

## Economic, Social AND Ecological Forestry

There is a great deal of discussion in forestry circles today regarding the concept of “ecological forestry”. Many progressive forestry analysts and practitioners have become enamored of the phrase, as if we have discovered a new holy grail. But have we, and what do we really mean by this term?

First, let me offer to the reader that most of the concepts of “ecological forestry” are not new to silviculturists. The terms and language are new, but the concept of taking care of all the parts is as old as civilization, and more particularly in this part of the country, Aldo Leopold. Every time we examine soil structure, species hardiness, erosion control or insect outbreaks, we are looking at ecological issues. Many of us do this without even considering that this is now called part of ecological forestry. It is just part and parcel of on-the-ground, dirt forestry.

Interestingly, most of my colleagues would argue that I’m a practitioner of the tenets of ecological forestry, so why should I be uncomfortable with the term? Because it is a three legged stool that holds up my weight, and ecological forestry represents only one leg of this stool. The other two legs are economic and social, and they are, as we are all aware, essential to successful practice. Would I prefer to call myself by one of the other legs? For example, wasn’t “sustained yield” just a fancy term for forestry based on economics? That certainly brought the practice of forestry under the gun a few years back. To call ourselves “ecological foresters” runs the same risk, in the future, since it appears to replace one leg of the stool for another.

Let me be more positive about this topic. I’m very much in favor of incorporating ecological considerations into our toolbox. In fact, I find myself doing just this on a daily basis. For too long water quality issues, wildlife habitat concerns and plant species diversity have been neglected in many of our conversations and they deserve our attention. However, I’m uncomfortable with calling everything that we do “ecological forestry”. I will continue to be very committed to the economic, social AND ecological dimensions of our profession.

Finally, if I had to label what I do, I would call it “restoration forestry.” Restoring degraded woodlands, restoring afforested sites, restoring beat up pastures and wetlands. To my mind, restoration forestry requires an ecological leg to stand on. But it also requires the other two legs to make it operational.