing a project in the Smokey Mountains on what role early leafing in the spring played for small seedlings and saplings of trees. Most of the summer they are shaded in the canopy, and they are in this dark environment. But in the spring, seedlings and saplings tend to leaf out before the canopy, and so we were interested in how important is that spring window of high light? I basically followed 20 different species through several springs of leafing out. Just following them, every two days going back to the same individuals over and over, and seeing how they were changing was such a neat experience and gave me a much different view of the forest. I gained this intimate view of what’s changing through time, not just the buds that I was watching but everything, all the plants and animal activity.

With climate change it seems like this is an aspect of the plant’s biology that’s likely to be really sensitive and to respond right away. Given that it determines the length of the growing season, it could also be really important in terms of the biological consequences.
Student Spotlight: Matt Suzukida

Not many students are lucky enough to find their major on first try as a freshman, but Matt Suzukida, now a senior in Forest Resources, was one of those lucky few. While searching careers that allowed him to work outside, he discovered forestry and decided to give it a try. “I heard the University of Minnesota has a really good forestry program, so combined with that and instate tuition the University was an easy choice.

Matt’s first year started well, and he enjoyed the coursework right away. He was interested to learn the science behind many logging practices that are often misunderstood by the public, giving logging a bad name. “I liked learning about the balance between using natural resources but using them responsibly,” Matt says. “Also, silviculture was really interesting to me. I like learning about the different practices for different species of trees and regeneration techniques.”

Beyond the classroom, Matt has been serving as the president of the Forestry Club for the last year and a half. “It’s a lot of extra work, but it’s rewarding and fun, too,” he says. “I didn’t quite know what all went into it, and now I see more of the administrative side. I fill out lots of forms for the University, but I think it’s been a great experience.”

So far, Matt’s favorite presidential responsibility has been running the holiday tree sale. Each year the club manages this sale start to finish, from tree selection, cutting, and baling to the final sale. They sell one-thousand trees and proceeds go toward scholarship support for members based on their hours of work. A lot of the decisions for the sale fall to Matt, but he enjoys the work and time spent with the other students.

Taking the good advice he received as a freshman, Matt has had an internship every summer since his freshmen year. The first year he was a tree inspector with the City of Saint Paul looking for Dutch elm disease. The second summer, working for the University’s Department of Soil, Water, and Climate, he completed a forest and soil inventory on plots throughout Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Michigan. This past summer Matt worked on a wildland firefighting crew with the U.S. Forest Service in the Superior National Forest and had the opportunity to go out on two assignments to Missouri and Montana.

Matt enjoyed the variety of work he was able to do, and when he graduates he hopes to find a position that allows him to continue experiencing multiple aspects of forestry. Writing management plans was one of his favorite activities during coursework, so he would enjoy a position that involved that. “I’m keeping an open mind about opportunities,” he says.

Dr. Charles Blinn, Professor

In collaboration with the Minnesota Forest Industries (MFI) and the Minnesota Logger Education Program (MLEP), we conducted a survey to assess the status of Minnesota’s logging businesses in 2011. We looked at factors such as volume produced, stumpage sources, season of operation, equipment, future plans for the business as well as issues facing the business. The study was conducted due to a growing concern about the health of the logging sector with the closure of mills in Minnesota. We’re trying to get ahead on the issue so decision makers better understand what is happening and can make more informed decisions to maintain logging’s viability.

What is different about this survey is that the industry wanted to better understand the current capacity within the logging sector. Given the concern, it was easy to form the partnerships to make this happen. Our results are currently helping forest products companies, management agencies, legislators, and others better prepare for the future to sustain our forests and forest products companies in Minnesota through a healthy, viable logging sector.

Dr. Eli Sagor, Extension Specialist

I’m really interested in how the University can help Minnesota’s couple hundred-thousand landowners take care of their lands, whatever they want to manage it for. The University land grant system is here to help people do what they want to do and be more successful at it.

I’m excited about figuring out new ways to reach people and get them research-based information they can apply and put to work on their lands. It’s really a combination of one foot in the academic environment and another foot out dealing with real people who are trying to solve every day problems. I love coming in with one perspective that I feel is well informed by research and more formal knowledge systems. Then I go out and talk to people who have been doing this for 40 years and have, in some cases, ideas and practices that are consistent or, in other cases, very different from what we might have found in research.

It’s not always that somebody is right and somebody is wrong, and I find that fascinating. I love learning how people do things and why they do them that way. I love, when I can, bringing out information to help people find new ways of doing things that might work better.
We asked our students to share their favorite events and activities from this fall. Here is the word on campus from their perspective:

The Society of American Foresters (SAF) convention in Spokane, WA was a big part of our fall. We were able to meet employers, attend seminars, talk with alumni, and of course compete in the Quiz Bowl where we took third place. We are currently underway with the holiday tree sale and are excited for an action-packed spring with conclave, Forester’s Day, and a variety of SAF - UMN Student Chapter sponsored activities.

- Sawyer Scherer, Forest Resources junior, SAF chapter president

This year has included some of the most fun and exciting times I’ve had since coming to college. My favorite part was attending the Introductory Field Session in Cloquet. I developed more in my education in one month than I could have imagined, made many new friends, and developed closer relationships with old friends and professors. The field experience gained was some of the most valuable education I have received, and I can’t wait to go back next May.

- Dave Rudolph, Forest Resources junior

I have been working on my application to the Natural Resources Science and Management graduate program, and I decided to get my essays reviewed by CFANS Career and Internship Services. Maggie Kubak was ten times more helpful than I ever thought would be possible. After her help, I felt my essays were a very strong part of my application.

- Alex Schlueter, Recreation Resource Management senior

My favorite part of fall semester would be working at the holiday tree sale. Everyone is always in a good mood, and it’s awesome to see all of the families excited for the holidays. So far we are selling out pretty quickly. This year we went to Carl Vogt’s tree farm every weekend in November and worked with him to harvest the trees for our lot.

- Lauren Stufft, Urban & Community Forestry sophomore

In my orientation class this fall, I enjoyed meeting the professors and interacting with them as well as fellow students, both in the Recreation Resource Management and Forest Resources majors. It has been fun and all involved make you feel right at home. I also enjoyed a visit to the Cloquet Forestry Center with class. On the way home, we stopped at Moose Lake State Park and conducted a campsite survey to gain experience and perspective on RRM fieldwork. It was really exciting to be out in the field and doing something major related.

- Caleb Johnson, Recreation Resource Management sophomore

This September, the Department of Forest Resources and the Recreation Resource Management Club partnered to participate in a fun and unique event called PARK(ing) Day. PARK(ing) Day was started in 2005 by an art and design studio in San Francisco when they converted a single metered parking space into a temporary public park in downtown. Since then, it has expanded across the globe with organizations and individuals joining in and creating their own parks for a day.

PARK(ing) Day parks vary from simply a bench with potted greenery to elaborate temporary theaters. The hope of these parks is to raise awareness of urban open space, generate conversations on how public space is used, and improve the quality of urban human habitat.

The Department and Club created two unique parks on St. Paul campus. At both sites fake turf covered the asphalt, trees provided greenery, and people were welcomed in. One park offered chairs, hula-hoops, and reading materials for passersby to enjoy at their leisure. The second park included a tent, camping chairs, rotating informational displays, as well as a small tree for participants to share their thoughts on forests, parks, and urban greenspace.

The parks received a lot of confused looks, but once they were over their surprise, many people stopped to ask questions and enjoy the spaces. One group even picniced in the park.

Many thanks to Chad Giblin, Zach Jorgensen, Brett Stadsvold, Gary Johnson, and Ingrid Schneider for their help in making PARK(ing) Day a success.

Visit parkingday.org to learn more or to see photos of other projects.
SAVE THE DATE!

Mark your calendars for next September (talk about planning ahead!) to join us for the Cloquet Alumni and Friends Day on September 7th, 2013. All are welcome to come to the Cloquet Forestry Center and learn about Minnesota’s oldest research and education forest. Enjoy tours, talks, and a barbecue dinner and social.

Plus! A special note for graduates of 1962, 1963, and 1964: in addition to the Alumni and Friends day, you are invited to a combined 50-year class reunion! First, join your classmates in the Twin Cities on Friday, September 6th, 2013. The day will include a morning coffee and conversation, a tour of St. Paul campus, and a class luncheon. Then, everyone is invited to join the fun at the Cloquet Forestry Center for the Alumni and Friends Day. Lodging is available for both Friday and Saturday nights at the Cloquet Forestry Center or nearby.

Class of 1962 contact: Larry Revier at 218-204-1140 or rev@arvig.net
Class of 1963 contact: Darrel Kenops at 208-884-1076 or dkenops@msn.com
Class of 1964 contact: Alan Ek at 612-624-3400 or aek@umn.edu

More details to come for both events!