The National Forestry Service, Steward of our Public Lands or Partner to Corporate Interests?

The National Forestry Services is tasked with maintaining our National Forests and public Lands. The Forestry Service was originally developed and funded through the government. Over the years continued budget cuts have forced the Forest service to rely on creative ways to finance their own existence. Since the lands they maintain are for the public, who should decide what is a good or bad public use for these lands? Over the years the land has been used for grazing cattle, resource mining, logging and most recently highly commercialized recreation.

It has been argued that any or all of these uses have caused long-term damage to the land. The Forestry Service is in the position of balancing the public use of these lands for all with the long-term affects of each use. The self-funding position the government has placed on the service has complicated the decision making of the agency forcing them to take a more economic outlook to the use of public lands in order to maintain their own viability, but at what cost? Does this place the agency in a position of neutrality to make decisions based on what’s best for the public in regards to the long-term viability of the land? Are decisions being made for the short term sustainability of the agency at the benefit of corporations instead of preserving the land the agency was created to protect?

Is the development of public lands by corporations seeking economic gain bad for the environment or is the degradation of some lands a public cost we must pay in order to expose more people to nature which in turn will create a greater good for all? The use of public lands for the development of ski areas complicates these decisions further. Is it ethically correct for the Forestry Service to allow use permits for this type of development which promotes use of the public lands but at the detriment of local communities that find themselves in the path of commercial development by the ski area companies which changes the local landscape and communities in what many would argue a purely negative way. Is the growth and development within these mountain communities actually a negative or a detriment if it brings services and business opportunities to these communities which otherwise would not be available to its residents?

I am proposing writing an essay on the use of public land and the ethical implications of the Forestry Service allowing corporations to use and develop parts of public lands. I feel the focus can be either on the public land debate or possibly the impact of the spill over affect of what happens to the local communities due to the Forestry Service allowing the public use of lands. I am researching this topic through the use of the listed resources to support my essay and narrow my focus further.
Readings / References:

“(R)”: Downhill Slide by Hal Clifford

“(R)”: Little Green Lies by Ben Elgin; Business Week October 29, 2007

“(R)”: Going Green, Luxuriously by Lionel Beehner; NYT, December 2, 2007

“(R)”: Resorts Prepare for a Future without Skis by Gisela Williams, NYT, December 2, 2007.

Econ 4545 Website


Keeping Faith with Nature: Ecosystems, Democracy, and America’s Public Lands by Robert B. Keiter

Crossing Open Ground by Barry Lopez

From Conquest to Conservation: Our Public Lands Legacy by Jack E. Williams, Michael P. Dombeck & Christopher A. Wood