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SPOTLIGHT

*IUFRO Spotlight is an initiative of the International Union of Forest Research Organizations. Its aim is to introduce, in a timely fashion, significant findings in forest research from IUFRO officeholders and member organizations to a worldwide network of decision makers, policy makers and researchers.*



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*IUFRO Spotlight issues up to September 2019 will primarily focus on the XXV IUFRO World Congress that will take place on 29 September-5 October 2019 in Curitiba, Brazil.*

*Individual Congress sessions will be highlighted in order to draw attention to the broader Congress themes, the wide variety of topics that will be addressed at the Congress and their importance on a regional and global scale.*

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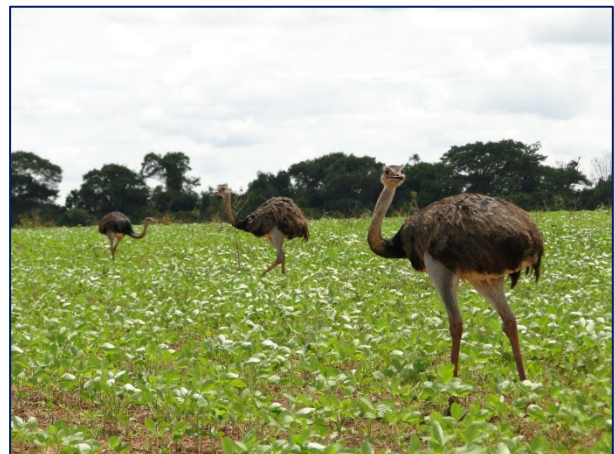
## Sifting through underlying values and ethics to make sound nature management decisions

How does one decide how to manage a forest ethically?

One could simply say: do the right thing. But, the right thing for whom? And defining right and wrong – concepts that can vary according to moral climate or individual circumstance – is not all that simple.

Forest stakeholders have different wants, different needs, and different values. Additionally, times, perspectives and situations also change. And all those differences come into play when dealing with any human-nature interactions, including forest management.

Dr. Christian Gamborg, Associate Professor in Natural Resource Ethics at the University of Copenhagen, Denmark, will present a session entitled: ***Ethics and values in relation to forest, recreation and wildlife management*** at the IUFRO World Congress in Brazil this fall, in which he will explore the underlying values and ethical aspects related to those issues.



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“There are often different views on issues. And societies are becoming increasingly pluralistic in terms of values. So what was considered prudent or ‘necessary’ forest management, say 20 years ago, may now be the source of conflict,” said Dr. Gamborg.

“For example,” he said, “intensive timber production might not always be welcomed by all stakeholders anymore; perhaps based on the idea that through such intervention, naturalness might be lost. So, what one party sees as ethical or respectful, might be seen by another as exactly the opposite.

“Controversies about humans’ relations with nature have become increasingly widespread and intense. A lot, if not most, of such controversies arise from underlying conflicts involving differences in value commitments and ethical judgments.

“However, these values and ethical commitments are often not explicitly articulated, or perhaps even realized as such – so it’s not a question of deliberate omission,” he said.

And identifying underlying values and ethical positions is often done indirectly, he added. “Sometimes that means inferring from what kind of prioritizations are made and, perhaps, through the kind of justification given for certain actions and management interventions. Less often are such values and positions explicitly stated.

“We need to address the concerns of all stakeholders and try to understand what value commitments might be underlying their positions. Partly in line with this is the perennial question of defining, or interpreting, what sustainability in SFM (Sustainable Forest Management) should entail,” he said.

“Accepting the plurality of views and opinions is a first step, but obviously not a silver bullet in any way. It might, however, help start dialogues that can lead to mutual commitments on the future of forests and their protection, management and use.

“Nature professionals need to get a better understanding of such controversies, to be able to form reasoned judgments and subsequently use these judgments to inform management decisions related to forests, recreation and wildlife,” Dr. Gamborg added.

His session, he said, will “flag the importance of identifying and understanding value commitments and ethical judgments underlying management of nature. By so doing, we can reduce conflict and increase robust compromises that hold benefits for both forests and people.”

“Conflicts can occur over the means as well as the ends. Disagreement can be over what the land use should be (e.g. designating a certain tract as a nature reserve or using water as a resource for electricity generation – hydro power).

“But even if agreement exists on the goals, the way a certain decision or project is carried out, can give rise to conflict. For example, if there is a perceived lack of local stakeholder consultation,” he said. “Consequently, consensus among stakeholders must not only be reached on goals but also on the means employed to reach these objectives.”

There are many well-known factors that can cause conflict. He noted scarcity of resources, poverty, imbalances in power and in distribution of benefits and harms.

“But,” he added, “we can also point to the lack of careful, rigorous thought. This session – and forest and environmental and natural resource ethics as such - aims to help develop such thought, especially for those who manage landscapes and/or forest resources, or who carry out research about nature, or those who aspire to do so.

“An example of an area where those underlying values and commitments are key to understand conflict – though it’s been going on in various forms for decades – would be human-wildlife conflict,” he said. “It is about the competing values – e.g. the conversion of forest land to agriculture with ensuing loss in habitat, ecosystem services and biodiversity.

“Having said that, there are certainly places where there are fewer controversies, and examples in most regions of the world where people are striving to implement SFM in a transparent way, assisted by certifying organizations and by decision makers being able to secure society’s basic needs,” Dr. Gamborg said.

For session attendees, gaining a clearer understanding of a range of values and ethical positions will help equip them to enter into dialogue with those who hold other points of view. “Something that is particularly timely now, and probably, for years to come,” he said.

At the session there will be a range of presentations focusing on case studies and theoretical reflections from all over the world. Among them: wildlife management by recreational hunting; valuation of ecosystems services; public values and forest management in relation to combatting climate change; pest control and population conservation.

*Dr. Gamborg is Coordinator of IUFRO Research Group 6.05.00 – Forest ethics:*

<https://www.iufro.org/science/divisions/division-6/60000/60500/>

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