

From Sustainable Forestry to Resilient Forestry

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The reality of global climate change is upon us. Pictures of its devastating impacts are streaming into our collective consciousness from across the globe. Hopefully the world's governments and religions will heed the call and work to dramatically reduce carbon emissions. This is a global task though we all have a personal role in it.

The fact of the matter is that rapid ecological change is now upon the land. By land, we mean water, soil, plants, animals including humans, and their interactions. While the world's governments and religions are tackling the emissions issues, we locals must work on concurrent local efforts to understand and preserve the resilience of local land. This cannot and will not be accomplished from the top down. We locals must become the new aboriginals.

For conservationists and land users of all stripes, understanding and preserving the capacity of the land to be resilient is now job one. Being sustainable is likely yesterday's story.

Webster's tells us that *sustainable* means "of, relating to, or being a method of harvesting or using a resource so that the resource is not depleted or permanently damaged." Though important, sustainable forestry is not up to the task of dealing with rapid change.

Webster defines *resilient* as "tending to recover from or adjust easily to change." In a period of rapid ecological change, resilience is now an essential characteristic of land.

Aldo Leopold once wrote that "health is the capacity of the land for self-renewal." It would appear that resilience is "the capacity of the land for self-renewal" in the face of uncharted ecological change.

Leopold also said that "conservation is our effort to understand and preserve" the land's capacity for self-renewal. It is important to recognize that we do not make forests healthy or resilient. Our job as conservationists is to understand how forests develop and maintain health and resilience. Our role as humans is to be their partners in mutually beneficial relationships.

The building blocks of a forest's resilience are water, soil, plants, and animals. Two of these – soil and plants – are either publicly- or privately-held. In other words, they are 'enclosed' and 'owned'. They are, in a word, property.

The other two building blocks are water and animals in natural settings. They are generally unenclosed and are free to flow and to roam, fly, or crawl. They do not recognize boundaries. They are not owned and they are not property. They are part of "the commons".

As we move our attention from sustainable forestry to resilient forestry, we will have a lot of housekeeping and changing to do. One action item will be to see how well we are dealing with “the commons” including flowing waters and roaming critters.

There will be plenty of work for everyone. There will also be many opportunities for new players and new roles for existing ones. What a time to be alive and part of the action!