



Society of
American Foresters
www.safnet.org

David Wm. Smith, CF, President, *Blacksburg, VA*,
smithdwm@vt.edu

Jason N. Kutack, Vice-President, *Hattiesburg, MS*

John F. Heissenbuttel, Immediate Past-President,
Washington, DC, john_heissenbuttel@afandpa.org

William H. Banzhaf, CF, CAE, Executive Vice-
President and Chief Executive Officer, banzhaf@
safnet.org

Council

David L. Adams, *Moscow, ID* • Donald S. Bell,
Bruce, MS • James "Jim" E. Doescher, CF, *Norcross,
GA* • Timothy A. French, CF, *Jefferson City, MO* •
John A. Helms, *Berkeley, CA* • Timothy A. Kaden,
CF, *Dover, DE* • Darrel L. Kenops, CF, *Springfield,
OR* • John Kotar, *Madison, WI* • John W. McNulty,
CF, *Dover-Foxcroft, ME* • Shelby L. "Lee" Spradlin,
Lynchburg, VA • Robert G. Sturtevant, CF, *Fort
Collins, CO*

Forest Science and Technology Board

Sharon T. Friedman, *chair* • Douglas C. Allen,
management & utilization • Melvin J. Baughman,
forestry systems • Hanna J. Cortner, *decision sciences* •
Stephen E. Fairweather, *resources measurements* •
Gary M. Nakamura, *social & related sciences* •
Thomas L. Schmidt, *ecology & biology*

House of Society Delegates

Michael B. Lester, CF, *chair* • Rachel Allison, *vice-chair*

National Office Department Directors

William H. Banzhaf, CF, CAE, *executive vice-president
and chief executive officer* • Michael T. Goergen, *senior
director, policy and programs* • Charles N. Jackson II,
*senior director, finance and administration, and chief
financial officer* • Lori B. Gardner, *director, member
services and marketing* • Jeff Ghannam, *director,
public affairs* • Michelle Mauthe Harvey, CF, *director,
science and education* • Madelaine Morgan, *director,
meetings and conventions* • Rebecca N. Staebler, *director,
publications*

commentary

Policies: Science-Based or
Science-Informed?



Sharon T. Friedman

When we use the term "science-based," I think we really mean that we would like decisions to be informed by the most-current, highest-quality scientific information. Using the term "science-based" can be misleading, as it implies that "science" is the foundation for the decision; in fact, people choose practices that best meet their values. Scientific and other types of information should inform the decisionmaker of the effects of different choices.

To me, making good resource management policy is both an art and a science. For policymakers or decisionmakers, it's a little like making lentil soup. They have tasty bits—the research articles, legal expertise, indigenous and practitioner knowledge, and monitoring information. They want each bit to be of sufficient quality, so they ask us scientists or other experts (the lentil and sausage specialists) for our advice.

The process of turning informational ingredients into policy soup has well-developed sciences to support it—the decision sciences. Researchers in these fields examine the processes for making decisions and how information can best be used in those decisions in a variety of contexts. Without quality decision science information and quality policy practitioners, taking infor-

mation from all the disciplines can result in a tasteless jumble rather than a mouthwatering delight.

Potentially even more dangerous is putting the lentil and sausage specialists to work in the kitchen. Since we scientists and other specialists tend to love our particular bit, we tend to overestimate the importance of that bit to the soup, and have an inherent conflict of interest in the soup's development.

I agree with my colleague Bob Lee at University of Washington that the beauty and attraction of science is that it "gives us rules that protect us from the all-too-human tendency to fool ourselves, either individually or collectively." But because all policy issues cross disciplines, the only truly "scientific" claim for the policy product is that of the decision sciences. I believe that in addition to quality ingredients, our best bet for a nutritious and delicious policy soup is civil public debate of competing knowledge claims, improving our decision science capacity, and a structured way to learn from our policy practitioners who dependably deliver quality products.

Sharon T. Friedman is chair, SAF Forest Science and Technology Board; sfriedman@fs.fed.us.