

THE EARLY CAREER DEVELOPMENT OF TRADITIONAL AND NON-TRADITIONAL FOREST SERVICE PROFESSIONALS

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TRANSACTIONS WESTERN SECTION THE WILDLIFE SOCIETY 22:34-38

In the 1950s and 60s those who studied the USDA Forest Service (USFS) found it a proud, productive agency with high esprit de corps (Gulick 1951, Kaufman 1960). This cohesiveness and strength was identified by Gulick (1951:74) as "the major coordinating force in the American forest policy and program...is not found in strong executive leadership by the President, or by the secretaries of the departments involved, or in the Cabinet, or in Congress and its diverse committees, or in similar state structures. It is found rather (a) in the woods, and (b) in the forestry profession and its unified philosophy....there are few major differences of opinion as to what has to be done, or how to do it, among men who have been trained in the same schools, brought up on the same philosophy, and are working for the same great purposes."

In the 1960s the strength of such "unified philosophy" was increasing perceived by many Americans as narrowly focused and not very adaptable to the broadening forest resource values of an urbanizing society. Legislation like the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA 1970) was an attempt to counter the disadvantages of such professional monocultures, by injecting interdisciplinary diversity into agencies like the USFS or Corps of Engineers. In the same era, equal employment and affirmative action policy also required that women become actively recruited by federal agencies.

We at Utah State University began studying the more sexually and professionally diverse USFS culture in 1982. The goals were to describe how (and how not) recently hired men and women professionals were adapting to careers in their professions and the USFS culture. For if the intent of NEPA (1970) and other 1970s legislation is to be fulfilled, young men and women specialists (e.g., wildlife biologists) must become integrated into federal agencies like the USFS. That is, they must be able to find satisfying and productive USFS careers, while helping the agency expand its forest resource sensitivities, values and management/planning skills.

This paper is based on two studies of entry-level USFS recruits. The first examined the career development of forester, range conservationists (range

cons) and wildlife/fisheries (WLF) biologists hired in two western USFS regions (Kennedy and Mincolla 1982). The second study focused on a nationwide sample of USFS wildlife/fisheries managers (Kennedy and Mincolla 1985a). These studies examined why these recruits selected their professions and how committed they are to a career in it, how well they were prepared in college to be successful in their early USFS years, how agency values were accepted, and if recruits are learning about and adapting to USFS culture.

THE SEXUAL AND PROFESSIONAL DIVERSITY OF REGION 4 AND 6 LAND MANAGER RECRUITS HIRED BETWEEN 1978-1981

Region 4 and 6 (R4/R6) invited us to study the 400-series recruits hired between 1978-1981 (Kennedy and Mincolla 1982). In that period, 26% of 400-series professionals hired by R4/6 were foresters, 35% were range cons, and 39% WLF biologists. Forty percent of these recruits were women. With 80% of our questionnaires returned, 50% of this R4 and R6 recruit class was sampled.

Recognizing that about half the USFS professionals to be sampled were women, we anticipated significant women-men differences in job satisfaction and career development. Some important women-men differences were observed, but greater differences were found between professional-types. Most often it was WLF biologists (regardless of their sex) differing from both their forester and range con colleagues.

Some Career Development Differences Between R4 and R6 Men and Women

Women had higher expectations than men about the challenge, professional prestige, group morale, etc. they would find on their first permanent USFS job. This may explain why women experienced lower overall satisfaction (Chi-square significantly different, $P = 0.01$) on their first permanent USFS job, and the effect of that job on their commitment to stay in the USFS was lower than men ($P = 0.02$). Most women seemed to resolve their initial job disappointment and concerns, however. When asked how their USFS career was progressing after two years or so in the USFS, few men-women differences remained.

One difference that persisted was fewer women (75%) had made a long-term commitment to their professions than men (92%) ($P = 0.04$). This was largely related to current or future family/career issues in which women felt more uncertain and more responsible in resolving.

Profession-Related Differences in Careers of R4 and R6 Recruits

WLF biologists differed from their forester and range con colleagues even as colleague students (Kennedy and Mincolla 1985b). First, they expressed much stronger concern to manage and protect resources as the primary motivations for pursuing their profession ($P = 0.001$). Foresters were much more likely to state, "wanting to work outdoors" or "desire to live and work in west", as a primary reason for selecting their profession. WLF biologists were much more likely to describe their professional motivations in college as, "love wildlife" or "want to protect wildlife resources."

Secondly, many more WLF biologists attended graduate school (65%) than did foresters (32%) and range-cons (15%) ($P = 0.01$). In addition, fewer wildlife/fisheries students dreamed of joining the USFS upon graduation. Asked to state how important was future USFS employment when deciding to pursue their natural resource profession, 56% of foresters checked either "important", "very" or "extremely important", as did 71% of range cons. Only 22% of WLF biologists answered that way ($P = 0.01$).

Eighty percent of all three professional types were committed to careers in their professions when surveyed, but WLF managers expressed greater strength in that commitment. While 65% of WLF biologists checked the two strong spots on a 7-point scale ("very" or "extremely strong"), 45% of range-cons and only 22% of foresters did so ($P = 0.05$).

Asked what two attitudes or values "are most rewarded by the USFS", R4 and R6 recruits gave open-ended replies that coded into: (1) be loyal to USFS organization, (2) be productive and hard-working, and (3) get along with people and in teams. About 25% of range cons gave replies that fit the "professional competency category", 2% of foresters and no WLF biologists did so. No one gave "commitment to resources" replies. When asked if they agreed that the three most rewarded values (above) should be so rewarded, WLF biologists were in greatest disagreement: 25% of WLF biologists rejected all three rewarded values, versus 12% of foresters and 16% of

range cons. The majority of foresters (51%) and range cons (56%) agreed with all three rewarded values, only 31% of WLF biologists did so. This is a noticeable, but not statistically significant difference ($P > 0.05$).

Such pre-commitment and value conflict differences may help explain why 32% of WLF biologists checked "no" when asked, "At this point do you want to spend your career working for the USFS?" Although most (51-56%) of all professional-types checked "undecided", few range cons (7%) or foresters (16%) checked "no".

FOCUS ON FOREST SERVICE WILDLIFE/FISHERIES MANAGERS

As a result of R4/6 study findings that WLF biologists were having some difficulty finding successful, productive professional careers in the USFS, the Wildlife and Fisheries Staff in Washington, D.C. funded a service-wide study. With an 82% response-rate, our questionnaire produced a 45% sample of all entry-level (1-6 years permanent employment) WLF managers in all USFS regions (Kennedy and Mincolla 1985a). The primary goal of this study was to understand how well university education, formal and informal USFS training was functioning, and what were unresolved training needs. But to understand this, we also had to understand how these entry-level people were adapting to their professions and the USFS culture.

This service-wide sample of WLF managers was as committed to their profession as was the R4/6 sample. Having been in the USFS twice as long (mean = 4 years) as the R4/6 sample, more (35%) were committed to a career in the USFS, 7% planned to exit, and most (58%) were still undecided. The major reason they were undecided or planned to leave the agency was related to a poor promotion or career ladder for their profession, followed by the low priority/status they perceive wildlife/fisheries resources to be relative to commodity production. Asked if the USFS "considers wildlife/fisheries resources as important as other resources like timber, range, recreation, etc.", 42% checked "disagree very much", 45% "disagree", 4% "neutral", 9% "agree" and 0% "agree very much". The majority of entry WLF managers judge USFS traditions, power and status is still with timber and range production (Kennedy and Mincolla 1985b).

How Well Trained Were WLF Managers Upon Entering the USFS

Sixty-two percent of entry WLF managers considered themselves "very well" or "well

Table 1. How well college prepared entry level WLF managers in technical and people management skills (n = 99).

Replies	Technical knowledge/ skills	Appropriate attitudes values	People management skills
	-----Percent-----		
Very well	7	10	1
Well	55	22	14
No impact	10	23	27
Poorly	25	35	42
Very poorly	3	10	16
Total	100	100	100

prepared" in professional knowledge and skills upon graduating from college (Table 1). Fewer (32%) were as well provided with proper "attitudes and values" to be successful in the USFS (e.g., being willing and able to be a cooperative, contributing and multidisciplinary team member). Less yet (15%) were well prepared in "people-management skills" (Table 1). Let's examine more closely how well their technical education really provided the professional skills necessary for the first years on the job.

Asked, were you hired as "a WLF manager to work primarily as a species or habitat manager, or neither?" One person (3%) stated they were hired as a species manager, 83% were hired to manage habitat, 7% to do both, and 7% hired initially to do other work (planning, range, etc.). Few entry WLF managers had college training that initially helped them succeed in the habitat demands of their job: none had college training that focused "much more on habitat," 16% of the training focused "more on habitat," 32% "equally on both species and habitat management", 27% "more on species", 25% "much more on species management." Obviously these entry WLF managers had a lot to learn in the technical-professional area of habitat management, even though the majority (61%) had masters degrees. They had even more to learn about the "attitudes" and "people-management skills" necessary to be a successful USFS manager.

Asked, "In your first year or two as a permanent USFS employee, what did you discover were the two most important attitudes/values to be a successful WLF manager in the USFS?" Most frequent open-

ended replies given coded into: (1) be able to get along with people and in teams, (2) behave and act professionally and competently, (3) be able to compromise, give-and-take, (4) have work-ethic, meet targets, and (5) loyalty, support the USFS. This was followed by, "What were the two biggest attitude/value changes (if any) you had to make in your first year or two as a permanent USFS employee?" Open-ended replies were: (1) learn to get along with people and teams, (2) adjust to wildlife/fisheries resources being low priority, and (3) accept that many decisions are political.

It's evident that the post-NEPA (1970) era of interdisciplinary decision-making requires entry-level managers to have the attitudes and skills to coordinate, cooperate and contribute in a team setting. The majority of professional recruits we studied had to learn these and most other attitude and people management skills on-the-job. It's also evident that NEPA does not seem to have produced a full multiple-use revolution in the USFS within a decade. Traditional forest production values still dominate. Few students of organizational behavior would have predicted such a revolution anyhow. Organizational values change by evolution, not revolution. But for many young, idealistic WLF managers, this evolution was not occurring dramatically or quickly enough.

Job Satisfaction

Although the romance, simplicity and challenge of wildlife/fisheries fieldwork was the primary career attraction for entry-managers, they now spend only 30% of their time in the field. They were much more involved in coordination with other USFS multiple-uses (24% of work-time), planning (12%), and administration/budgeting (8%), areas not well studied in college or dreamed about in youth.

Still general job satisfaction among entry-level managers was high, with the following percentages agreeing that: I like my job (81%), my work's important (93%), my work's interesting (89%), USFS generally accepts my advice (61%), USFS treats me as a valuable employee (47%). Note that entry-managers feel challenged, involved and productive in their job, more than valued for their effort.

When general career and job satisfaction of men and women entry-level WLF managers was compared, the results contested some conventional wisdom. In all cases where statistically significant differences occurred ($P < 0.05$), women

seemed to feel better about their USFS careers than their male colleagues.

Women WLF managers felt their jobs "more challenging" ($P = 0.04$) and more "interesting" ($P = 0.05$) than men. They perceived the USFS "generally treats me as a valuable employee" more than their male peers ($P = 0.02$). They were more satisfied with their "current rank" ($P = 0.01$) and more optimistic with future "promotion prospects" than men. Our survey did not directly address if women experience more sexual prejudice or agency barriers than their male colleagues. But in this particular sample of entry-level specialists, women consistently felt better about their current job and future USFS career prospects than their male colleagues.

CONCLUSIONS

Developing a commitment to one's profession begins in high school or college. It becomes established there (or not established) in courses, with role models, and in temporary jobs. Over two-thirds of the professionals we've examined were committed to careers in their professions upon college graduation. After 2 to 4 years of permanent job experience about 90% were committed to their professions. In contrast, developing a commitment to the USFS agency usually occurred late, and that commitment often conflicted with previously established professional values, especially for WLF managers.

WLF managers were much less likely than their range con or forester colleagues to have dreamed of working for the USFS in college. They experienced more conflict between their professional values and those of the agency. They perceived the USFS not valuing their specialty or the wildlife/fisheries resource as highly as timber or range. In addition, many did not see an attractive career ladder available to them in their specialty or as line officers. Not surprisingly, entry-level WLF managers were less sure they wanted to spend the next 10-20 years of their careers in the USFS than were their forester or range con colleagues.

Students of organizational behavior would not be surprised to find that a new and different profession, (like WLF managers) were having more difficulty integrating into USFS culture, than traditional forester and range con professionals. They would also not be surprised to discover that many of these new, young specialists were frustrated with agency culture not changing rapidly

enough. Organizational cultures change slowly, especially proud and cohesive organizational cultures. Changing them require time and effort, and often blood, sweat and tears. In addition, it facilitates organizational evolution if new specialists are trained to appreciate, understand and manipulate organizational cultures. Most entry-level WLF managers were not so oriented or so trained, and such ignorance and naivety often contributed to the stress of their USFS integration and effectiveness (Culter 1982, Kennedy 1985c).

Our studies have helped document and clarify WLF manager and USFS integration problems that were intuitively recognized by many people. The agency has responded with more research support and immediate integration of study findings into training programs. It's the beginning of a long process to help WLF managers and other new specialists. The traditional USFS power structure recognizes the integration problems of this new phase of its organizational development, and plans to help new specialists understand, appreciate, become integrated into the organizational culture. This requires a change in the technical skills emphasis of professional WLF biologists' training, to incorporate the understanding of and effectiveness in organizational cultures. It may also require a change of heart for traditional USFS culture to welcome and integrate new, different and sometimes strange specialists into its ranks, and to share power with them. In this way the USFS can respond to the intent and substance of laws like NEPA (1970) and continue its tradition as a proud, cohesive, effective agency, adapting to a diverse, urban American society.

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