

Making the most of forest ethics: Concepts and cases

Christian Gamborg¹, Peter Sandøe²

¹ Senior scientist, University of Copenhagen, Danish Centre for Forest, Landscape and Planning, Frederiksberg, Denmark, chg@life.ku.dk

² Professor, University of Copenhagen, Danish Centre for Bioethics and Risk Assessment, Frederiksberg, Denmark, pes@life.ku.dk

Over the last twenty-five years especially, forest management in Europe and North America has been rethinking its foundation. At the same time, environmental philosophy has also been engaged in a process of expanding and revising its basis. The principal focus for both environmental philosophy and forestry is value of forest. This can be understood in more than one way – for example, as what different stakeholders consider important regarding forests; as the various functions a forest may fulfil; or an understanding of what is worth protecting or promoting in relation to forests.

The aim of this paper is to point to ways in which ethical reflections relating to value issues can be timely and productive in relation to forest management. By way of experience, we suggest looking at forest ethics as an integrated and interdisciplinary part of forest management. It is widely believed that ethical issues arise after scientific research/management has been conducted. In fact, they need to be addressed prior to, or in conjunction with, such research/management.

'Ethics', as the term is here understood, has as its main function to reflect and clarify. Reflection may for example concern the complex trade-offs between conservation and the consumption of renewable resources. The output may be a better understanding of various ways of looking at such trade-offs and thereby making room for dialogue about the goal of forest management. In general, ethical reflection may help to formulate and discuss the relative importance of potentially conflicting concerns and values.

In the paper we develop this idea by means of two examples representing current trends in forest management: a technological and an ecological or 'back to nature' trend. One example concerns gene technology which has been met with initial distrust in many parts of the world. Another example is about "close-to-nature" silviculture and the issue of striking a balance between natural regeneration and hunting.