PUBLIC LANDS AND FORESTS
(1967, R1992, R2000, R2001)

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Policy Statement

The American Society of Landscape Architects believes that public lands should be retained, expanded and administered in a manner promoting multiple use while recognizing special issues inherent in wildlands and other sensitive environments. Stewardship of the public trust requires careful assessment to determine uses that are consistent with long-term sustainability. Managers should be encouraged to render appropriate land use decisions which sustain natural systems, utilize best management practices for the development of extractive resources, and consolidate private lands with public lands to better protect habitat and/or increase aesthetic and recreational opportunities. The establishment of national monuments to set aside significant natural resources that lie within these lands is encouraged. Management and acquisition decisions should be made with effective public participation and broad local support.

Rationale

Past land management has promoted decades of resource use in excess of the natural capability of the land to sustain that use. Multiple use decisions have favored industry while natural values have been compromised to the extent that in many cases indigenous plant and wildlife communities are, or are destined to be, irretrievably lost. Excessive soil depletion, general watershed destruction, depletion of stream flow and wetlands, and fragmentation of habitat each have adverse effects on the habitats and ecosystems within many of our public lands and forests.

Any discussion of public lands issues demands an awareness of the socio-political structure, which typically supports traditional uses. Often agency efforts to provide wise management of the public lands are thwarted by political pressures exerted on behalf of entrenched interests. Land planners and managers should seek to understand the roots of human interests and concerns, and to effectively use the scientific knowledge base related to public lands and forests.

Concern over the exploitation of those resources has prompted new laws to regulate mineral leasing, livestock grazing, and forest harvesting. Given the strong resource exploitation traditions inherent in public lands management, the challenge of encouraging changes in public policy and values which satisfy the natural or intrinsic capability of the land to support sustainable use while maintaining a healthy ecosystem should be met.