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SYMPOSIUM: PERCEPTION AND NATURAL RESOURCES

FOREWORD

A widespread simplistic view of natural resources is that they are a fixed stock of useful materials, subject in part to renewability and always in need of conservation. This view persists, in various guises, alongside a more anthropocentric and dynamic concept of natural resources. In the latter view, given early expression in Zimmermann's concept of functional natural resources or Sauer's view of resources as cultural appraisals, natural resources are those things found in nature and useful to man.

With this definition, we now have a dynamic stock of natural resources, the mix of which fluctuates according to their perceived utility for man. This revision of the classic static resource approach is now widely shared among scholars in the field.

The three articles that follow have as a common point of departure this view of resources and go on to consider specifically the variation in perceived utility of several types of resources.

Dean Quinney considers the small forest tract and inquires into the perceptions held by their owners. Robert Lucas is concerned with wilderness area and attempts to define such areas in terms of user perception. Our article on natural hazard deals with the perception of one aspect of resource management that appears to influence widely the management of many natural resources.

The three articles have theoretical implications in that each helps to answer the "why" of resource use, a question of interest in its own right. They also have considerable utility for providing the kinds of understanding needed for an applied resource management. Each exemplifies a special type of understanding. The Quinney article goes very directly to a major problem. It asks of those concerned with forest management: How do you secure the benefits of a natural resource, when not only is it diffused in ownership, but also it is not perceived as such by a large proportion of its owners? This is the first of the applied understandings that might come from perceptual resource studies: identifying differences in kind in basic attitudes towards natural resources and basing policy on knowledge of such differences.

The second understanding is illustrated by the Lucas article, and it is a

tantalizing one. It suggests the possibility of defining and identifying resources in terms of user perception. If we find the definition of a resource amorphous or arbitrary, might we not attempt to define it as its users see it rather than by some legislative, technical, or expert view? Caution is needed in applying such an approach to some resources; for example, caution would be required in allowing ranchers to determine their own use capacity of rangeland in their stocking practices. In the case of wilderness areas, however, it holds forth the prospect of increasing our effective wilderness area considerably.

The third type of perceptual understanding is one that tries to define precisely the hiatus between technician and user. Commonly this has been expressed in terms of an educational lag. Where resource practice does not conform to the technician's view, it means the educational process of bringing the user up to the technician's standard has been lagging. Our article suggests wide barriers ascribable to factors other than publicity or education.

These perceptual investigations aim to illuminate differences in basic attitudes towards resources, differences between technical-governmental practices and those of resource managers, and hold forth new ways of defining and identifying certain types of resources.

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