

PART I

Introduction and History

It is not possible to write a book about old-growth forests without considering ecological, social, and economic history. Old growth is, after all, about time and about how forests change from both natural and human causes. Thus, old growth also reflects *ideas* about forests, which co-evolve with scientific and cultural forces. In this opening part, we set the stage for reexamining the old-growth icon in the Pacific Northwest. The first chapter by Spies and Duncan introduces our search for better understanding in the 1980s as scientists began to study old-growth forests and as managers and the public began to debate their future. The period from 1980 to 1993 was characterized by a creative scientific and social ferment that turned management of federal forests upside down in the Pacific Northwest. The burden of proof shifted from those who would protect old growth to those who wanted to cut it. In the fifteen-year period since the adoption of old growth conservation policies on public lands, we've had an opportunity to reflect on how this change happened, examine how well the new approaches have worked, and investigate new ways of understanding this coupled natural-human system through ecological and social sciences. It is clear that the old-growth icon was a powerful force behind sweeping changes in management and policy, but it also is clear that deep complexity underlies the icon, and if solutions are not based on a rich understanding of forests and

how people relate to them, unintended consequences can generate ongoing social ferment.

In the second chapter, Johnson and Swanson set the stage for a broad historical sweep of worldviews and national forest policies, each of which places a marker for how society has viewed forests through time. They demonstrate that the idea of old growth has not been constant, and it is really only since 2003 that conservation of old growth has become a stated goal of a national policy (Healthy Forest Restoration Act). Despite its prior absence from national policies, old growth has been central to the ecology, economy, and social condition of the Pacific Northwest for centuries, dating back to the native peoples of the region. Their chapter presents clear evidence of the long-term social importance of old growth and the social and scientific diversity of the concept. Thus, they also propose that society's treatment of old-growth forests will continue to change in the future.

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Old Growth in a New World

A PACIFIC NORTHWEST ICON REEXAMINED

EDITED BY

Thomas A. Spies and Sally L. Duncan

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