

old forests NEW MANAGEMENT

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NEW WAYS TO SUSTAIN OLD FORESTS

Researchers in Australia and around the world are making progress in understanding old growth forests – but ultimately it's up to the public and managers to decide how much to protect and how to conserve it.

That's the view of Dr Tom Spies of the US Forest Service, a scientist long familiar with old growth forests and the public debate surrounding them in Australia and the United States.

“We are making good progress in both countries in recognising the non-timber values of old growth, defining old growth, finding ways to protect existing old stands and developing new silvicultural systems that can retain or create biodiversity in managed forests.

“However there's been much less progress at reaching social consensus on how much to protect and how to move from forest economies dependent on old-growth to ones based on sustainable management of native and non-native forests,” he says.

Despite this, Dr Spies argues that harvesting timber and preserving old growth forests can go hand-in-hand, if the goal is to preserve biodiversity across the entire landscape while providing revenue from wood products.

Conserving old growth in managed forest landscapes has three main aims, he says:

- 1) to protect a significant part of the remaining older forest using landscape design principles
- 2) to retain structural complexity across the forest using new silvicultural methods in managed coupes which may make up a large part of the total landscape
- 3) to restore older forest to places where it has been lost due to logging or fire.

“The public may only see the old growth issue in terms of the first objective, but if your aim is to retain biodiversity across the whole landscape, the other two approaches are just as important – and this needs to be made more visible to the public,” Dr Spies adds.

“Conserving old growth forests and features such as large hollow-bearing trees using reserves, coupes managed with retention silviculture, and restoration can help to maintain



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native biodiversity, as well as providing ecosystem services such as carbon storage and recreation opportunities.”

To achieve this requires landscape-level planning to decide on goals, placement of reserves, management patterns, coupe-level silvicultural practices, and the restoration of fire regimes that will retain plant and animal species and structural diversity in the forest.

Most important, he says, is engaging forest managers, scientists and the public in dialogue about forest management and conservation, so there is wider appreciation of both goals and the value of the new forestry practices.

However Dr Spies concedes that approaches that include active management are unlikely to satisfy all environmentalists, even though the overall goal may be species conservation across whole landscapes.

“There are no easy answers to the old growth issue because there are so many different perspectives on it. Our relationships with forests and our knowledge of these forests will continue to change. The forests themselves will change from disturbance and climate change. Given the ecological and social dynamics we will probably never completely “solve” the problem.

“And given the uncertainties about our knowledge and the future, we must continue to learn and adapt through monitoring and management experiments.”

The Old Forests, New Management Sir Mark Oliphant Conference is at Hobart’s Hotel Grand Chancellor. It features more than 160 scientific presentations and papers about advanced temperate forest management.

The conference is hosted by the CRC for Forestry, Forestry Tasmania and the International Union of Forest Research Organisations and sponsored by the Department of Innovation, Industry, Science and Research (DIISR) under the International Science Linkages Programme, the Australian Academy of Technological Sciences and Engineering and the Australian Government Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry.

Media are welcome to attend and to interview participants.

More information:

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