

## OPENING ADDRESS

John T. Shannon<sup>1</sup>

I am glad to be here today to help open the symposium on Arkansas' forests. It is gratifying to see so many forestry leaders in attendance. I am particularly pleased to welcome my brother, State Forester from Oklahoma, Roger Davis; and representatives of the State Foresters from Tennessee and Louisiana.

It would be unfair and perhaps ill-advised for me to begin my comments with an inside joke about my short stature, so let me bring you in on it. For several years, Randall Leister was my boss at the Arkansas Forestry Commission. Since becoming State Forester over 3 years ago, I have been Randall's boss. Whenever I am making a public speech and Randall is in the audience, he always shouts from the back of the room, "Stand up, John." That Randall gets wittier with each passing day! To obviate that comment from Randall and to proceed with the symposium, I am pleased to announce that I am standing up.

The USDA Forest Service (Forest Service) and the Arkansas Forestry Commission completed the last forest survey in 1988. The World has changed greatly since then, as have forestry practices and policies. Let's look at four examples.

First, as recently as the mid-to-late 1980's, clearcutting was the primary silvicultural regimen practiced on the National Forests in Arkansas. Since then, changes in public attitudes about clearcutting and a "walk in the woods" with former Senator David Pryor caused a reversal in the harvesting practices. Today, the forest plans for the National Forests in Arkansas permit virtually no clearcutting.

Second, concerns about maintaining populations of spotted owls in the Pacific Northwest have arisen since 1988. Driven by the Endangered Species Act and with the direct involvement of President Clinton, timber harvesting on national forests in the Pacific Northwest has greatly declined.

Third, NAFTA has opened huge markets for timber grown in the United States. NAFTA may also exacerbate the flow of subsidized Canadian timber into the United States.

Fourth, remember the Soviet Union? Its vast Siberian conifer forest was to be developed into the "woodbasket of the world." There is no more Soviet Union, and that forest economic development never happened. Productive soils

and adequate rainfall are crucial for forest growth, but political stability is crucial for capital investment.

We know that these four changes and others have affected Arkansas' forests. For instance, I have a hunch that the reduction of timber harvesting in the Pacific Northwest has led to an increase of timber harvesting in Arkansas. After today and tomorrow, we no longer will have to rely on hunches. The key function of this symposium is to provide the facts.

In a few moments, John Kelly will discuss the design of the forest inventory. He will frankly discuss design limitations. But the Forest Service and the Arkansas Forestry Commission do not conduct the decennial inventory through the windshield of a truck. We collect hard data from over 3,000 continuous forest inventory plots. Although all human endeavors are flawed, the forest inventory data is the best information we have. Within the limitations of the survey design and those human errors that must occur while collecting data at over 3,000 sites, the inventory data are unassailable.

Facts are difficult things. But facts will drive this symposium. For this symposium to be successful, we must start with good faith in each other and trust in the data. I am reminded of my mother requiring each of her five children to drink a teaspoon of cod liver oil every winter morning. I gagged it down, but, today, must admit that the cod liver oil was good for me. For those in the audience who are disappointed with the forest inventory data, please swallow hard and remember that facts, while difficult things, are good for us.

In addition to discussing the raw data, I expect several speakers to analyze the data and state opinions about changes in the forest resources. I ask all speakers to plainly label their opinions as such. Several audience members have asked me if the speakers will opine whether forest practices in Arkansas are sustainable. Specifically, several of you have asked for a sneak preview of Dr. John Gray's conclusions regarding the sustainability of the hardwood export chip mills. What will the speakers say? Darned if I know. I will hear their opinions and conclusions when you do. Before we go home on Saturday afternoon, we will have the most current snapshot of the forest resources of Arkansas and the opinions of key forestry leaders about trends in the forest resources and the significance of the data.

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Although cynicism can degenerate into mere negativity, a little cynicism is healthy. If the inventory data suggest that Arkansas' forestry leaders must act, you may want to ask, "What are you going to do about it?" If the data suggest that our forestry practices are endangering populations of those pesky, neotropical migratory birds, what is the Forest Service going to do about it? The Forest Service is in a good position to act; it owns half the country. If, on a regional basis, the forest products industry is cutting timber faster than the timber is growing, what is the forest products industry going to do about it? If the data suggest that private, nonindustrial owners of forest land are not implementing Best Management Practices or are making other ill-advised forest management decisions, you should ask, "Okay, Mr. Big-Shot State Forester, what are you going to do about it?" The real work of this symposium, therefore, commences at adjournment.

Forests are tremendously dynamic, but people prefer to remain static. Change is difficult. In order to wisely act in response to the data and analysis provided during the next 2 days, Arkansas' forestry leaders will need that same gift that the Wizard presented to the Cowardly Lion—courage. If cutting practices are simply not sustainable, leaders of the forest products industry must have the courage to face the issue head-on by cutting less timber or growing more. To effectively pursue their legitimate goals of healthy and sustainable forest ecosystems, members of the forest

environmental community must have the courage to understand that under Arkansas law, "the right of property is before and higher than any constitutional sanction." Accordingly, cooperation with private landowners is the essential element for forest resource protection. Conversely, private owners of forest land must have the courage to understand that there is great public interest in private land. Finally, if the forest inventory data suggests that forest resource challenges are ahead, and if I determine that the forestry commission's policies and legislative charge do not address those challenges, I must have the courage to set aside time-worn policies and implement new ones. Mostly, I must have the courage to ask the Arkansas General Assembly to change the forestry commission's enabling legislation to shift the agency from a timber commission to a forest resource conservation commission.

In closing, I think we all need to lighten up. I have lived in other States and have traveled extensively in Arkansas. Only four States have more timberland than Arkansas, and our forest land has increased by 2 million acres during the past 20 years. As we debate the issues and argue about the numbers during the next 2 days, we should be mindful that, in Arkansas, life is good.

Thank you for being here. Enjoy the symposium!