

# **UCLA**

## **Electronic Green Journal**

### **Title**

Chiefly Politics: Contested Leadership in the USDA-Forest Service

### **Permalink**

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/8hb4j9mr>

### **Journal**

Electronic Green Journal, 1(12)

### **Author**

Miller, Char

### **Publication Date**

2000

### **DOI**

10.5070/G311210375

### **Copyright Information**

Copyright 2000 by the author(s). All rights reserved unless otherwise indicated. Contact the author(s) for any necessary permissions. Learn more at <https://escholarship.org/terms>

Peer reviewed

## Chiefly Politics: Contested Leadership in the USDA-Forest Service

Char Miller

*Trinity University, USA*

.....  
When in the fall of 1993 Jack Ward Thomas' name was floated as the Clinton Administration's choice to replace Dale Robertson as chief of the United States Forest Service, forest supervisors and other well-placed administrators were appalled. Not that they disliked Thomas, a wildlife biologist who had been in the agency for 27 years, but they sharply disapproved of what they believed to be the politics of his selection, or rather that his selection was political. In tapping Thomas, then-Secretary of Agriculture, Mike Espy, had elevated him over a long list of career forest managers and, more important, over the "senior executive service," a collection of managers from whom some of the recent chiefs had been drawn. To some agency insiders it seemed that Thomas had been selected for reasons external to the organization, and it was on that basis that letters of protest poured into the White House and the Department of Agriculture. "With all due respect," wrote 70 forest supervisors to the president on October 22, 1993 "we oppose this course of action," for it would "set a precedent for all future administrations, making it possible for the currently correct special interest groups to control the National Forests." Such a precedent would damage the service's morale and would pose "a serious threat" to the forests themselves. Far better to adhere to what these supervisors claimed to be the traditional approach for selecting a chief; only professional qualifications have mattered; politics has had no place. (New York Times, 1993a; New York Times, 1993b; New York Times, 1993c)

The tradition is actually a bit more complicated than that. True, the claim of a non-politicized transition dates from the agency's first change in leadership in 1910, when its founder, Gifford Pinchot, was dismissed, and replaced by Henry Solon Graves, Dean of the Yale School of Forestry. Moreover, this claim has been asserted ever since, serving as a rhetorical device by which the agency has sought to assert the primacy of internal control over succession. But that has not rid the process of politics. Not only has internal jockeying for place, (separate and apart from professional concerns), always played a critical role in determining who would become the next chief, but considerations external to the agency have regularly influenced this process. Politics have always been at the core of the administration of American public forestry.

No one appeared to appreciate the significance of this historical reality more than Jack Ward Thomas. Intriguingly, he acknowledged his debt to this past when in his discussions of the Forest Service's agenda for the forthcoming century he drew upon the insights and evoked the aura of the agency's

controversial founder, Gifford Pinchot. There could have been no better reference. For Pinchot, the politics of Forest Service leadership was of utmost concern, and this was as true for the five years when he served as the agency's chief as it would be during the remaining 35 years of his life, a period in which five new chiefs were selected. It was Pinchot who initially and repeatedly claimed that the agency must insulate itself from outside political pressures by asserting the preeminence of professional values to those of administrative patronage. But he regularly undercut these assertions when one of his successors did not conform to Pinchot's well-defined sense of the Forest Services' mission; at these points, his public criticism could be as relentless as his private assaults. This 'old' chief never dropped his combative posture--never retired--and as such was in good measure responsible for establishing the complicated heritage that would lead to Thomas's contested ascension (Thomas, 1994; Fry, 1994).

## **Ground Work**

The origins of this tradition can be traced to the explosive, but carefully managed conclusion of Gifford Pinchot's tenure in early January, 1910, when President Taft canned him for insubordination during the Ballinger-Pinchot affair. How he and the Forest Service responded to the debacle would have a significant influence on the future passing of leadership within the agency (Penick, 1968).

Pinchot's initial response demonstrated his understanding of the situation's delicacy and the presumed need for a grand gesture. The morning after he was fired, he arrived at the Forest Service's headquarters, meeting first with the agency's leadership, and then with a large gathering of staff, which included "white and colored, men and women, varying in rank from charwoman to assistant chiefs." As he entered the general forum, he was greeted with a thunderous ovation, "as demonstrative as it was possible for three hundred persons to make." According to one account; the roar penetrated to the street below, leading a passerby to remark, "the whole service was insubordinate." But encouraging further unrest was not on Pinchot's mind, rather he urged his fervent supporters to demonstrate their loyalty to him by sticking to the Forest Service: he confirmed that "the work of conservation, to which they were devoting their lives, was greater than any one man or any administration, and should be carried on despite all obstacles." He had been fired, but they must keep the faith (Washington Star, 1910, p. 1, 10).

Pinchot had no intention of disappearing from the scene, however. "We are still in the same work--different parts of it, but always the same work," a congruence he reinforced when he urged his now-former subordinates "to call

on him whenever perplexing problems vexed them," assuring them that the door to his palatial home at 1615 Rhode Island Avenue "would always be open to them." No longer the nation's forester, Pinchot was positioning himself as a power behind the throne. Any new chief would have to contend with the old (Washington Star, 1910, p. 1, 10).

How fortuitous, then, that the man Taft selected as the second chief of the Forest Service was one of Pinchot's oldest friends and closest colleagues, Harry Graves, then Dean of the Forestry School at Yale. Actually, there was nothing fortuitous about his selection--Pinchot arranged it. Even as he bid an emotional farewell to the assembled throng at the Service's headquarters, he and his associates, most especially Herbert A. Smith, director of the agency's public relations, maneuvered to insure the selection of one who shared Pinchot's sense of the Forest Service's professional mission and political perspective. This was essential, Pinchot believed, for whomever "guided the future of the Forest Service...would have no small influence on the future of the great [conservation] cause the Service had embodied and led" (Pinchot, 1998, p. 459).

Worried that President Taft would select an outsider whom he could not control, and hearing rumors that A. P. Davis of the Reclamation Bureau was under serious consideration as Pinchot's replacement, Pinchot and Smith embarked on what they considered a "benevolent conspiracy" to change the President's mind. Smith fired off a series of telegrams, one to Graves urging him to consider the appointment (if offered), and another to Lee McClung, then Taft's Secretary of the Treasury but formerly Treasurer of Yale, requesting that he persuade Anson Stokes Phelps, Yale's Secretary, to slip Graves' name before Taft, yet another son of Eli. This complicated series of contacts within an old-boy network produced the outcome Pinchot and Smith desired: Davis never interviewed with Taft, A. F. Potter, the acting Chief of the Forest Service, did, but withdrew in favor of Graves; on January 12th, a mere five days after Pinchot had been dismissed, the dean of the school of forestry that the Pinchot family had helped establish became the Chief of the USFS, the agency that Gifford Pinchot had created. Unknowingly had Taft done Pinchot's bidding, one good reason why Graves' appointment gave the fired forester such a sense of "keen satisfaction" (Smith, 1941; Pinchot, 1998).

This episode satisfies in another sense, serving as a bellwether for the complex relationship that thereafter would unfold between Pinchot and the Forest Service. This would not be the last time, for example, that the agency, or certain members of it, would call upon him to flex his political muscle, or draw upon his well-developed capacity for political intrigue to protect the Forest Service from White House machinations; Taft was but the first of a long line of presidents who would discover just how effective this strategy could

be. But this incident was also a mark of Pinchot's ongoing presumption of preeminence, of his willingness to employ external forces to mold the internal character of the Forest Service, thereby securing the ends he desired. He was still in the game, his presence at once clarifying and complicating the world in which the service, and especially its chiefs, operated (Miller,1994).

His would not be an every day presence. In the years following his 1910 dismissal, he spent considerable energy and capital on an ever increasing number of political campaigns, beginning with Theodore Roosevelt's comeback bid in 1912, and then escalating with his own attempts to secure state and national offices in and from Pennsylvania; in the early '20s he was appointed Commissioner of that state's forestry department, the first of many political posts he would seek; although Pinchot never won a coveted seat in the U.S. Senate, he twice served four-year terms as the Keystone State's governor, in 1922 and then in 1930. The intense pressures of governing one of the nation's largest and most populous states necessarily limited his capacity to insert himself into the quotidian operations, political decisions, or professional concerns of the Forest Service. He had moved on.

But that did not mean he could not be called back, even on the seemingly most minor of issues. During the second week of January, 1914, for instance, while ostensibly huddling with Pinchot about the Forest Service's proposed response to a grazing bill that was due for debate during the forthcoming session of Congress, Graves asked him for advice on a troubling personnel matter. A "Mrs. Pryor," a member of the Washington staff, had complained about her "working conditions." Pinchot immediately interviewed her, was persuaded that she had been "treated unjustly," and recognized that this situation contained some unspecified political fallout: "The FS is in real danger because she has told Sen. [John Sharp] Williams [D-Miss.] and will tell others," he jotted down in his diary. What bothered Pinchot most was that when he informed Graves of this complication, the chief did not grasp its significance: "HSG does not seem to get the point." Pinchot did, however, and the next day had another meeting with Graves in which he laid out his worries, conferred again with Mrs. Pryor, apparently smoothing over her concerns, and then deflected what he called "a very determined" Senator Williams. There was nothing he would not do to stave off threats to the integrity of the Forest Service (Pinchot, 1914).

Even if that meant saving it from itself: Pinchot's response to Graves' hesitant handling of the Williams episode was of a piece with his perception that the second chief was waffling on a larger issue--that of the appropriate relationship between the Forest Service and the lumber industry. Unlike Pinchot, who distrusted industry and believed the agency should be its sharpest critic, Graves preferred to seek a middle ground with opposing

forces. Encouraged by his own proclivities, and by his more accommodationist staff, especially William B. Greeley, who oversaw the agency's timber management programs, Graves had begun to map out a closer alliance between public forestry and private lumbering interests. A series of joint studies of the lumber situation in the United States, launched in cooperation with the Bureau of Corporations (and its successor the Federal Trade Commission), and industry representatives, concluded that private timber corporations were compelled to strip their forested lands even when timber prices were low, due to ongoing taxation and credit pressures. The Forest Service's response to this situation, Graves and Greeley believed, should be to manage its timber so as not to compete with private cuttings; the public good would best be served by sustaining private interests (Greeley, 1917; Greeley, 1951; Graves, 1919).

Pinchot was shocked. These reports' findings at once were a "whitewash of destructive lumbering" and reined in the Forest Service's capacity to offer independent judgment of industrial production, a quick way, he believed, to compromise the public interest. Although when he had been chief he too had sought cooperative programs between industry and the service, and had sought to encourage the creation of a mutual agenda because of the power that lumbering lobbyists held in Congress, he was now convinced that accommodation meant capitulation. The integrity of the Forest Service lay in the balance: it was time to attack (Greeley, 1951).

The clash came in 1919, when Pinchot and others prodded the Society of American Foresters to assess the situation confronting the American lumber companies. Few could have doubted that SAF's Committee for the Application of Forestry, which Gifford Pinchot chaired and whose membership he helped select, would challenge the Forest Service's research, results, and recommendations. Any doubts remaining were dispelled when the report was published in the December 1919 number of the Journal of Forestry: the title of the lead piece, Pinchot's "The Lines are Drawn," made it clear that a battle had been joined against the "continued misuse of forest lands privately owned." The widespread and "destructive lumbering on private timberlands is working a grave injury to the public interest and must be stopped," he proclaimed, but that would only occur if foresters joined together and fought against these depredations. "I use the word fight," the chairman trumpeted, "because I mean precisely that. Forest devastation will not be solved through persuasion, a method that has been thoroughly tried out for the past twenty years and has failed utterly." New tactics must be employed to insure that "private owners of forest land," who are "so constituted and inspired that a change from within is not to be expected," are "compelled to manage their properties in harmony with the public good." That would only come from "[p]ressure from without, in the form of public sentiment, crystallized in

compulsory public regulation." This alone "promises adequate results," he observed, an observation that carried with it a clarion call: with the "field cleared for action and the lines...plainly drawn," he who is "not for forestry is against it. The choice lies between the convenience of the lumbermen and the public good" (Pinchot, 1919, p. 901-02).

It was Graves' turn to be shocked. Not because he fundamentally disagreed with Pinchot--by 1919, he too had realized that lumber interests talked more about cooperation than they practiced it; he too thought that some regulation was necessary, though stressed state rather than federal control. No, what bothered Graves was that the committee appeared to be pursuing what he labeled a "socialistic" agenda and that Pinchot, in undertaking "this scheme of his own," was attempting to supplant Graves and "become the hero in saving the forests of the country." Confirmation of the continuing regard with which Pinchot was held emerged in a straw vote that the SAF held in response to the Pinchot committee's findings: two-thirds affirmed their support of some form of national regulation of private lumber practices. Pinchot, it seemed, continued to do more to articulate and set the agenda of American forestry than did his successor (Steen, 1976, p. 178).

This was a difficult situation at best: these once-close friends now communicated, when they did, through third parties. It would be through this indirect means that Pinchot learned in March, 1920 that Graves, worn down by illness and worn out by the politics of his job, had resigned as Chief. Freed from Pinchot's shadow, he no longer had to fear, as apparently he had for several years, that his "enemy" was poised to rebuke him for cozying up to the lumber industry. That fear would be all-too publicly realized during the eight-year term of Graves' assistant, William B. Greeley, who became the third Chief of the Forest Service in April, 1920 (Steen, 1976, p. 143).

## **Transition Game**

Years later, and with the prompting of an interviewer, Greeley's widow was pained to recall that her husband's accomplishments had gone unacknowledged in Gifford Pinchot's autobiography, Breaking New Ground (1946): "Mr. Pinchot just had no use for Billy that was all," she remembered; to him, "Billy was a traitor." Although there was no reason for Pinchot to have included Greeley in his memoirs--Breaking New Ground concluded with Pinchot's dismissal from the Forest Service in 1910, several years before Greeley became a central player in agency matters. Had Pinchot written the planned second volume, Greeley would have been the prime target of his scorn, pummeled as was the despised William Howard Taft in the first volume (Greeley, 1960).

Certainly the two men were acutely aware of each other's perspectives throughout the 1920s, differing stances that consistently drew them into public confrontations of a kind and intensity that had not occurred between Pinchot and Graves. This struggle, whether splashed across the pages of the Journal of Forestry or aired in congressional hearings, turned on different constructions of the Forest Service's mission, its professional ideals, social significance, and political agenda. As Greeley put it: Pinchot "saw an industry so blindly wedded to fast and destructive exploitation that it would not change. I saw a forest economy overburdened by cheap raw material. Mr. Pinchot saw a willful industry. I saw a sick industry." And when they fought over these positions, they gave no quarter, making them more alike than they might have been willing to admit (Greeley, 1951, p. 118).

The two clashed even before Greeley had replaced Graves, first over a 1916 report Greeley had authored on the economic troubles underlying the lumber industry, which Graves supported and Pinchot denounced; with that, Greeley noted proudly, "I lost caste in the temple of conservation on Rhode Island Avenue." More sustained were their disagreements in 1919 over the need for federal oversight of private lumbering activities. When, in the Journal of Forestry, Pinchot had asserted that only strict national regulation would halt destructive lumbering, Greeley promptly rebuked him: not only were Pinchot's proposals of doubtful constitutionality, they were in direct conflict with the powers and inclinations of the states, a situation that would "seriously confuse and hamper our national development of forestry." The states instead must be recognized, he wrote, as "the proper agency to deal with private lands within their borders"; any other approach was undemocratic, un-American. That political principle was reinforced by another concerning foresters' social concerns: they had no business involving themselves in what he called "purely industrial conditions," that is in the relations between employers and employees. "Let us stick to the subjects in which, as foresters, we can claim some degree of expert knowledge," he concluded, exhausting, for instance, "every opportunity for education, for showing the forest owners that the arrest of denudation is to their benefit." By this approach would the profession avoid what Pinchot had thought axiomatic, "a 'fight' between the public and the timber owners" (Greeley, 1951, p. 118; Greeley, 1920, p. 103-05).

Greeley knew he could not avoid a brawl with Pinchot and the old chief felt no restraint in roughing up the new one. In a series of rebuttals published in the Journal of Forestry, one just before Greeley assumed his new post and one just after, Pinchot dismissed the claims for state control, observing that this form of management would result in more litigation and conflict than would national regulation. Federal control alone would counteract the power special interests would exert in those states that witnessed the greatest devastation. "It would be only necessary for the lumber interests...to prevent the passage



of bills in three or four great lumber states in order to effectually cripple the whole plan of State control." Pinchot, who had long battled against such interests, reminded his readers that what had kept the National Forests inviolate (and the Forest Service independent) was "that both were free from State control," free from the meddling of the western states' timbermen. They were "saved in Congress by the support of the Central and Eastern states," he asserted, the very "forces which the State control plan now proposes to eliminate from the critical points in the fight" to regulate private land exploitation. "The problem is National, and the Nation alone is strong and steady enough to handle it" (Pinchot, 1920, p. 106-09; Pinchot, 1920B, p. 441-447).

Pinchot's political analysis had professional consequences, which he made certain to emphasize in his second rejoinder: "Where We Stand." Its title, set in the first person plural, assumed a direct correspondence between where Pinchot, and foresters in general, stood. As he asserted his claim to institutional memory, he positioned himself as the keeper of the flame, the definer of faith--**he** was "we." By this definition was Greeley an interloper, a flack for corporate interests who sought to damage the Forest Service's integrity and its commitment to the public good (Pinchot, 1919).

This point was more subtly made in an obituary of Eugene S. Bruce that Pinchot co-authored in the same number of the Journal of Forestry in which "Where We Stand" appeared. Bruce, a lumberman in the Adirondacks when Pinchot met him in the late-nineteenth century, "abandoned a career rich in promise," and at a "real sacrifice to his own financial future" to join with "a little band of foresters in Washington filled with enthusiasm but void of experience." Driven by a "clear vision of [the] better handling of the forests which he loved," he had a "grim determination to see this better handling realized," and with "the zeal of a new convert to a great cause," fought unsparingly for his principles. The memory of this lumberman who had become a forester was honored in ways that Pinchot would never grant to a forester who acted like a lumberman, a dismissal that surely William Greeley, now in his first month as the new chief, recognized, and his widow forty years later could still recall (Graves, et al., 1920).

The third Chief was not Dead On Arrival. He proved an adept opponent, a skilled political player who challenged Pinchot's claims to define the profession, and proclaimed his own with considerable success. In the process, he reshaped public foresters' sense of their duties, especially in the establishment of a cooperative relationship with the timber industry. With Pinchot, there would be no reconciliation.

This was particularly clear in Greeley's deft handling of a series of legislative

initiatives that surfaced in response to the findings of the SAF Committee for the Application of Forestry. In response to Pinchot-inspired legislation, specifically several versions of the so-called Capper Bill that was designed to enact federal controls over timber cutting on private lands, Greeley encouraged industry executives to form the National Forestry Program Committee, then cooperated quietly with its efforts to counter Pinchot's congressional supporters; one aspect of this included the drafting of a bill that Graves gave to lumber lobbyists, and who dropped it into the legislative hopper. Pinchot was not the only one who knew how to manipulate the political process to his advantage (Steen, 1976, p. 179-181).

Greeley's legislative rebuttal, the Snell bill, named for its sponsor, Representative Bertrand Snell of New York, advocated state control of lumbering practices, and, due to its origins, quickly gained unanimous industry support. Sparks flew at public hearings in Washington, when Greeley and Pinchot predictably dismissed one another's position. There was one direct interchange between them that would later trouble Greeley's widow. After the two men had offered contrary testimony, she recalled, a member of the committee asked Pinchot "how does it happen that this young successor of yours believes this way?", to which Pinchot reportedly replied, "'Oh well, he's young,' or something to the effect that the lumbermen had 'pulled the wool over his eyes.'" As usual Pinchot had the last word (Greeley, 1951, p. 104-05; Greeley, 1960).

But Greeley had the last laugh. When the Capper Bill failed to reach the Senate floor, and the Snell bill, which did not have a Senate counterpart, languished in the House, a successor was drawn up, the Clarke-McNary Act. It secured bicameral sponsorship, and the issue of control over private lumbering flared anew, with a significant difference. This time Greeley stacked congressional hearings with witnesses friendly to his position on state control. The opposition never mounted serious resistance. By June 1924, the act had swept through Congress, and as Greeley stood in a cloakroom listening to the final vote he exulted: "it was a great thrill to be in on the kill--even if the victory was bloodless." That it was so, he knew, was at least in part due to the fact that Pinchot had been embroiled in a tight campaign for Governor of Pennsylvania; although he had dismissed the Clarke-McNary Act as a violation of the public trust, and a gift to the lumber interests, his absence meant there was, Greeley beamed, "no fight against the new and popular proposal from the West." His characterization of the geographical source of support for Clarke-McNary neatly confirmed Pinchot's deep-seated fears that the influence of western lumbermen now dominated the Forest Service (Greeley, 1951).

This dominance would have ramifications for the internal culture of the agency: Greeley's perspectives not only held sway, other voices were

correspondingly muted. The most striking example of this was Raphael Zon. The occasional (and fiery) editor of the Journal of Forestry was a close associate of Pinchot's, and was eased out of the Washington office, ending up at the Lake States Forest Experiment Station in St. Paul, Minnesota. He had confronted Greeley once too often in staff meetings, and though he reported that his exile was "voluntary," it had been "suggested by Greeley." With the Journal in friendlier hands, and the Society of American Foresters hewing to the non-regulatory line of the Greeley-led Forest Service, Pinchotites understandably felt isolated and of little consequence. The agency, one of them commented, was replete with Greeley "yes-men." To escape marginalization, some even changed their stripes, such as Herbert Smith, a defection that particularly hurt Pinchot. His pain indeed was magnified by the fact that he had been instrumental in the creation of the central elements in its organization, in its schools and lead journal, in its professional associations and governmental agency. Now, however, his continued pleas for a more socially responsible, politically engaged forestry fell on deaf ears. By the late-1920s, no longer a member of the American Forestry Association because of its capitulation to industrial interests, rarely asked to write for professional forestry publications, Pinchot felt cut off from the world he had helped create; he even stopped attending meetings of the Society of American Foresters. What Harry Graves had never been able to accomplish, William B. Greeley had: the founder had been uprooted (Schmaltz, 1980; Miller, 1994).

But not entirely so. Despite these professional setbacks, and despite his close focus on the complex legislative agenda that confronted him in Harrisburg, Pinchot nonetheless kept a sharp eye on the situation in Washington; slapping out at Greeley's newly won preeminence whenever he had an opportunity. In 1926, for instance, he monitored a Greeley-sponsored grazing bill, and schemed with Harry Graves on how best to attack it when it came before the House Committee on Agriculture. "Personally, I dislike the bill very greatly in certain important respects," Pinchot wrote Graves, who had returned to his post as Dean of the Yale School of Forestry, but "we can thrash that out when it gets before the Committee," before, that is, the two former Chiefs would testify against their successor's initiative. Pinchot gave Greeley fair warning of his opposition and forthcoming testimony, informing him that the grazing bill was "defective" in its specifics "but especially in this--that it is obviously written from the point of view of protecting the special interests of a special group instead of protecting the interests of the general public." Such accommodation was galling: "I hope most earnestly that you will not allow any bill of which this can properly be said, as it can of this bill in question, to be introduced in Congress with the approval of the Forest Service...." Once more Greeley had failed to uphold what Pinchot believed to be the agency's high ideals (Pinchot, 1926a; Pinchot, 1926b).

Hoping to resuscitate a flagging opposition, Pinchot, after completing his first term as Pennsylvania's governor in January 1927, once more turned his attention to the politics of public forestry. His first move was to challenge Greeley's perspectives by writing a stinging preface to, and financing the publication and distribution of, George P. Ahern's Deforested America (1928), a savage critique of the lumber industry's environmental depredations. As Pinchot understood it, the "Lumber industry is spending millions of dollars to forestall or delay the public control of lumbering, which is the only measure capable of putting an end to forest devastation in America. It is trying to fool the American people into believing that [it] is regulating itself," he concluded. "That is not true, and Major Ahern has proved it beyond question" (Ahern, 1928).

Even friends wondered just how effective raising these charges would be: from distant St. Paul, Zon roared his approval--"Bravo! At least there are two militant voices raised against the camouflage spread about the practice of forestry by private timber land owners"--but he doubted their angry voices would become anything but a "a cry in the wilderness." The "forest profession," Zon assumed, had "completely surrendered to the hegemony of the National Lumber Manufacturers' Association." Undaunted, Pinchot and Ahern hoped to encourage the spread of their message through the sponsorship of an essay contest for professional foresters (Pinchot was to foot the grand prize of \$1,000); the guidelines required submissions to explore "the actual forest situation in the U.S." and to offer practical remedies. The winners would be announced at the annual meetings of the Society of American Foresters, the papers themselves would be read before the assembled professionals, and later published in the Journal of Forestry, assuring maximum exposure. The contest's goal was to nurture and raise critical voices against the reigning discourse that proclaimed the unmitigated success of Greeley-promoted cooperation between private and public forestry. These counter claims, Pinchot expected, would check the self-congratulatory posture of the contemporary leadership of the American forestry movement (Zon, 1928; Ahern, 1928; Pinchot, 1929; Zon, 1929).

How fitting, that Greeley selected this moment to submit his resignation as chief of the Forest Service, effective in late-April 1928, clearing the way for him to become executive secretary of West Coast Lumbermen's Association, headquartered in Seattle. Nothing could more perfectly symbolize Greeley's long-held allegiance to the needs of the lumbering interests, his critics concluded; by departing the Forest Service, he was going home. About Greeley's years as chief, Pinchot was emphatic: his administration had been "pitiful." With his "malign influence" removed, "the foresters [are] returning to what they had known all along was the right point of view." A self-satisfied claim, to be sure, and a bit of wishful thinking, too, but Pinchot had reason to

hope that the profession now would be more amenable to his conception of the tasks that lay before it. After all, Greeley's successor, R.Y. Stuart, had worked in Pennsylvania's Department of Forestry while Pinchot had been governor, a tie that gave Pinchot and his coterie greater freedom to express their opinions, to feel that they mattered. Pinchot reactivated his membership in the important Washington chapter of the Society of American Foresters, whose meeting he had avoided during the Greeley years. There and elsewhere, he once again pressed the case of national regulation of private forestry practices. His position did not emerge as a recommendation in A National Plan for American Forestry (1933), which Stuart believed to be the major accomplishment of his tenure as chief, but it was aired throughout the document, as were calls for significant increases in the amount of public ownership and management of forested lands. This recommitment to a widening role for the Forest Service, reassertion of its proper place in the making and execution of public policy, brought Pinchot considerable joy. As he wrote in an open letter to his professional colleagues, "the time is ripe for a great advance in forestry in America," and he urged that the SAF now reject the "counsels of overcaution, inaction, and delay, and turn to the aggressive pursuit of clear cut objectives" that would put "an end to forest devastation" (Pinchot, 1928; Williams, 1989, McGeary, 1960, p. 405-06).

Of primary concern was "public control of the axe," he reaffirmed; it is "our central problem." He was understandably delighted when this problem received even closer scrutiny following the elevation of Ferdinand Silcox to chief in 1933, following Stuart's tragic tumble out his 7<sup>th</sup>-floor office window at the Forest Service headquarters in Washington, D.C. Having worked in both public and, most recently, private forestry, Silcox had retained the ideals of public service, and was thus untainted by the retrogressive politics of industry. He was a liberal forester whom the old chief quickly embraced. That Silcox was no Greeley was manifest in the crusading tone and blunt message of his keynote address to the 1935 annual meeting of the SAF. In identifying a "thrilling frontier where men battle for yet disputed principles," he called upon his peers to join in this struggle of ideas, a struggle that echoed Pinchot's conception of forestry's social obligation and its anti-industry perspective. Since "the primary objective of forestry is to keep forest land continuously productive," Silcox declared, supervision of private forestry practices no longer could be left in the hands of industry. "Public control" and regulation must "take precedence over private profit," words that incensed lumber lobbyist William Greeley but which Pinchot greeted with evident relief. Under Silcox's direction, he wrote, the Forest Service would again become "the aggressive agent and advocate of the public good, and not the humble little brother of the lumbermen." Not since 1910 had the agency assumed such a principled and combative posture; not in 20 years had it been in such good hands. Comforted and reinvigorated, Pinchot felt certain that this transition

would herald a renewed integration between himself and the agency he had brought to life. Characteristically, he cast this harmonic possibility in pugilistic terms, anxiously seeking a chance "to fight side by side with a leader like Silcox"; that, the 70-year old Pinchot confided to Zon, "is a grand prospect" (Silcox, 1935; Pinchot, 1934; Miller, 1996).

### **After Life**

There has never been an ex-chief quite like Gifford Pinchot. None has been as intimately involved in the Forest Service's quotidian organizational matters or as thoroughly engaged in the ongoing struggle to define its mission as he had been during the more than 30 years that followed his 1910 dismissal. Founders, apparently, have privileges. Only his death in 1946 stopped this very long engagement, and even then his supporters such as Raphael Zon continued to fight on in his name, a name that is still invoked to rally support for or opposition to shifts in Forest Service policy. Pinchot remains a totem, a marker of considerable currency, one Jack Ward Thomas also tried to utilize during his short-lived, but energetic attempts to restructure the agency and to sharpen its commitment to the principles of Ecosystem Management. Thomas' goal had been to catapult the Forest Service to the forefront of the late-20th century environmental movement, a position it once held earlier in the century. Being on the cutting edge is "our birthright, our heritage, and our destiny," Thomas asserted. But that avant-garde status could only be reclaimed, he added, if the service recovered what he called "the Pinchot thrust of leadership" (Fry, 1994; Thomas, 1994).

### **Literature Cited**

Ahern, George P. (1928). *Deforested America*. Washington: privately published.

Fry, John. (1994). The New Chief. *Snow Country*. May/June, 4-7.

Graves, Henry S. (1919). A Policy of Forestry for the Nation. *Journal of Forestry*. 17, 901-910.

Graves, Henry S, Pinchot, Gifford, & Zon, Raphael. (1920). Eugene Sewell Bruce. *Journal of Forestry*. 18, 439-440.

Greeley, William B. (1917). *Some Public and Economic Aspects of the Lumber Industry*. USDA Report no. 14.

Greeley, William B. (1920). Self Government in Forestry. *Journal of Forestry*.

18, 103-105.

Greeley, William B. (1951). *Forests and Men*. Garden City: Doubleday.

Greeley, Mrs. William B. (1960). Oral History Interview, June 28. Forest History Society, Durham, N. C.

McGeary, Nelson. (1960). *Gifford Pinchot: Forester-Politician*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Miller, Char. (1994). Sawdust Memories: Gifford Pinchot and the Making of Forest Service History. *Journal of Forestry*. 92, 8-12.

Miller, Char. (1996). A Cautionary Tale: Reflections on the Reinvention of the Forest Service. *Journal of Forestry*. 94, 6-11.

*New York Times*. (1993a). 27 October, A20.

*New York Times*. (1993b). 29 October, A19.

*New York Times*. (1993c). 18 November, B19.

Penick, James I. (1968). *Progressive Politics and Conservation: The Ballinger-Pinchot Affair* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Pinchot, Gifford. (1909). Forestry on Private Lands. *Conservation of Natural Resources, The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*. May, 8-11.

Pinchot, Gifford. (1910). Statement of Gifford Pinchot on leaving the Forest Service, 13 January. Harry Slattery Papers, Duke University.

Pinchot, Gifford. (1914). Diary, January 8-9. G. Pinchot Papers, Library of Congress.

Pinchot, Gifford. (1919). The Lines are Drawn. *Journal of Forestry*. 17, 901-902.

Pinchot, Gifford. (1920a). National or State Control of Forest Devastation. *Journal of Forestry*. 18, 106-109.

Pinchot, Gifford. (1920b). Where We Stand. *Journal of Forestry*. 18, 441-447.

Pinchot, Gifford. (1926a). Letter to Henry S. Graves, March 24. Pinchot

Papers, Library of Congress.

Pinchot, Gifford. (1926b). Letter to William B. Greeley, March 16. Pinchot Papers, Library of Congress.

Pinchot, Gifford. (1928a). Letter to Henry S. Graves, November 30. Pinchot Papers, Library of Congress.

Pinchot, Gifford. (1928b). Letter to Raphael Zon, December 26. Pinchot Papers, Library of Congress.

Pinchot, Gifford. (1929). Letter to Raphael Zon, November 15. Raphael Zon Papers, Minnesota Historical Society.

Pinchot, Gifford. (1931). Letter to Society of American Foresters. *Journal of Forestry*. 29, 628-29.

Pinchot, Gifford. (1934a). Letter to Raphael Zon, June 26. Pinchot Papers, Library of Congress.

Pinchot, Gifford. (1934b). Letter to Raphael Zon, October 3. Pinchot Papers, Library of Congress.

Pinchot, Gifford. (1998). *Breaking New Ground*. Fourth Edition. Washington, D.C.: Island Press.

Schmaltz, Norman J. (1980). Raphael Zon: Forest Researcher. *Journal of Forest History*. 24, 24-39.

Silcox, Ferdinand. (1935). *Journal of Forestry*. 33, 198-204

Smith, Herbert A. (1941). Memorandum Re: Graves' Appointment as Forester," September 11. Gifford Pinchot Papers, The Library of Congress.

Steen, Harold K. (1976). *The U.S. Forest Service: A History* Seattle: University of Washington Press.

Thomas, Jack Ward. (1994). This Time, Our Moment in History, Our Future. Unpublished speech, delivered to the Forest Service Leadership Meeting, 20-23 June.

*Washington Star*. (1910). 10 January, 1, 10.



*Washington Post*. (1910). 10 January, 1.

Williams, Michael. (1989). *Americans and their Forests: A Historical Geography*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Zon, Raphael. (1928). Letter to Pinchot, December 22. Raphael Zon Papers. Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul, MN.

Zon, Raphael. (1929). Letter to Gifford Pinchot, November 26. Pinchot Papers, Library of Congress.

.....

Char Miller <[fmiller@trinity.edu](mailto:fmiller@trinity.edu)>, Professor and Chair, History Department, Trinity University, San Antonio, Texas 78212, USA.