

FOREST ECONOMICS: FOR WHOM AND FOR WHAT?

The breadth of this specialisation of ours, forest economics, is quite astounding. Nowhere is this better illustrated than in the contents of this issue. Yet one cannot help but wonder sometimes, whether these important and rigorous analyses are finding their way to the intended or appropriate audiences. While journals such as ours are invaluable for academic researchers and postgraduate students, are there other avenues which can increase the visibility and impact of our professional research? Can we fine-tune the questions we choose to investigate, to increase the relevance of the answers to policy-makers?

The Inter-governmental Panel on Forests and the World Commission on Forests and Sustainable Development are very high-profile, current international fora which are demanding more and more comprehensive economic analyses of forests, forest products, forest industries and deforestation processes. Both have recognised that major new initiatives in forest science are urgently needed if forests and forestry, throughout the world, are to contribute their full potential to meeting today's needs and those of the 21st century. One of the IPF's Inter-Sessional Workshops on Integrated Application of Sustainable Forest Management Practices (Kochi, Japan, November 1996) concluded *inter alia* :

"A new culture on land use planning and forest research recognizes and accepts that integration of a wide variety of environmental, social and economic values, needs and aspirations is essential to achieve sustainable forest management practices.... Research in this new culture is stake-holder-driven, focused and practical. Planning is iterative between planning levels and evolutionary over time; it results in implementation of planning decisions. The products of this emerging culture will be a new generation of applied research and its inclusion in all levels of planning processes is an important supportive tool necessary for achieving sustainable forest management...."

The future will demand studies of "forests in society" that have greater emphasis on identifying underlying processes, rather than applied research limited only to forest management and timber production.

Numerous recent initiatives seek to foster wider international cooperation among forest economists world-wide, and between forest economists and related researchers. This journal can act as a clearing house of information that brings researchers together to address these challenging questions.

International cooperation in research will lead to major advances in our understanding of the role of forests in society, and improved techniques for forest planning and management for an era of more sustainable development. However, the results must be put into practice, so they need to be communicated effectively to policy makers and forest managers. A partnership between policy makers and researchers is essential to improve techniques for analysing the issues presented in pursuit of sustainable forest management and development.

Researchers and practitioners in forest economics will need to recognise that governments are not their only client. Changes are occurring rapidly in how forests are managed, by whom and for what. To embrace these challenges, changes are imminent in the nature of forest economics. Forests are a key part of the interface between humanity and the environment. They can no longer be studied as though they are simply "outdoor factories to produce wood-fibre", divorced from society and as if forest activities are only of local concern.

Neil Byron / associate editor