



## UI Extension Forestry Information Series

### What is Stewardship?

*Ron Mahoney and Yvonne Carree Barkley*

Heard the one about the Conservationist and the Environmentalist? Probably not, but you all have heard those terms used, abused, argued, and compared. Newer to the land use debate is the term *stewardship*. These days, one can hardly scan a natural resources article or hear a conversation about land and forests without noticing the use of stewardship.

But what exactly is stewardship? Difficult to define, stewardship is one of those terms that is easier to describe. Turning to “Webster” or a thesaurus provides only indirect help, defining only the noun steward as “one who manages another’s property...an administrator; supervisor”. Perhaps it is the very lack of strong definition and connotations of the word “steward” that makes the action of stewardship a comfortable term to everyone from preservationists to utilitarian conservationists. Yet, stewardship remains one of those elusive terms, as descriptive individually as the word “love”, more art than science.

Land stewardship is almost parental in nature. You “parent” your land, you provide for and nurture your land as you would a child, always doing your best to insure the health and well-being of that land for its future. Land stewards believe the forest and other natural resources need their care to survive and prosper. Stewardship connotes an awareness of the natural systems surrounding us, of social responsibility and dedication.

Numerous people have had and expressed this “feeling for the land”, this “sense of privilege in owning land” and the responsibility of that ownership. As people, knowledge, social structure, and

standards of living have changed, so have our attitudes about the earth and its resources, and our financial ability to do something about it. From the manifest destiny policy that guided the settlement of the United States, we went to the sustainable dominion of the first chief of the USDA Forest Service, Gifford Pinchot and the cranky rebellion of Thoreau (On Walden Pond); Aldo Leopold (Sand County Almanac) called us to be responsible to future generations for our actions and Edward Abbey (the Monkeywrench Gang) encouraged destructive disobedience. More recently, research forester Jerry Franklin championed realistic resolution of old growth dilemmas, and novelist David Brin described a near future where global stewardship is the necessary focus of everyone.

In the United States, individuals have long valued and enjoyed clean air, wildlife, seclusion, and outdoor adventure, as well as the economic opportunities of our vast natural resources. What we value as individuals we now value collectively as a nation. There is a forestry section in the Federal Farm Bill, and substantial resources are dedicated towards a nationwide program of forest land stewardship.

Today, global stewardship is rapidly evolving from a moral concept to an ecological and economic reality. While everyone has a share and a role in global problems, many private landowners see stewardship in a more local and immediate sense, as when they see their own children and grandchildren inherit land that is as good or better than when their parents or grandparents began their stewardship.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

---

And so we come to this: *STEWARDSHIP is an attitude, a dedication to doing the best we can for the land, whether it be the entire globe, the nation, or our own private land. We must accept that each of us will and must define what is best for the land, and that we will not always agree and will not always be right. How people define good land stewardship is not as important as the development and practice of a stewardship ethic.*

So, how does one become a good land steward? Learn about your land, whether it be 1,000 acres of sagebrush, 40 acres of pine forest, or 5 acres in a rural subdivision. Think about all the pieces that are part of the picture puzzle of your land. Find the best ways to manage your land for your purposes,

and get help if you need it. Be aware of the health of the whole system, the air, soil, water quality, fish and wildlife habitats, insects and disease activities, and growth and vigor of the plant life. Admire the beauty of the land, take satisfaction in what you see as improvements, relish the time you have spent on your land and fulfill your personal stewardship goals by leaving your land flourishing for tomorrow's land stewards.

---

This information first appeared in the Woodland NOTES Extra Stewardship Edition.

**About the Authors:** *Dr. Ron Mahoney* is an Extension Forester and Professor and *Yvonne Carree Barkley* is an Extension Associate - Forestry at the University of Idaho.

