Forest Resource Policy and Administration:  
A Teaching Challenge in  
University Professional Forestry Schools

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FOREST RESOURCE POLICY AND ADMINISTRATION:  
A TEACHING CHALLENGE IN UNIVERSITY PROFESSIONAL FORESTRY SCHOOLS

Paul V. Ellefson ²

Forest resource policy is a subject area embraced by nearly all curriculum offered by university-level forestry schools throughout the world. Such is candid acknowledgment that most forestry graduates eventually practice their technical forestry training within the context of the often subjective and whimsical environment of politics and administration. Whether current approaches to the teaching of forest policy are based on concepts and principles that will enable graduates of professional forestry schools to sympathize with and (as necessary) to become effectively involved in such settings is debatable. Given such uncertainty, and acknowledging the importance of politics and administration to sustaining high levels of forestry benefits throughout the world, there exists ample reason to reflect on the many approaches that are currently being used to guide professional instruction in forest resource policy at university schools of forestry.

The variety of contemporary approaches used to teach forest resource policy reflects the experimental nature with which university instructors have approached the subject. To presume

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there is a widely acknowledged and commonly used conceptual foundation for teaching the subject would be most inappropriate. Commonly used approaches include:

* **historical**: identification and comparison of well-defined chronologies of major policy-type events in forestry.

* **analytical**: rigorous application of quantitative techniques to specific forestry issues and the options suggested for addressing them.

* **issue**: careful investigation of facts and circumstances surrounding a particular forest resource issue.

* **comparative**: comparison of policies, programs and administrative structures in different countries or in different units of government within a country.

* **case study**: identification of events and forces that shape the character of a forest resource issue.

Although university-level courses in forest policy utilize facets of each approach, most forest policy courses tend to be dominated by a single method or style. To be described later, very few forest policy courses approach instruction with a focus on attaining student understanding of the process by which policies are developed, of the organizations that participate in the process, and of the policies and programs that result from interactions between participants and the policy process.

**Objectives and Purposes of Policy Instruction**

The offering of university level instruction in forest policy presumes there is a purpose for doing so. Foremost is interest in cultivating student understanding of forestry's place among broader
societal interests and the political and institutional circumstances that enable forest resources to contribute to the realization of such interests. Among the more focused objectives to be sought with forest policy instruction are:

* Develop student appreciation of the political and administrative environments which influence the development of forest policies and programs, especially the uncertainties and complexities that are often associated with such environments.

* Develop student understanding of policy development and implementation as a sequence of political events that are logically interconnected, although not firmly identified with any one institution or organization -- the policy process.

* Develop student understanding of decision processes that take place in each of the events that make up the policy process, especially the concepts and rules that are commonly involved in policy selection.

* Develop student understanding of the organizations (and the individuals therein) that actively participate in the policy process, including factors that constrain the ability of such organizations to effectively engage in policy development.

* Develop student understanding of the professional resource managers' role in policy development and the ethical and moral standards that influence the nature of that role.

* Develop student familiarity with major categories of forest resource policies and programs that often result when individuals and organizations become involved in the policy process.

* Develop student ability to clearly define and critically examine policy responses to forest resource issues (including the organizations involved therein) and to communicate the results of such examinations in manners that are forthright and understandable.

**Process, Participants and Programs as an Instructional Framework**

In recent years, public policy instructors in schools of government and public affairs at major universities have begun to critically assess the manner in which public policy is taught. In large measure, their
appraisals have concluded that the teaching of public policy has focused excessively on policy analysis techniques and on the substance of contemporary issues that are being processed by government; limited attention has been devoted to developing student understanding of policy development as a process and the role that various individuals and organizations play in such a process. Critically argued is that students acquire analytical skills that are applied to current issues without their appreciating how such issues are brought to and ultimately processed by government. The appraisals also suggest that current approaches to the teaching of policy fail to instill in students an awareness of the truly political nature of policy development, especially its incremental nature, widespread use of bargaining and negotiation, and use of non-economic decision rules for policy selection (deLeon 1988, Coplin 1978, Sahr 1982, Sedjo 1984).

Responding to critical appraisals of policy instruction, educators have reviewed a number of policy development models as potential focal points for the teaching of public policy. In some quarters, suggestions have been made that public policies be viewed as the result of democratic processes, wherein citizens are considered politically equal; information about forest policies is fully available to all; citizens act on their preferences for forest policies; majority rule prevails in the selection process; and the policy preferences of citizens is highly correlated with the actions of their representatives in government. In such a context, forest policies are viewed as being proposed by citizens to elected representatives who in turn give legitimacy to the suggested policy or program. Once so acted on, bureaucracies are viewed as the means by which
the will of representatives is carried out. When legitimized policies are found to require interpretation as to content and intent, judicial systems are asked to enter the policy-development scene.

An alternative to political democracy as a means of structuring the teaching of public policy is group competition. Involved is the notion that political processes leading to the selection of forest policies do not involve individuals, rather they involve organized groups of individuals, namely, interest groups. The latter are viewed as organized groups of people with common interests (persons interested in recreational use of forests, persons interested in water flowing from forested areas). Members of interest groups share common public policy objectives and generally agree on the means of achieving such objectives. Public forest policies are viewed as the result of political struggles between groups. Which forest resource policy ultimately prevails depends on the relative power and influence of each group and their ability to press claims for their interests (usually at the expense of competing groups). The role of government becomes that of ratifying forest policies (possibly enacting laws) that result from the political equilibrium that eventually results from struggles between groups. The influence of any one interest group is controlled by the countervailing power of other groups.

Powerful elites is yet another model around which the teaching of public policy can be focused. Suggested is that all political institutions of society are dominated by small groups of skillful individuals (agency heads, interest group leaders, executives in private sector) that know how to manipulate instruments of power in order to secure forest policies favorable to their interests. They are presumed to have the means for
gaining control over avenues of power in government (wealth, prestige, knowledge) and the motivation for doing so (ideological commitment, interest in wealth and power). From an elitist perspective, the role of individuals in forest policy development is not denied; they are simply presumed as not wishing to exercise leadership skills. They are judged as wanting to be left alone, delegating to others the responsibility for selecting forest and related policies that affect their lives.

The most recently suggested approach to teaching public policy is to view policies as the result of a sequence of logically, inter-connected activities which in total constitute a process -- the policy process. Involved is a focus on political events of the following nature: agenda setting, formulation, selection, legitimizing, implementing, evaluation, and termination. Although each event involves a highly complex set of political activities in its own right, such events are viewed as important ingredients of the broader policy process which they create. The policy process becomes especially meaningful to students when combined with an understanding of policy participants and the policies and programs which result when participants activate the policy process. General university-level textbooks organized around such an approach have become commonly available in recent years (for example Brewer and deLeon 1983, Hogwood and Gunn 1986, Jones 1984) as have a modest number of textbooks focused on environmental policy making (for example Buck 1991; Henning and Managun 1989; Meier 1991; Porter and Brown 1991). A forest resources policy text based on the approach is also available (Ellefson 1992).
Critical Ingredients of Policy Instruction

University-based instruction in forest policy subject material will often encompass a variety of ideologies, concepts and contemporary examples. The specifics of course content will generally depend on the experience and inclination of course instructors and on the type of policy training particular countries and employers wish their professionals to have. To effectively appreciate policy development, however, students should be exposed at a minimum to the language of policy sciences, the process by which government processes issues and responds with policies, the nature of participants in the policy development process, the range of policies and programs society currently implements, the type of information demanded by the policy process, and the ethical and moral standards which those involved in policy development are commonly urged to comply with.

Definitions and Character of Policies. Student understanding of forest resource policies and their development implies an ability to recognize concepts and principles that are associated with various terms and phrases, and to be appreciative of certain policy and policy development characteristics that may be fundamentally troubling or uncomfortable to students. Regarding the former, clear and meaningful definitions should be provided to students, especially definitions for terms such as "policy," "lobbying," "power," "advocacy," "compromise," "regulation," "bargaining," and "planning." To complement definitional clarity, terms should be presented in an applied fashion and should be linked to concrete examples; abstract definitions void of illustrations are of little value to student understanding of policy and program development. As for policy characteristics that may discourage student interest in
learning about policy sciences, there are many. For example, persons engaged in policy development often find agreement on concise statements of policy to be a very difficult, thus policies are usually described by vague and unclear terms and phrases; participants in political systems are often fearful of policy suggestions that are untried and large in scale, thus policy changes are usually modest and incremental in nature; and moral and physical standards available for guiding choice are many in number, thus policy selection denies the making of choices with single and very simplistic rules. Receptivity to policy-type subjects can be facilitated by alerting students to policy characteristics of this nature in the early stages of a forest policy course.

Conceptual Framework for Policy Development. Student understanding of policy development and implementation should rest on a logical and internally consistent framework, preferably one oriented around the process by which policies are developed and implemented. Although the terminology used to describe the policy process varies considerably, it is generally acknowledged as including the following events (Figure 1) (Brewer and deLeon 1983, Ellefson 1992):

- **agenda-setting**: getting government to acknowledge a forest resource problem or issue. May result from the actions of powerful political figures or from a well-orchestrated set of citizen strategies and tactics fashioned so as to secure government recognition of an issue.

- **formulation**: creative design of a suitable policy response to a forest resource issue that has attained government agenda status. Involves the generation of creative and imaginative ideas by communities of formulators located in public and private organizations.

- **selection**: choosing from among the many (or few) forest policy options that have been formulated. May result from various processes, including rational comprehensive, rational incremental, mixed-scanning, and organized anarchy. Involves
bargaining and the use of multiple decision rules.

* legitimizing: giving selected forest policies some official status; for example, embellishing them in a statute, a judicial ruling, or an administrative regulation. Requires acknowledgement of political feasibility and the development of strategies needed to overcome political obstacles.

* implementation: translating a legitimized forest policy into an operational program or project. Involves interpretation of broad statements of policy, designation of agencies or departments to carry out programs and projects, and the actual delivery of goods and services called for by a forest policy.

* evaluation: determining if implemented forest policies and programs are accomplishing agreed to goals and targets in acceptable manners. Involves selection of programs to be evaluated, measurement and analysis of program outcomes, and judgements and subsequent recommendations for evaluated programs.

* termination: deliberate conclusion or cessation of a forest policy, program or an organization. Often results from judgements and recommendations made during evaluation. May occur after a policy's objectives have been successfully accomplished.

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**Figure 1. Policy Development and Implementation, by Policy Event and Policy Product.**
As a teaching framework, the policy process (so defined) enables students to approach the subject of public policy with less apprehension. They are able to adhere to a framework that is conceptually sound and that depicts the manner in which forest resource policies are actually developed and implemented. In addition, the policy process approach persuades students to avoid the danger of focusing their energies on a single policy event (such as implementation or evaluation) in the expectation that doing so will result in socially desirable forest policies. The student is encouraged to appreciate that successful policy development requires effective operation of all events in the policy process. Similarly, viewing policy development as a generic process, students are encouraged to avoid the notion that policy development is the responsibility of a single institution (such as a bureaucracy or a legislature). Knowledge of the process and its character can be transferred to literally any institution that becomes engaged in the process. When the policy process is flavored with substantive material about specific forest resource issues, students are provided with an opportunity to understand how process and issue content interact to make for a successful (or unsuccessful) forest resource policy.

Character and Types of Participants. Student understanding of the policy process is of limited value if the individuals and organizations that activity participate in the process are ignored. In large measure, the efficiency of the policy process (and the effectiveness of the resulting forest policies) is dependent on how well such individuals and organizations engage the process. Although the type and nature of participants involved in policy development will vary from country to
country and from issue to issue, commonly acknowledged participants include (Ellefson 1991, Jones 1984): legislatures, judicial systems, bureaucracies, interest groups, political parties, mass media, and the general public.

Critical to student appreciation of policy development is their understanding of the manner in which participants are organized, their primary purpose or mission, and the manner in which they become involved in the policy process (e.g., lobbying and protest; program implementation; legal interpretation; information transfer). Not to be overlooked is creating student sensitivity to the myriad of problems that often confront participants involved in policy development; such enables them to be more appreciative of conditions that can detract from the development of effective forest resource policies. For example, legislative systems may be dominated by the wishes of organized special interests, judicial systems may suffer from lack of access to technical forestry information, bureaucracies may be bound by rules and regulations that stifle creativity, interest groups may suffer from inadequate financial and professional resources, and the mass media may focus unduly on leaders that suggest overly simplified policy options or that take extreme stands on complex matters of forestry.

Forest resource policies and programs are seldom the product of a single political institution; many organizations can and do become involved in the development and implementation of policies. By broadening their recognition and understanding of the organizational landscape within which policy development occurs, students become better equipped to avoid the perils of focusing on one institution (for example, legislatures) at the expense of others that may be more active and more influential in the
politics of policy development. So too, by focusing on the interaction of participants and the policy process, students become more appreciative of the essence (especially the shortcomings) of the policies and programs that result from the interaction of the two.

**Character and Types of Policy Outcomes.** Charged with an issue and then vigorously activated by interested individuals and organizations, the policy process can produce a variety of important policy and program outcomes. Once appreciative of the policy process and the participants that activate it, students are in a position to be more understanding of the policies and programs that they may be called upon to implement, evaluate or terminate. An understanding of forest resource policies and programs is facilitated by viewing them as lying on a continuum, whereon at one extreme society entrusts forests to the private sector to provide the economically and socially desirable forestry benefits its desires, while at the other extreme, society seeks such benefits by retaining for itself (through government) exclusive ownership of forests. In between these extremes, society can choose from a variety of governmentally more intrusive means for securing important forestry benefits. The continuum would appear as follows:

* private sector forest ownership
  nonindustrial private forests
  industrially-owned forests

* information and service program initiatives
  direct technical assistance (individual landowner focus)
  extension of information (groups of landowner focus)
  indirect technical assistance (research, forest protection)

* fiscal and tax initiatives
  fiscal incentives (cost-share programs)
  tax incentives (income and property)
* regulatory initiatives
  land-use regulation
  pollutant regulation
  forest practice regulation

* government forest ownership

The nature of policies and programs emanating from such initiatives is the focus of student inquiry. In such a context, attention is also directed to planning and budgetary processes that guide the direction and magnitude of such initiatives.

Information Requirements for Policy Development. Forest resource policies and programs are developed and implemented with the assistance of various types of information made available by a variety of sources. In general, forestry students are prone to appreciate the virtues of technical forestry information and see ample reason for policy makers to request such information. Equally important, however, is an understanding of the nature of the technical information being demanded by policy makers, their need for politically relevant forestry information, and the importance of presenting information in a brief and succinct manner (O'Donnell 1978). For example, policy makers charged with multi-sector programs often find little comfort in information about the number of trees planted or the number of hectares harvested as a result of a particular program; information concerning the economic and social implications of a forestry program often weigh far more heavily on their mind (such as employment created, income generated, economic stability established). Similarly, policy makers have need for politically relevant information, especially knowledge about the clients of a forest resource program and when such clients will receive benefits from a program they have an interest in. As to the form in which
information is presented, policy makers seek brief, politically relevant and argumentative information -- not lengthy and technically complex oral or written reports. In a policy development context, students should be led to appreciate the many sources of information demanded by participants in the policy process and the importance of politically relevant information presented in a useable fashion.

**Ethical and Moral Standards Affecting Policy Development.** Development and implementation of forest resource policies can often place forestry professionals in difficult moral and ethical situations. For example, should professionals engage in negotiation practices that require the use of compromise and political tradeoffs? Should professionals guide policy selection toward a particular clientele group while ignoring the special needs of another group? Should policy analysts slant their evaluations in order to counter the biased analyses prepared by political opponents? And when asked to do so, should professionals implement policies and programs which differ markedly from their own conservation and ecological standards?

Appropriate responses to ethical and moral dilemmas vary from individual to individual and from country to country (Madsen and Shafritz 1992, Wachs 1985). However, students should be given an opportunity to explore a range of individual or society imposed standards that guide relationships with others or guide decisions concerning the substance of proposed forest policies. At the least, students should be made aware of the need to enter the policy process in a manner that involves basic honesty and conformity to law, avoidance of conflicts of interest, an orientation toward public service and an interest in procedural fairness. In the latter case, students considering public employment should be
encouraged to consider competing interests in the development of public policies and should be persuaded to exercise informed moral judgement regarding the balancing of such interests.

Ethical standards concerning professional activities are commonly prepared and widely publicized by professional forestry associations. Ethical standards concerning human responsibilities toward trees, wildlife, nature and the biosphere in general are less clearly focused; illustrations can, however, often be found in forestry and natural resource literature. Where ethical standards have not been fully developed, students should be exposed to policy and program development situations (case examples) that involve ethical dilemmas; they then should be encouraged to develop their own ethical and moral precepts for responding to such dilemmas. A classroom setting is a most appropriate place for doing so.

Experience in Applying Policy Development Concepts

Student understanding of the conceptual foundations which underlay policy development and implementation is important. Equally important, however, is the application of such concepts to real-world situations. The intent of doing do is to enable students to recognize policy-type situations, explore the substance of such situations, establish sound communication abilities, and develop adeptness in leading people and organizations to successful policy conclusions.

Case Studies. Student understanding of the conceptual foundation upon which policy development rests is significantly promoted by case examples of events that comprise the policy process, of participants that are involved in the process, and of policies and programs that are currently
being administered (for example, Anderson 1976; Buchholz, Marcus and Post 1992; Ellefson 1993; Lindfors 1974). For example, case examples of forest resource issues achieving government agenda status are especially useful in providing insight as to why government ignores certain forestry issues while it readily acknowledging others. Agenda-setting case situations can significantly amplify student understanding of triggering events, issue managers, political symbols, and strategic actions taken in order to secure a place for an issue on an agenda.

Case examples describing a policy or program's implementation can also be very useful, especially cases that present evidence of how vaguely defined policies are interpreted and clarified, and how such polices are ultimately carried out by responsible agencies and bureaus. From a participant perspective, especially useful cases are those describing interest group involvement in the formulation of forest resource policies and programs; legislative and parliamentary action taken to legitimize forest resource polices in statutes (such as Forest Service 1978, Woods 1989); and public agency struggles with the task of terminating a forest resource policy or program. Policy and program-wise, students benefit greatly from descriptions of how policies and programs are organized, planned, financed and administered. In this respect, the world's forestry community has an especially rich literature from which to draw (experience with cost-share programs, service forestry programs, regulatory programs, government resource ownership). Case examples of legitimized forest planning and budgeting processes are also helpful.

**Student Internships.** Understanding policy and program development can also be promoted through student internships. The forestry education
community has a laudable history of emphasizing education experiences in field settings. The latter notion could be usefully expanded to include field experiences in decision making and policy development situations (Bingham and Biersack 1978). As opportunities present themselves, students should be encouraged to seek policy-type experience with government program managers, interest group leaders, and industrial forestry executives. To be meaningful, such experiences should avoid uneventful tasks and routine office work; rather they should enable students to encounter the business of policy development via daily observation of policy-maker activities and, where appropriate, engagement in report writing and presentations commensurate with their level of skill. Intern programs can demand significant energy and resources on behalf of educators and practicing professionals; such energies can generally be considered well-spent from an educational perspective.

**Leadership Skills.** Development of effective forest resource policies and programs seldom rests with the indecisive or the hesitant (Christensen, Garvin and Sweet 1991). Confidence and determination are hallmarks of forestry professionals that have engaged the policy process and ultimately made a difference. For students so inclined, opportunities for developing and exercising leadership skills should be encouraged. Examples include the holding of formal offices in student organizations and organized special interest groups, and organizing the efforts of others for purposes of addressing important matters of forest policy. Such should be carried out with an understanding of the qualities and the skills commonly associated with leaders, especially:

* belief in the possibility of success -- presume their actions will make a difference.
* significant communication skills -- ability to express to followers a clear picture of what is expected of them.

* a measure of empathy -- acknowledge and appreciate the aspirations and weaknesses of others.

* boundless energy -- willing to work long hours, often under arduous circumstances.

* sound judgement -- well-reasoned conclusions, void of emotional or arbitrary tendencies.

Acknowledging such qualities and skills, students can revel in their leadership strengths while working to build skills in those areas in which they are lacking.

**Communication Skills.** Student ability to communicate (both written and spoken forms) is often lamented by educators and employers of forestry professionals. In the field of policy development and implementation, such a deficiency can be especially troublesome (Hambrick and Snyder 1978). At a minimum, students should be made aware of their writing and speaking skills and should be made to understand that communication skills can be improved with practice. The latter can be accomplished in a number of ways, including generous assignment of reading and writing exercises, extensive requirements for formal spoken presentations, and liberal use of written examinations. In forestry curricula generally, there is often great concern over student writing abilities; unfortunately, few instructors are inclined to teach important writing skills if doing so limits the opportunity to present technical forestry subject material.

An especially useful writing exercise is the issue briefing paper. Via the latter, students can scrutinize a forest resource issue and characterize it in a systematic fashion. Such papers are typically prepared as though they are to be submitted to a policy maker or administrator that
is interested in the circumstances surrounding an issue and the policy or program options that are available to address it. The exercise is consistent with the preparation of briefing papers or issue summaries that are often asked of policy or program analysts employed by public and private agencies. The content of a briefing paper typically includes:

* **Policy or Activity Causing the Issue.** Clear and exacting statement of the policy or administrative action that has provoked the issue. What is the source of the disagreement? What program objectives are not being accomplished? What resources are being miss-allocated? What procedures are not being followed? Who is involved in the issue (both within and outside government)?

* **Policy or Program Options for Resolving the Issue.** What policy or administrative actions can be taken to resolve the issue? Which have been tried in the past? What do other fields have to offer in the way of alternatives?

* **Pros and Cons of Policies or Programs Suggested for Resolving the Issue.** What are the advantages and disadvantages of the policies or administrative actions that might be taken to resolve the issue? Technically and politically, what is known and not known about each alternative?

* **Organizations Supporting or Opposing Proposed Policies or Programs.** Who is in favor of a particular alternative and who opposes it? What is the reasoning behind the support (or opposition) for a particular policy or program?

* **Criteria Used to Judge Policy or Program Proposals.** What rules and criteria should be used to decide which alternative will be selected? In what fashion have such rules been legitimized -- if at all?

* **Opinion on the Issue.** What is your (student or analyst) opinion on the issue? Which alternative(s) would you recommend and, very briefly, why?

**Observations and Recommendations**

Forest resource policy as a subject area for instruction by university-level forestry schools is an important part of a student's professional training. If forestry schools are intent on training students
to fully participate in the physical as well as the social and political environments within which modern forestry is practiced, their forest policy instruction would best be oriented toward presentation of the appropriate conceptual skills that are necessary to do so (Schmithusen 1990). Implied therein is an understanding of how forestry issues come about, in what fashion government responds to and implements programs to address such issues, and the ways in which implemented programs can be made to operate more effectively. Once such a conceptual framework is understood, the role that various individuals and organizations play in activating the process becomes a logical point of transition to a broader understanding of policy development. Although not all students are destined to become active players in the policy development process, they should be encouraged to understand and to appreciate the role of those that have chosen to do so.

The teaching of forest policy in a university setting should entail significant trial and experimentation as to approach. The political and natural resource climates of countries around the world are far too diverse to embrace a single style or method of instruction. However, if suggestions were to be made as to what should be universally avoided, they would have to include the following:

* refrain from focusing on a single organization or institution's involvement in policy development. Common tendency is to focus excessively, for example, on legislatures when in fact interest groups, judicial systems, government agencies and the like are often of greater importance to policy development and implementation.

* avoid teaching rigorous economics and related analytical techniques as though they were the essence of policy development and implementation.
In reality, policy decisions and their understanding have more to do with attaining harmony among disagreeing individuals and organizations via notions of bargaining and negotiation than with guiding decisions with some notion of economic optimality (Ellefson and Lyons 1989).

* avert excessive focus on policy development and implementation at a single government level within a country. For example, prevailing evidence indicates that most forestry professionals deal with policy development at lower levels of government (state and local governments). Exclusive focus on policy development at the national level could be for nought in such cases.

* refrain from laborious dissection of facts and circumstances concerning current and very visible forestry issues without tying such instruction to some conceptual foundation (for example, agenda setting theory). When the contemporary issue in question is gone from society's agenda, students will be left with out-dated facts about an out-of-date issue. They will be placed in a truly precarious position for anticipating and dealing with impending issues that differ in substance and social importance.

References


