January 26, 2006

Dear Friends, Colleagues, and Interested Observers,

During the course of the past two weeks, the College of Forestry at Oregon State University has been engaged in a visible conflict over publication of an article in the journal *Science* regarding logging after the Biscuit Fire of 2002.

Responding to early comments on the article, I wrote a context piece that was interpreted by some as not being supportive of the scientists who published the article. That was not my intent, and I truly regret that it caused this perception in our College, across the university and in the world beyond our university. I support the freedom of all our faculty, students and staff to pursue their scholarly work following the scientific process.

I have listened to the concerns of many people over this issue and I must tell you that from feedback I have received, there are some things I wish I had done differently. For example, in addition to what I said about academic freedom, the science process, single studies, and the proper role of science in policy, I would have immediately congratulated the authors of the Science article for their significant accomplishment. Few faculty, let alone graduate students, get their work published in this prestigious journal. I would also have explained to those concerned about the study’s conclusions that this study was a step in a larger learning process and that only the science process fully played out would eventually resolve any concerns about the study.

The events of the past two weeks highlight two things for me: the diversity of perspectives within our College and the abundant passion our people have for their vocation. With this diversity it is inevitable that members of our College community will at times interpret information differently, whether this information comes from a scientific study or from a public statement, such as my context piece. I profoundly regret the negative and emotional intensity that recent events have generated. I know that ultimately this diversity and passion are our greatest strength; they fuel the scientific process and allow us to provide our students with a rich educational experience. I also recognize that we need to closely examine the academic culture and climate in our College to ensure that our diversity and passion serve us constructively rather than destructively.

We must examine how and why things unfolded the way they did after the *Science* article, reaffirm the core values and principles that we hold as guidance for our scholarly work, and reinvigorate a culture of trust and openness in the College. To me these core values include free and open inquiry and expression, the science process, peer review, scholarly discourse and responsibility, and ensuring that research findings are not influenced by where the funding comes from. The conversation on academic freedom that we have now opened in our College as a result of events of the past two weeks will elucidate what these concepts mean to us and perhaps add some that I haven’t mentioned here. I sincerely hope our conversations will reaffirm our collective commitment to shared values and principles.
We did not hit the mark on all the core values over the past few weeks. But our aim now is to learn from this experience, look deeply within ourselves, and take the steps needed to maintain a free and open environment for scientific inquiry. I invite further discussion about concerns that remain and intend to move the College of Forestry forward as we continue to explore pressing issues in the science of forestry and our environment, as we have for nearly 100 years.

Respectfully,

Hal Salwasser

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