

The controversy over clearcutting that erupted in Montana's Bitterroot National Forest in the late 1960s originated with a retired forest supervisor named Guy Brandborg, whose conservative approach to forest management was cast aside during the postwar boom in timber production. He orchestrated a classic confrontation with the Forest Service that had less to do with the visual appearance of the clearcuts than with the disputed aims of public forestry.

A RADICAL IN THE RANKS

G. M. BRANDBORG AND
THE BITTERROOT NATIONAL FOREST

In late August 1971, Senator Gale McGee of Wyoming stood at the head of Took Creek in western Montana's Bitterroot National Forest and viewed a scene he called "the shocker of them all"—a clearcut that encompassed most of the upper slopes of this otherwise undistinguished drainage. Forest Service crews had cut

dozens of evenly spaced terraces into the mountainside to permit mechanical replanting of ponderosa pine seedlings, adding to the visual disturbance. Such logging, McGee told reporter Dale Burk of the *Missoulian*, a small western Montana daily, was "a crime against the land and the public interest." Three months later, Burk's photograph of the scene made the front page of the *New York Times*, vaulting the Bitterroot to prominence in the growing national debate over forest management.¹

At McGee's side in Burk's photo was a tall, solidly built man with a close crop of white hair. He was Guy M. Brandborg, a former Bitterroot Forest supervisor who had retired in 1955 after forty years of service with the agency. "Brandy," as he was known in Montana, had everything to do with a reporter and a senator standing on the raw hillside that day. In 1969 he had urged Dale Burk to look into the timbering that was being done on his old forest, supplying leads to loggers and ranchers who also were disturbed by what they had seen up in the hills. The result was a nine-part series in the *Missoulian* that startled and angered many

in the timber industry and the Forest Service. Burk interviewed longtime Bitterroot Valley residents who railed against practices they felt were silting up streams and irrigation ditches as well as jeopardizing the economic future of the valley. Burk also gave space to Bitterroot Forest personnel, who counseled patience and explained how the clearcuts would soon yield a healthy young forest.² As the agency's defenders and detractors joined the fray, both the Forest Service's leaders and Montana Senator Lee Metcalf sought studies that would defuse the situation. By the end of 1970, however, after Metcalf released a stunning report by a University of Montana faculty committee headed by its forestry school dean, Arnold Bolle, there was no going back to the quiet days of unquestioned agency professionalism.

SHREWD ACTIVIST

A rough-hewn yet astute man who enjoyed leadership roles, Guy Brandborg never shied from promoting his views on conserva-

BY FREDERICK H. SWANSON



DALE A. BURK PHOTO

G. M. Brandborg strides along a terraced clearcut in the West Fork District, Bitterroot National Forest, about 1970. Such logging scenes made sensational copy for visiting reporters.

tion. While he was supervisor of the Bitterroot and for years following his retirement, he urged Montanans to adopt farming and forestry methods that would ensure the land's long-term productivity. By 1958 his work with numerous governmental, educational, and citizens' organizations had earned him the prestigious American Motors Conservation Award. But his hortatory efforts peaked in the last decade of his life, when he wrote mountains of correspondence to politicians, reporters, agency heads, and fellow activists, urging them to return the Forest Service to the principles he had followed while supervisor. Brandborg accompanied reporters such as Gladwin Hill of the *New York Times*, James Risser of the *Des Moines Register*, and James Nathan Miller of the *Reader's Digest* on a circuit of Bitterroot clearcuts, contrasting the agency's high-impact approach with the much more limited selective cutting he had once employed. "He had an uncanny touch with writers," recalled Michael Frome, who credited Brandborg for many of the ideas he used to censure the Forest Service in columns for *American Forests* and *Field & Stream*.³

Brandy's flannel-shirt-and-suspenders appearance did not hurt his credibility with reporters. As a professed "sourdough forester," he lacked the scientific training of most contemporary Forest Service timber staffers, yet he drew on years of field experience to inform his views. He could be abrasive toward those he disagreed with, using his newspaper commentaries to castigate politicians, bureaucrats, and industry leaders whom he believed were selling out the public's forests. Yet he acutely understood

how to bring pressure on those in power, and beginning in 1968 he organized a calculated and persistent campaign that resulted in significant changes in forestry practices throughout the Northern Region of the Forest Service.

Today, the clearcuts in Took Creek support thick stands of forty-foot-tall ponderosa pine, so the Bitterroot's personnel may well feel a sense of vindication for their earlier efforts. The terraced slopes exhibit little erosion, as had been feared, and are frequented by deer and elk. Was the environmentalists' campaign simply a reaction to the visual chaos of clearcutting, as many foresters at the time asserted? Brandborg, for his part, was concerned more about the rapid rate of cutting on the Bitterroot and rarely mentioned aesthetic matters in his many polemics on the subject. His greatest concern was that the Forest Service had deviated from sustained-yield principles as he understood them, and that an inevitable decline in harvests would cause hardship for hundreds of families in the Bitterroot Valley. His critique went beyond the environmental issues that were being raised in the 1960s and 1970s; he was trying to rekindle a decades-old debate over the proper role of the national forests in the economy of nearby rural areas.

A QUEST FOR SOCIAL FORESTRY

Guy Mathew Brandborg (1893–1977) grew up on a farm outside Henning, Minnesota, the son of Charles W. Brandborg, an



DALE A. BURK PHOTO (1970)

Guy M. “Brandy” Brandborg, supervisor of the Bitterroot National Forest from 1935 to 1955 and later a vocal critic of his agency’s timber cutting practices.

agrarian populist who was a leader in the radical Farmers Alliance movement. In 1914 the young Brandborg was hired as a summer laborer with Montana’s Lewis and Clark National Forest, learning to build trails, string telephone lines, and supply fire lookouts in the wild country west of Choteau. His trail companions taught him much about backcountry living, but they also discussed the agency’s crusade against wasteful and monopolistic logging practices. “I sensed something,” he recalled of these discussions. “My God, all they were talking about was Gifford Pinchot and the direction and leadership that he was giving.”⁴

Brandborg attended the ranger training program at the forestry school of Montana State University in Missoula⁵ during the winters of 1915 and 1916, where Pinchot’s doctrines were further inculcated. Following stints as a ranger on the Helena National Forest and as assistant supervisor of the Nezperce National Forest in Idaho, Brandborg received a promotion in 1935 to supervisor of the Bitterroot National Forest. This 1.6-million-acre reserve ranged from foothills cloaked with stately ponderosa pines to the lofty granitic crags of the Bitterroot Range. There he faced the same tasks that occupied most of the region’s foresters: fighting fires, managing grazing, and offering minor amounts of stumpage and cordwood to local users.

The Bitterroot Valley also included extensive timberlands under the control of the Anaconda Copper Mining Company. In 1891 the Company, as it was known, built a sawmill near Hamilton and began logging the valley’s choice ponderosa pine

to supply its mining and smelting operations around Butte. By 1940 less than 200 million board feet (mmbf) of pine remained in large private holdings.⁶ Brandborg’s staff, observing the ongoing depletion, realized that industry would eventually need federal timber. They planned to offer sales under carefully monitored sustained-yield conditions—meaning, to them, that there would be no rapid liquidation of their own mature stands.

From 1921 to 1935 the Bitterroot had sold no more than 2 mmbf per year, plus incidental sales of posts, poles, and firewood. During that period the forest operated under a “limitation of cut” set by the secretary of Agriculture at a somewhat optimistic 66 mmbf. In 1936 Brandborg initiated a survey of timber stand conditions both on and off the forest to determine a more realistic yield, as well as to assess the continued drain from private stocks. This effort culminated in 1941 with a detailed timber management plan, which set the forest’s allowable harvest at 7.5 mmbf of ponderosa pine per year. No limits were fixed for other species, since there was as yet little demand for them. The high country of the Bitterroot and Sapphire mountains, which supported vast stands of lodgepole pine, Douglas-fir, and spruce, would be retained as a protection forest, to serve primarily as undisturbed watershed.⁷

The 1941 plan tackled more than silvicultural needs and harvest levels; it reflected Brandborg’s interest in promoting community stability through control of cutting rates on both private and public land. During this era several Forest Service leaders raised concerns about overcutting on private land, including Forest Service Chiefs Ferdinand Silcox and Earle Clapp, who favored outright regulation of private cutting as part of the New Deal’s industrial recovery program. The Northern Region forester, Major Evan W. Kelley, propounded this theme in a 1938 speech to a meeting of the Ravalli County chamber of commerce in Hamilton, where he called for acquiring the valley’s private holdings so that the Forest Service could manage them for continuous production.⁸ Both he and Brandborg envisioned the Forest Service as the eventual caretaker of almost all of Ravalli County’s remaining forestlands once the Anaconda Company finished logging its holdings, which was expected to take only five more years. “The exploitation philosophy has been the motivating influence governing the time, manner and method of harvesting private owned timber crops,” Brandborg asserted in his forest plan. “It is of paramount importance that such lands be brought under proper management and protection practices at the earliest possible date, preferably under some form of public control and management.”⁹

NEW DEAL CONSERVATION

Brandborg’s timber management plan openly embraced community stability as its primary goal. It directed that timber be made available only to the twenty or so small mills operating in the valley, locking out mills located outside Ravalli County. This local milling requirement amounted to government-sponsored economic planning—not an unusual approach at the time. In a speech he gave to local civic groups, titled “Can We Manage and Conserve Our Forests?” Brandborg tried to enlist support for his controversial ideas. “You could have abundance for this generation but poverty for your children,” he warned, “if the remaining old growth national forest timber were to be cut at the same



COURTESY RAVALLI COUNTY MUSEUM (LG 1.63)

Lumber mill in Burnt Fork drainage, Bitterroot National Forest, 1935. G. M. Brandborg's timber sale policies favored small outfits located within the Bitterroot Valley, to the detriment of larger operators based in nearby Missoula.

rapid rate, and in the same wasteful manner, as the private timber has been cut in the past." His objective was to ensure "permanency and stability of timber supply and its accompanying forest values at the highest level our country can afford. This means abundance for our children and a reasonable supply for this generation."¹⁰ His insistence on maintaining harvests at a relatively constant level would underlie much of his later activism.

Although he had little formal education beyond the tenth grade, Brandborg made an eloquent call for taking a long perspective on local land-use issues. "We Americans have not yet learned to live in the same environment, generation after generation," he observed in his speech. "As individuals we have been able to move on to new land when the old farm wore out. As a nation we have moved on to exploit new frontiers. Whether this generation can be its own doctor and prescribe for its own ills remains a serious question." Referring to the valley's cutover lands, he wrote, "I am firmly of the belief that the quicker you can place the bulk of these young growth lands in national forest status, the more certainly and quickly you will build back these community values on them."

SHIFTING PRIORITIES

Following World War II, the Forest Service's timber management division embarked on an accelerated sales program to meet a projected boom in home construction. The regional forester in Missoula, P. D. Hanson, submitted upward revisions in the annual

allowable cut for each of the forests under his jurisdiction, citing "letters from the Chief urging the greatest possible production of timber, especially for housing." The increases were substantial in some cases: the Flathead, a productive national forest in northwestern Montana, saw its annual allowable cut raised from 40 mmbf in 1939 to 60 mmbf in 1946, while the Kootenai, also a rich timber producer, jumped from 18.4 mmbf to 44.6 mmbf.¹¹ In the haste to build roads and open up national forest timber, the region's earlier emphasis on regulating or acquiring private forestland was laid aside—as was the practice of maintaining a relatively stable supply of timber.

Assistant Regional Forester Axel G. Lindh, as head of the Northern Region's timber staff, was the principal architect of the region's new program. In a 1946 memo to Brandborg he announced that for the region to meet its goal, each forest would need to increase sales to the maximum limit of sustained-yield capacity. "The nation needs its timber," he advised. "All parts of all these 85 working circles must be made to produce." Lindh pointed out that the Bitterroot National Forest held 356,000 acres of commercial timber land, but under its 1941 plan only the ponderosa pine stands, comprising 120,000 acres, were subject to regular harvesting. "With the local growing dependence it is urgent that this plan be revised and greatly intensified," Lindh wrote.¹²

During the war, the Bitterroot for the first time reached its allowable cutting level of 7.5 mmbf of ponderosa pine. Harvests of spruce, fir, and lodgepole pine remained low, averaging just over 1.5 mmbf per year. In 1946 Brandborg agreed to increase the

overall cutting limit to 25 mmbf, 10 million of which was in the ponderosa pine component.¹³ He was loath to push sales beyond this amount, however, and he stuck to the stipulations of his 1941 plan: timber would be harvested using only the single-tree selection method, and with few exceptions it could be milled only within the Bitterroot Valley. Above all, he would try to maintain the sales volume at close to an even level, avoiding any sharp increases that would encourage industry to build mills beyond what he felt the forest could supply over the long term. Still, he was no preservationist: in his annual report for 1953 he proudly announced the sale of 21 mmbf from all timber species.¹⁴ His emphasis on cutting high-quality, mature ponderosa pine allowed the Bitterroot to get higher prices per board foot than any other forest in the region. This labor-intensive approach to forestry—hand-marking and cutting only the best, mature pines, disposing of slash, and even pruning the lower branches from the remaining trees so they would yield clear lumber—fit with his desire to employ as many local men as possible.

The regional office, however, wanted to see more timber coming from the Bitterroot and less social policy. Widespread insect and disease outbreaks in the early 1950s provided the opportunity to intensify management. An aerial spraying program using DDT to control spruce bark beetles debuted on the Bitterroot in 1952, but as Axel Lindh noted, “most control measures for insects and disease in mature and overmature stands are little more than a delaying action...in most cases the best control is to harvest the susceptible timber.” The region’s forests were carrying a large inventory of overripe trees, he said, and harvesting would ensure more productive young growth. Although he gave a nod to maintaining a steady timber output, he advised that “in some working circles the advantages of prompt harvest may be greater than any possible gains from trying for a sustained yield with highly perishable timber stands.”¹⁵

The Bitterroot’s local milling requirement was another sticking point. Lindh and his fellow staffers felt that mills in the Missoula area could utilize logs more efficiently and leave fewer small trees behind. Several of these mills wanted access to the Bitterroot’s high-quality timber; in 1952 the White Pine Sash Company, a producer of door and window frames, asked the regional office to suspend the local milling restriction, pointing out that its advanced bandsaw rigs reduced wood waste by 10 to 15 percent compared with the circular saws in use in the Bitterroot Valley’s small mills. Brandborg, however, felt that his requirement was a covenant with the people of the valley. Lindh sent a staffer to Hamilton to hash out the question, who acceded to Brandborg’s wishes but noted that “preserving the status quo on the Bitterroot may tend to keep that area serene, but it will tend to the opposite effect in other communities” where such protections were not given.¹⁶

BLADES TO THE GROUND

In the spring of 1955 Brandborg stepped down from his forty-year career with the Forest Service. In his final annual report, he urged his readers to keep in mind Gifford Pinchot’s mandate to manage the national forests for a perpetual supply of timber, which to him still meant a relatively unvarying flow of logs. But timber-oriented foresters such as Axel Lindh preferred a modern reformulation of the sustained-yield concept that strove to maximize output

from the entire commercial forest land base. It was time, he told Brandborg, to “demonstrate silviculture as the agriculturalists have demonstrated scientific farming.” Brandborg could not go along with this approach—his protection forest up in the high ridges and steep mountainsides held too many other values, in his opinion. He was also fearful that logging these areas would release a sudden windfall of timber that could not be sustained.

Yet maximum yield was the course his superiors chose in the mid-1950s and onward. On February 1, 1955, P. D. Hanson announced the sale during the previous year of 1.1 billion board feet of timber from the Northern Region—a new record. For many of his staff, this represented a fulfillment of the long-delayed promise of making the national forests truly productive. Brandborg’s departure gave the regional office further opportunity to make changes on the Bitterroot. Soon afterward, Axel Lindh made a field examination of the forest, faulting its policy of making numerous small sales to local mills and focusing silvicultural efforts on the big pines. He advised Brandborg’s replacement, Thurman Trosper, to increase the cutting in the Douglas-fir and lodgepole pine stands, employing patch cutting (the name then given to clearcutting) followed by machine scarification of the soil to promote regeneration.¹⁷ Trosper introduced some limited clearcutting, but he was reluctant to make dramatic changes, and it took yet another management turnover to institute the region’s desired sales policy.

In 1960 Harold Andersen assumed the reins on the Bitterroot with instructions to modernize the forest’s timber program. He hired an experienced forester named Ray Karr to draw up a new timber management plan that would undertake more rapid cutting in the higher elevations, where a parasite called dwarf mistletoe was taking a toll on overmature Douglas-fir stands. Karr’s plan envisioned a conversion period in which these slow-growing stands would be cut at a rapid rate, followed by reduced cutting as newly established plantations grew back.¹⁸ Eventually there would be a more balanced distribution of young and old trees, under which a relatively even flow of timber products would be realized. The immediate effect, however, was a one-time bounty as the old-growth was hauled off—exactly what Brandborg feared would lead to overbuilt mill capacity.

Cutting levels on the Bitterroot rose from 18 mmbf in 1955—Brandborg’s last year on the forest—to 30 million in 1961, when the first fruits of the accelerated harvest program were realized. But in 1962, 76 mmbf was taken off the forest, and for the rest of the decade the cut never dropped below 54 million. The stepped-up cutting powered a significant increase in local milling capacity. By 1967, five major sawmills operated in the Bitterroot Valley, producing 84 mmbf of lumber per year and directly employing 470 workers. Timber from adjacent national forests and the remaining stands on private lands supplemented the Bitterroot’s cut.¹⁹

Although the volume harvested from the Bitterroot did not approach the amount taken from forests in northwestern Montana, the widespread use of terracing added to the visual impact of its clearcuts. The technique was not new to the Intermountain West, having been used to rehabilitate overgrazed lands in Utah in the 1930s and to promote timber regrowth on dry sites in Idaho and eastern Oregon. Axel Lindh urged the Bitterroot foresters to try terracing as a means of improving regeneration of ponderosa pine on south- and west-facing slopes,



ERIN PETERSON PHOTO. COURTESY OF USDA FOREST SERVICE, BITTERROOT NATIONAL FOREST

Using the Rocky Mountain tree planting machine to reforest terraces in Blue Joint Creek, Bitterroot National Forest, May 1965. Note second operator (facing toward rear) who is inserting ponderosa pine seedlings in a furrow, which the machine then closes. Terracing permitted use of these efficient devices and created favorable conditions for seedling growth.

where moisture stress and competition from grasses stifled the seedlings. Foresters on the Sula and West Fork districts of the Bitterroot began the practice around 1964 and found that the terraces helped collect moisture and reduced the angle of incidence of the sun. The even, level rows permitted planting by machine, and with an average of 4,000 acres being cut every year, they had a lot of ground to replant. First-year seedling survival was as high as ninety percent using the new method.²⁰ But the steep cutslopes above the terraces led some onlookers to fear increased erosion. Moreover, although terracing was a forest regeneration technique, not a logging method, its use enabled harvesting on steep hillsides that might not otherwise have been cut. The high road densities required for “jammer” cable logging, then in common use, added to concerns about soil erosion, displacement of big game, and encroachment by invasive weeds.

OPPOSITION GROWS

Following his retirement, Brandborg remained active in conservation causes, helping organize educational programs in Ravalli County and taking part in the growing movement to protect wilderness areas in the region. He also became increasingly concerned about the new direction his former agency was taking.

In 1966, five years after a forest fire burned more than 28,000 acres in the Sleeping Child drainage of the Sapphire Mountains, the Bitterroot proposed creating a huge firebreak along many miles of the range’s crest, clearcutting “worthless” lodgepole pine and conducting controlled burns. Brandborg felt that this was overkill, and in a letter to his friend Miles Romney, who published a local weekly called the *Western News*, he advised a restrained hand in this high-elevation forest. “Many feel that the judgment of other scientists should be solicited: ecologists, biologists, watershed managers, and other experts, before giving the forester a free hand in denuding the proposed ten-mile strip and engaging in other clear-cut and burning practices,” he told Romney.²¹ His call for a multidisciplinary assessment anticipated a later requirement of most Forest Service timber sales.

A field trip in the fall of 1968 persuaded Brandborg that something was seriously amiss with the Bitterroot’s forestry program. Champ Hannon, a former West Fork district ranger who lived in the logging town of Darby, invited him to take a hundred-mile auto drive up in the hills to see how the new management program was faring. “We were well guided,” Brandborg reported in a letter he wrote to Montana Senator Lee Metcalf the following day. “Prior to his retirement from the Forest Service Champ spent some twenty years selecting and placing the U.S. stamp on

trees to be sold. During that period he selected and marked billions of board feet of timber.” Hannon chose only the older ponderosa pines that were showing reduced growth, leaving about half of the overall volume for future cuts. Both Hannon and Brandborg felt that the current harvest was not sustainable, and they also felt a personal loss in seeing their carefully marked timber sale areas turned into clearcuts. As Hannon told an interviewer, “the work that I did for the Forest Service was just thrown away.”²²

Ranchers who ran sheep and cattle in the Sleeping Child drainage were also raising concerns about the effect of postfire salvage logging on water quality, timing of spring runoff, and siltation of irrigation ditches. Rebuffed in their efforts to halt clearcutting in the upper-elevation forest, they asked Brandborg to intervene on their behalf. Drawing on his years of experience organizing citizens’ efforts, he orchestrated a new campaign aimed squarely against his old employer. Soon both Metcalf and fellow Senator Mike Mansfield began receiving a steady stream of letters from constituents in the Bitterroot Valley about the effects of widespread clearcutting on wildlife habitat, water quality, and maintenance of long-term timber supplies. Clearcutting whole hillsides drove home the scale of change to many conservative old-timers in the valley, who in some cases saw their favorite hunting and fishing grounds drastically altered.

To bolster this effort, Brandborg joined with Doris Milner, a Hamilton wilderness activist, and Charles McDonald, another retired Bitterroot Forest ranger, to sponsor a resolution through the Bitterroot Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) program, a federally funded rural development agency, calling for an independent study of timber practices on the Bitterroot. The resolution ran into opposition from supporters of the valley’s lumber mills, who organized a public meeting in Darby that drew some 150 people. Rather than press the contentious issue, the chairman of the RC&D program met with Regional Forester Neal Rahm in December 1968 and urged him to investigate the allegations of mismanagement. Rahm appointed an expert in-house panel to evaluate the criticisms, consisting of three of his own division heads as well as three senior members of the Intermountain Forest and Range Experiment Station. Bill Worf, head of the Northern Region’s recreation and lands division, chaired the panel, and Rahm gave him wide discretion to investigate and make recommendations. The committee issued a detailed report in May 1970 that criticized many particulars of the Bitterroot’s timber program. Its language was unusually direct for a bureaucratic report: a central finding was that “there is an implicit attitude among many people on the staff of the Bitterroot National Forest that resource production goals come first and that land management considerations take second place.”²³

With Worf’s report in hand, Rahm appointed a new supervisor to restructure affairs on the Bitterroot. Orville Daniels had been deputy supervisor of the adjacent Lolo National Forest, and with his mandate for change he ended the use of terracing, reduced the annual allowable harvest to around 30 mmbf, and hired a landscape architect, a soils specialist, and a wildlife biologist to balance the program. He adopted most of the findings of the task force study, including required consultations with soil scientists and geologists before cutting on slopes with grades over 35 percent, greater consideration for aesthetics in the design of cutting units, and avoiding logging in places where regeneration was not assured.

UNDER THE MICROSCOPE

The promised reforms hardly slowed the controversy. Brandborg and Burk continued to write about alleged abuses, aided by lobbyists for national environmental groups who helped steer additional reporters to the scene. The grassroots origin of the controversy was of particular interest to these writers; although some of the complaints came from well-connected retirees and second-home owners—“outsiders” in local parlance—there were also objections from retired foresters such as Charles McDonald, who expressed concern about regeneration problems in some of the clearcuts on his former district. “I hope my persistent efforts in directing your attention to the destruction of our Bitterroot timber is not regarded as an impertinence,” he told Metcalf. “A large majority of people here are truly alarmed, and hope for a more unbiased study than is occurring by Forest Service appointed personnel.”²⁴

Metcalf, too, hoped that an outside study would settle the issue without resorting to a full-scale congressional investigation, as the Sierra Club and other national environmental groups were already demanding. Over the past year and a half, he had been discussing the growing controversy on the Bitterroot with his friend Arnold Bolle, dean of the forestry school at the University of Montana. These talks, Bolle recalled, “grew more serious as the problem became more serious.” Bolle, meanwhile, was taking soundings of some of his faculty associates, and by the fall of 1969 he had put together a review committee to help Metcalf deal with the citizens’ questions. Metcalf formalized the request in a December 2, 1969, letter to Bolle, and thereby launched what would become the Bitterroot controversy’s most famous product: a report innocuously titled “A University View of the Forest Service.” Better known as the Bolle Report, its bold conclusions quickly eclipsed the agency’s task force study. The committee stated flatly that “multiple use, in fact, does not exist as the governing principle on the Bitterroot National Forest” and expressed doubts that the forest could maintain its current harvesting level. Using the Bitterroot’s cutting methods as a starting point, the academicians took on economic and policy issues affecting the entire National Forest System, propelling Bolle and his committee to the center of attention in the continuing storm over national forest management.²⁵

MOUNTING STRAIN ON FORESTS AND FORESTERS

The changes that Neal Rahm and Orville Daniels made in the Bitterroot’s operations, while substantial, proved insufficient to ward off further controversy. Part of the reason lay with the persistence of activists such as Brandborg and Burk, who relished their role as crusaders and were highly effective in rousing public concern. Their articles, commentaries, speeches, and phone calls kept the spotlight on the Bitterroot long after the public’s attention might have wandered off to other issues. But their criticism rankled many agency staffers, who felt they were being unfairly vilified as lackeys of industry. In fairness, the men who designed and carried out the Bitterroot’s timber program in the 1960s were just as dedicated to their work as Brandborg’s earlier generation of foresters. They believed in their mission of applying the most up-to-date techniques that would ensure the greatest production of resources. What could not be reconciled,



USDA FOREST SERVICE, BITTERROOT NATIONAL FOREST

Terraced clearcut in Took Creek, around 1970. The deep gouges cut into these steep hillsides offended many viewers' aesthetic sensibilities.



AUTHOR PHOTO

The same hillside in Took Creek, viewed from the same point in 2008, shows a thriving plantation of ponderosa pine. The Douglas-fir in the foreground have reseeded from the edge of the cutting unit. Note photo location marker.

however, was the disputants' radically different perceptions of the public good.

The Bitterroot controversy was also prolonged by the Forest Service's insistence that the clearcutting issue was largely a matter of adverse aesthetics and could be dealt with on those grounds. Even Rahm's task force, which looked into (and dismissed) the claims of watershed damage and poor regeneration, wrote that "the storm over the practice of clearcutting has mainly centered on the disturbing visual impacts of this form of timber cutting in the eyes of many beholders."²⁶ The foresters tried to reassure their critics that young growth would soon heal the clearcuts (as in most cases it did), but this only appeared to gloss over concerns about more serious issues. Many valley residents felt that the agency was pursuing an agenda heavily weighted toward timber production and doubted that soils, watersheds, and wildlife could withstand such intensive use.

The foresters were also feeling pressure from the region's timber producers. In March 1970 the Intermountain Company announced it would close its mill at Darby and lay off fifty workers, citing reduced supplies of ponderosa pine as a result of restricted harvests from the Bitterroot. (The mill had been designed to use the larger logs from this species.) All of the Bitterroot Valley's major mills faced dwindling timber supplies and eventually closed, as Brandborg had feared, yet many in the industry blamed him and his allies. The mill owners maintained that modern silvicultural methods and improved wood utilization would permit even higher cuts as long as productive timberlands were not placed off limits. Brandborg responded in his newspaper commentaries that the harvest levels had been set by politicians in Washington and far exceeded the long-term capacity of the forest.²⁷ The antagonists could not agree on even the most basic goals and concepts, such as what constituted sustained yield or how various forest values should be weighed in the multiple-use equation. This was a significant policy dispute—one that the Bolle Committee took up at length—and it ran far deeper than the visual appearance of the clearcuts. It still underlies much of the ongoing forest policy debate.²⁸

RECONCILING ECONOMICS AND THE ENVIRONMENT

Could the Bitterroot have kept the mills going under the intensive management program that Axel Lindh envisioned in 1946? For the promise of expanded cutting to be realized, the clearcuts and their associated road network would have had to reach across the entire commercial forest area, taking in wildlands prized by hunters and hikers. New congressional directives, including wilderness study legislation sponsored by Lee Metcalf, placed some of these areas off limits. In any event, the Bitterroot is unlikely to return to the output-driven practices that Orville Daniels once termed "the dark side." But by the same token, Guy Brandborg's quest to regulate private and public forestlands to promote local community stability proved impossible in an age when market forces were given free play. By 1970, in fact, several of the Darby-area mills had been sold to or had entered into partnerships with companies such as Intermountain. These integrated, capital-dependent operations left little room for his old ideals.

Throughout the Bitterroot controversy, Brandborg refused to separate environmental goals from economic production. He

advised Dale Burk to focus on the plight of woodworkers, whom he called "skilled and great people, the backbone of the timber industry." In 1972 he pointed out that "people in the area are fast realizing that agriculture and forestry are the foundation of their economy, as they are in all western Montana forest communities. They are dependent upon a continuous supply of timber." No one in industry would have disagreed, but Brandborg saw environmental quality as an integral part of the economic picture. The valley's residents, he maintained, "recognize their obligation to pass on to the next generation a natural resource base in a more productive condition than they received it. That's real progress."²⁹ At a time when Gifford Pinchot's Progressive views were often seen as antiquated and antienvironmental, Brandborg stuck to his belief that conservation and economic progress went hand in hand.

Guy Brandborg died in 1977, spending his last weeks giving interviews from his hospital bed and exhorting his friends to continue his crusade. In the ensuing years his concerns about community-scale forestry were sidetracked as national environmental groups sought sweeping changes in federal forest policy through legislation and litigation. In recent years, however, action has shifted back to the local level, where a new crop of small-scale logging outfits and millwork entrepreneurs are beginning to retool western Montana's forest industry, often using trees formerly piled as slash.³⁰ The Forest Service, too, is reorienting itself around concepts such as stewardship contracting and restoration forestry. Controversy still boils over on the Bitterroot regarding individual logging projects, but these new initiatives appear to be edging closer to Brandborg's ideal of a grassroots commitment to permanent forestry. Just as the Bitterroot's once-bare hillsides are sprouting young pines, some old ideas are taking root in a new context—giving hope for Brandborg's vision of forests that support local communities for many generations. □

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NOTES

1. Dale A. Burk, "Sen. McGee Views Bare Bitterroot," *Missoulian* (Missoula, MT), August 26, 1971. Burk's photo of the Took Creek clearcut also appeared above Gladwin Hill's article "National Forests: Physical Abuse and Policy Conflicts," *New York Times*, November 14, 1971. Hearings on clearcutting practices, at which both Brandborg and Burk testified, were held before the Senate Interior Committee's Subcommittee on Public Lands in Washington, DC, on April 5 and 6, 1971. McGee's visit to the Bitterroot is also mentioned in Luke Popovich's two-part retrospective, "The Bitterroot—Remembrances of Things Past" and "The Bitterroot—A Fading Polemic," *Journal of Forestry* 73 (1975): 791–93 and 74 (1976): 39–41.
2. Dale Burk's series in the *Missoulian* ran from November 2 to November 18, 1969, and included interviews with Guy Brandborg and Sierra Club lobbyist Brock Evans. Burk went on to write many articles on forest

- practices, collecting some of them in his book *The Clearcut Crisis: Controversy in the Bitterroot* (Great Falls, MT: Jursnick Printing, 1970).
3. Michael Frome, *Promised Land: Adventures and Encounters in Wild America* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1994), 278.
 4. Information on Guy Brandborg's early life and career is drawn from a series of taped oral history interviews made by his friend Mavis McKelvey in May 1975 (OH-413-01 and OH-413-02, K. Ross Toole Archives, Mansfield Library, University of Montana, Missoula, MT [hereafter KRTA]). I am indebted to Mrs. McKelvey for the use of her materials.
 5. What was The State University of Montana at Missoula is now the University of Montana.
 6. Lawrence W. Zach and S. Blair Hutchison, *The Forest Situation in Ravalli County, Montana*, Forest Survey Release No. 21 (Missoula, MT: USDA Forest Service, Northern Rocky Mountain Forest and Range Experiment Station, 1943), 5, 13.
 7. The secretary's limitation of cut for the Bitterroot is given in a preliminary timber management plan developed in 1922 under Forest Supervisor Wilfred White. Both this and the 1941 timber plan are in the National Archives, Pacific Alaska Region, Seattle [hereafter NA-PAR], series 95-60A70, Box 10A, fd. "S—Plans—Timber Management—Through 1943."
 8. Silcox presented his views on the regulation issue in a provocative essay titled "Foresters Must Choose," *Journal of Forestry* 33 (1935): 198–204. Kelley's March 11, 1938, speech is in the Forest Service's Northern Region history files, series 1680–1, fd. "Evan Kelley—Speeches & Writings." The Northern Region (Region 1) of the Forest Service, headquartered in Missoula, was known as District 1 until 1933.
 9. USDA Forest Service, Bitterroot National Forest, "Management Plan for Bitterroot Working Circle, Bitterroot National Forest, Bitterroot Valley, Mont., 1941," Guy Brandborg papers, KRTA, Box 2, fd. 2.
 10. G. M. Brandborg, "Can We Manage and Conserve Our Forests," type-script of speech given around 1940 (Stewart Brandborg Papers, KRTA, series 2006-38, Box 30, fd. 9).
 11. P. D. Hanson to forest supervisors and district rangers, July 26, 1946 (NA-PAR, series 95-63A209, Box 8, fd. "S-Sales-policy—1931–1949"). The 1939 figures are from a P. D. Hanson memo to the Chief, Forest Service, June 14, 1946, in the same folder. The latter memo was prepared by Axel Lindh.
 12. Axel G. Lindh to G. M. Brandborg, November 15, 1946 (G. M. Brandborg Papers, KRTA, Box 10, fd. 2).
 13. Wartime cutting levels on the forest are from "Summary of Cutting Budget—Bitterroot Working Circle" (NA-PAR, series 95-60A70, Box 10A, fd. "S—Plans—Bitterroot—Timber Management—To 1943"). The postwar increase in allowable cut was specified in a July 26, 1946, memo from Regional Forester P. D. Hanson (NA-PAR, series 95-60A209, Box 8, fd. "S—Sales-Policy").
 14. "Bitterroot National Forest: Major Accomplishments, 1953" (NA-PAR, Northern Region history files, Box 61).
 15. A. G. Lindh to Forest Supervisors and Rangers, December 12, 1951 (NA-PAR, series 95-60A70, Box 10A, fd. "Timber Management 1951").
 16. William D. Dratz, Missoula White Pine Sash Co., to A. G. Lindh, April 4, 1952; Donald H. Matthews, memo to files, May 1, 1952 (NA-PAR, series 95-60A70, Box 10A, fd. "Timber Management 1952").
 17. A. G. Lindh, forest inspection report, November 25, 1955 (NA-PAR, series 95-60A70, Box 10, fd. "Inspection—1957").
 18. "Amended Timber Management Plan, Bitterroot Working Circle, Bitterroot National Forest, Montana-Idaho, F.Y. 1966–F.Y. 1972" (Bitterroot National Forest, Hamilton, MT, historical timber records, fd. "Timber Management Plans").
 19. Sawmill production and employment figures are from a pamphlet titled "Fact Sheet, Bitterroot Valley," prepared by the Denver-based Federal Timber Purchasers Association in the early 1970s (Stewart Brandborg Papers, KRTA, series 2006-38, Box 22).
 20. Introduction of terracing: Axel Lindh, undated letter, Lee Metcalf Papers, Montana Historical Society, Helena, MT, Box 32, fd. 1. Annual acreage harvested: harvest regeneration records, Bitterroot National Forest (NA-PAR, series 95-76B1317, Box 1, fd. "2470—Silvicultural Practices"). Seedling survival: *Management Practices, Bitterroot National Forest: A Task Force Appraisal*, May 1969–April 1970 (Missoula, MT: USDA Forest Service, Northern Region, 1970), 35.
 21. Brandborg to Miles Romney, Jr. [1966] (Stewart Brandborg Papers, KRTA, Box 30, fd. "Logging Rav. Co."); Bob Gilluly, "Operation Firebreak Scheduled in Two Bear Area About Oct. 1," *Ravalli Republican* (Hamilton, MT), September 23, 1966.
 22. Brandborg quote: Brandborg to Lee Metcalf, September 28, 1968 (G. M. Brandborg Papers, KRTA, Box 13, fd. 1). Champ Hannon worked on the Bitterroot in various capacities from 1925 to 1954. His comments are from John Coleman, "An Interview with Champ Hannon," Montana State Historical Society, Oral History OH-2, January 21, 1970. The selective cutting that Hannon and Brandborg favored in ponderosa pine had its own ecological consequences: a strong regrowth of Douglas-fir that, absent fire or other treatment, will eventually overtake the pines (see Stephen F. Arno, Carl E. Fiedler, and Matthew K. Arno, "Giant Pines and Grassy Glades," *Forest History Today* (Spring 2008), 12–19).
 23. Rahm responded to Clarence Popham in a May 1, 1969, letter that outlined the task force's members and duties (Stewart Brandborg Papers, KRTA, series 2006-38, Box 22). Quotation is from *Management Practices, Bitterroot National Forest*, 9.
 24. Charles McDonald to Lee Metcalf, November 8, 1969 (Montana Historical Society, Lee Metcalf Papers, Box 37, fd. 5).
 25. Select Committee of the University of Montana, "A University View of the Forest Service," United States Senate, Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs, Senate Document 91-115 (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1970). Arnold Bolle recalled his committee's work and the controversy that followed in "The Bitterroot Revisited: A University [Re]View of the Forest Service," in Char Miller, ed.: *American Forests: Nature, Culture, and Politics* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1997).
 26. *Management Practices, Bitterroot National Forest*, 21. Aesthetic concerns also figured prominently in *National Forest Management in a Quality Environment*, a 1971 Forest Service publication that was designed as an agency-wide response to criticism of clearcutting.
 27. "Darby's Intermountain Mill to Close, 50 Jobs Affected by Shutdown," *Ravalli Republican*, March 27, 1970; Robert E. Stermitz, "Bitter Root: Shameful Distortion," *Missoulain*, April 7, 1970; G. M. Brandborg, "Those to Blame for the Overcut," *Missoulain*, July 3, 1970.
 28. Foresters and academics have explored the meaning, significance, and desirability of sustained-yield forestry at great length. See, for example, Harold K. Steen, ed., *History of Sustained-Yield Forestry: A Symposium* (Durham, NC: Forest History Society, 1984).
 29. G. M. Brandborg, statement at public hearing on Flathead Wild and Scenic River proposal, April 30, 1972 (Doris Milner family collection, Hamilton, MT).
 30. See, for example, Dillon Tabish, "Cashing In on Castoffs," *Montana Magazine*, September–October 2008, 74–76. The market for small trees and forest waste remains limited, however, especially with the loss of much of Montana's wood-processing infrastructure in recent years.