Identifying the Role of Government in Forest Management

In the early 1600s, when Europeans began settling in North America, one could theoretically travel through the trees from the east coast to the Mississippi River without touching the ground. Ancient forests covered much of the west coast. Although the majority of those forests no longer exist, millions of acres are under the management of the National Forest Service.

Objective:

☑ Explain the history and the role of the National Forest Service.

Key Terms:

forest supervisor
multiple use

The National Forest Service

There are 191 million acres within the national forests of the United States. They are under the control of the United States Department of Agriculture Forest Service. This all began in 1799 when Congress appropriated $200,000 to buy reserves of live oak along the coasts of South Carolina and Georgia in what was the first acquisition of timberland by the federal government. In 1881, the Division of Forestry was created within the Department of Agriculture. In 1901, the name was changed to the Bureau of Forestry, and in 1905, it became the Forest Service. The first chief of the Forest Service was Gifford Pinchot.

FIGURE 1. Gifford Pinchot was the first chief of the Forest Service. (Courtesy, Gerald Williams, U.S. Forest Service)
Congress established the Forest Service to provide quality water and timber for the nation’s benefit. Since its creation, the role of the Forest Service has expanded to the management of national forests for additional multiple uses and benefits. **Multiple use** means managing resources under the best combination of uses to benefit people while ensuring the productivity of the land and protecting the quality of the environment.

**THE ROLE OF THE NATIONAL FOREST SERVICE**

The Forest Service manages public lands, known collectively as the National Forest System, located in 44 states, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands. The lands comprise 8.5 percent of the total land area in the United States. The natural resources on these lands are some of the nation’s greatest assets and have major economic, environmental, and social significance for all Americans. The job of the Forest Service is to manage the forest in a way that allows people to share and enjoy the forest, while conserving the environment for generations to come. The Forest Service accomplishes this task through five main activities:

1. Protection and management of natural resources on National Forest System lands.
2. Research on all aspects of forestry, rangeland management, and forest resource utilization.
3. Community assistance and cooperation with state and local governments, forest industries, and private landowners to help protect and manage non-federal forest and associated range and watershed lands to improve conditions in rural areas.
4. Achieving and supporting an effective workforce that reflects the full range of diversity of the American people.
5. International assistance in formulating policy and coordinating U.S. support for the protection and sound management of the world’s forest resources.
The Forest Service is organized into four basic levels—ranger district, national forest, region, and national level. Each level has a specific role to play in accomplishing the management tasks of the nation’s forest resources.

**Ranger District**

The district ranger and his or her staff may be your first point of contact with the Forest Service. There are more than 600 ranger districts. Each district has a staff of 10 to 100 people. The districts vary in size from 50,000 acres (20,000 hectares) to more than 1 million acres (400,000 hectares). Many on-the-ground activities occur on the ranger districts, including trail construction and maintenance, operation of campgrounds, and management of vegetation and wildlife habitats.

**National Forest**

There are 155 national forests and 20 grasslands. Each forest is composed of several ranger districts. The person in charge of a national forest is called the **forest supervisor**. The district rangers from the districts within a National Forest work for the forest supervisor. The headquarters of a national forest is called the supervisor’s office. This level coordinates activities among districts, allocates the budget, and provides technical support to each district.

**Region**

There are nine regions numbered 1 through 10 (region 7 was eliminated some years ago). The regions are broad geographic areas, usually including several states. The person in charge is called the regional forester. Forest supervisors of the national forests within a region report to the regional forester. The regional office staff coordinates activities between national forests, monitors activities on national forests to ensure quality operations, provides guidance for forest plans, and allocates budgets to the forests.
National Level

The national level is commonly called the Washington Office. The person who oversees the entire Forest Service is called the Chief. The Chief is a federal employee who reports to the Under Secretary for Natural Resources and Environment in the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). The Chief’s staff provides broad policy and direction for the agency, works with the President’s Administration to develop a budget to submit to Congress, provides information to Congress on accomplishments, and monitors activities of the agency.

Summary:

There are 191 million acres within the national forests of the United States that are under the control of the U.S. Department of Agriculture Forest Service. Congress established the Forest Service to provide quality water and timber for the nation’s benefit. Since its creation, the role of the Forest Service has expanded to the management of national forests for additional multiple uses and benefits.

The Forest Service manages public lands located in 44 states, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands. The lands comprise 8.5 percent of the total land area in the United States.

The job of the Forest Service is to manage forests in a way that allows people to share and enjoy the forests, while conserving the environment for generations to come. The Forest Service accomplishes this task through five main activities.

The Forest Service is organized into four basic levels. They are ranger district, national forest, region, and national level.

Checking Your Knowledge:

1. What is the extent of forests managed by the United States Forest Service?
2. What is the role of the United States Forest Service?
3. What is the meaning of multiple use as related to forests?
4. What are five main activities the United States Forest Service follows to fulfill its responsibilities?
5. What are the four levels of organization within the United States Forest Service?
Expanding Your Knowledge:

Contact your nearest Forest Service District. Explain that you are a student and that you want to learn more about the organization of the United States Forest Service and its mission.

Web Links:

U. S. Forest Service History
http://www.foresthistory.org/Research/usfscoll/index.html

United States Forest Service
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_Forest_Service

Meet the Forest Service
http://www.fs.fed.us/aboutus/meetfs.shtml