

First National Social Science Symposium Held

More than 250 registrants gathered at the Oregon State University conference center on May 12 to hear William R. Burch of Yale University School of Forestry and Environmental Studies sound the keynote of the First National Symposium on Social Science in Resource Management. The week-long session was sponsored jointly by OSU, the National Park Service, the U.S. Forest Service, and a half dozen allied organizations.

Burch challenged the assemblage to develop theoretical interpretations of the monumental body of social science data already existing – interpretations from which social scientists can arrive at generalities that will generate quick answers to specific problems.

"We have a rich, full set of solid empirical data already," he told the conferees. "Too often we tend to 'do another study' when we should be looking instead to the work already done. I submit that we *can*, right now, from the knowledge we already possess, aid in resolving specific management problems."

Burch named Frederick Law Olmsted, John Wesley Powell, and Charles Darwin as three great progenitors of today's applied, resource social science. Olmsted, he said, saw the operational balance of nature with man as a design problem. Powell's genius lay in his understanding that in the arid West it was water, not land, that was the prime resource so far as people were concerned. Therefore the arid West would require different social institutions than the humid East if resources were to be sustainable.

"And Darwin," he said, "demonstrated for all time the importance of the narrative form as our species tries to understand its place in the cosmos. This young man's voyage was more than a journey – it was a vision." Burch cited Darwin's observation that no one could contemplate "undefaced nature" without feeling that "there is more to man than the mere breath in his body."

Burch used the Symposium abstracts (180 of them) to describe "where we are now" as a discipline. We are continuing to reinvent nature, he said, but the conference papers form a mosaic that offers hope for the future of the social sciences. He described them as covering four major areas – the recreation system, the patterns of communities and institutions ("too often skewed in favor of stability and no-change"), political economy, and positive contributions to resource policy, planning and management.

The raw materials of the Symposium, Burch suggested, "are broadly representative of the base from which social scientists can draw some important general conclusions. And as we extract these conclusions and form a body of knowledge that will support *predictive probabilities*," he said, "our work as social scientists will achieve recognition as worthy of integration into the operational decision making process."

"The human species is the only one we know of that has the capacity to wonder and to dream about life's meaning," Burch concluded. "Science itself is but another set of stories to contain and to celebrate the mystery and wonder of life."

The profession – the discipline – that takes man and his dreaming capabilities into the natural resource management equation is one whose work, Burch implied, will never be finished.

Instead of a Symposium Proceedings, several edited volumes will be produced. Prospective authors

have been invited to submit their manuscripts for publication consideration. Editors will formulate their volumes and review the materials submitted during the summer and authors will be notified by September of the review decisions. Seven volumes currently underway are: Book I: Rural Communities, Forestry and Parks; II, Social Behavior and Natural Resources; III, Leisure Behavior in Parks and Forests; IV, Applied Science in Resource Management; V, Economics and Non-market Valuation; VI, Social Science and Natural History Interpretation, and VII, Human Dimensions in Wildlife.

Donald R. Field, conference co-chairman and series editor, indicated that an additional two volumes are under consideration. Field may be contacted at the OSU Department of Resource Recreation Management, College of Forestry, Corvallis, OR 97331.