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Electronic Green Journal

Title

The U.S. Forest Service: A History

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/72n794fv>

Journal

Electronic Green Journal, 1(21)

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Publication Date

2005

DOI

10.5070/G312110601

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Peer reviewed

Review: The U.S. Forest Service: A History

By Harold K. Steen

Reviewed by [Robert D. Hook](#)
University of Idaho, USA

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Harold K. Steen. *The U.S. Forest Service: A History* (centennial ed.).
Durham, NC: Forest History Society; Seattle, University of Washington
Press, 2004. 356 pp. ISBN 0-295-98373-6. US\$25.00

When I first perused this book in 1976, I thought Harold Steen, who currently teaches conservation history at New Mexico State University, had done an excellent job in publishing the administrative side of the U.S. Forest Service. It is unfortunate that, with the exceptions of the photos, it doesn't take into account what has happen to the other levels of the U.S.F.S. However, as Steen says in his original preface, "It is regrettable that this work could include only infrequent references to the routine, daily lives of Forest Service personnel. The mass of available documents forced a focusing on the higher administrative levels and fairly well precluded more than an occasional glance at the real heroes of this story—the ranger and his staff" (p xxxiii).

Today as I re-read the book I find that, although the new preface brings the book up-to-date, I still agree with my original assessment of it. It is an excellent, thoroughly researched and scholarly book. It provides a detailed narrative of the Forest Service history. It is organized chronologically, which provides the reader with an understanding of the problems, controversies, politics, failures, and successes as they occurred. Steen had access to original documents letters, diaries, files, and memoranda on which he based most of the book with only limited use of secondary sources. In the new preface he also made use of interviews with many of the Forest Service Chiefs and relied heavily on secondary sources.

The new preface is a short, precise and well-written addition to the original book. Its purpose was to update the material, and Steen has done that capably. He comments, "Most of the Forest Service's activities [since the original book was published] have not been controversial. ... However, the controversies that captured attention and created perceptions inside and outside of the agency have shaped the profile of the Forest Service since this book was first published, and so are the focus for this preface" (p. x). These controversies include environmental laws, wilderness acts, clear-cutting of forests, even the level of management discretion Congress should leave to U.S.F.S. management. Steen concludes with a discussion of ecosystem management and how the official policy moved from protection only to

include restoration of the ecosystem.

This is a good time to reprint *The U.S. Forest Service: A History*, as the Forest Service will celebrate its centennial in 2005. The book is well-written and easily understood by the layman as well as scholars and others interested in the Forest Service. It includes appendices, notes on sources, and an index. It will make a worthwhile purchase for libraries that collect material in forestry and timber management. The new preface is substantial and will make the book valuable even to those who purchased the original edition.

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