

## DEMONSTRATION FORESTS: CONCEPTS AND APPLICATION

by

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### INTRODUCTION

In the past decade, we have witnessed the growing public concern over the environment and its use or, as in some instances, its misuse. While the forestry profession has always been concerned with the environment, too often it has failed to either recognize or account for both the direct and indirect effects of its management on the total land resource. There are numerous examples where the profession has badly misjudged or underestimated this public concern and awareness for the environment. For instance, foresters in North America have come under attack from all quarters (including from within the profession) over the environmental implications of clearcutting. Closer to home, there has been a public outcry in the Eastern States over the practice of converting native eucalypt forest to softwoods.

In Western Australia, the Forests Department has so far escaped any serious public criticism over its land-use management. But it is only a question of time before it too is subjected to closer scrutiny and possible criticism by the public. Like it or not, the Department must accept the fact that we are now in an era when anything and everything it does is open to question, misrepresentation and criticism from outside sources.

What the Department must do, and do as soon as possible, is to get the public on its side; in short, educate them to what, when, where, how and why it does things. Other forestry organisations throughout the world have or are learning this lesson the hard way.

### CONCEPTS AND APPLICATION

There are numerous methods available for educating the public, some of which the Department is using (e.g. Extension Branch services, publications such as "Forest Focus, etc.). One effective and relatively inexpensive

educational technique is the demonstration forest. As the name suggests, a demonstration forest is an interpretive forest block or unit that displays the core element of forest land management.

The concept of a demonstration forest is not a new one. A number of private forestry organisations in North America have set up demonstration forests to justify their management practices to the public as well as to satisfy recreational use pressures. These organisations have found that the demonstration forest is not only necessary, but profitable in the long term.

A successful demonstration forest should be planned to cater for both active and passive forms of recreation while presenting the forest management story in a logical, straightforward manner. This can be accomplished by complementing existing recreational facilities (e.g. picnic areas) with scenic drives, hiking tracks and shorter self-guiding nature trails to develop a comprehensive network of development. Throughout this unit, forest management can be featured with the aid of informative signs, brochures and pamphlets. Some of the major features that could be explained or demonstrated are as follows:

1. Jarrah or Karri life cycle
2. Jarrah dieback
3. Economic and biological considerations of forest management
4. Plant ecology
5. Prescribed burning
6. Forest fauna - species and habitat requirements
7. Catchment management
8. Bauxite mining and forest geology
9. Pine plantation programme
10. Forest recreation

The key element in presentation is simplicity; that is, signs and pamphlets must be written in the layman's language. For example, one private forestry organisation in the south-eastern U.S. has a sign at one of their demonstration forest plantations which expresses softwood growth rates in terms of the number of home units that can be constructed from the periodic increment. As another example, a public land management agency in the western U.S. has demonstrated the benefits of thinning by incorporating cross sections of a thinned and unthinned stem in a sign depicting the logic behind this management practice. Presentations made in this manner will obviously make a much greater impact on the public than will more involved, technical explanations.

The demonstration forest concept, if it is adopted, need not be limited to one area. A system of such units in several forest types (i.e. Jarrah, Karri, Tuart, Wandoo, etc.) could be readily and effectively incorporated into the existing system of intensive management units. Rather than try to conceal forest operations (this has been tried in North America with a notable lack of success), it would seem better to display our management openly. If, by so doing, our management is questioned or criticized, then we are in a much stronger position to answer this criticism.

Forestry is not something to be hidden or ashamed of, although it has been treated this way to some extent by the profession itself. By taking the offensive and educating the public, we will avoid a great deal of criticism. However, if we choose to ignore the public and are put on the defensive, then any answers to criticism may end up sounding more like excuses than sound justifications.