

Socio-Political Factors and Nursery Management¹

John R. Scholtes²

Scholtes, John R. 1992. Socio-political factors and nursery management. In: Landis, T.D., technical coordinator. Proceedings, Intermountain Forest Nursery Association; 1991 August 12-16; Park City, UT. General Technical Report RM-211. Fort Collins, CO: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, Rocky Mountain Forest and Range Experiment Station: 51-54. Available at: <http://www.fcnet.org/proceedings/1991/scholtes.pdf>

Abstract. --The following paper discusses a few social and political factors which a manager should evaluate about his or her site to better understand public actions and reactions which may affect your nursery operation. Examples are provided of reactive and proactive responses to situations which affect neighbors and the community. Finally, a bit of management "philosophy" is presented about being a good neighbor.

INTRODUCTION

During this presentation, I will utilize the J. Herbert Stone Nursery as an example to illustrate the types of factors one should examine to better understand the political and social climate within which a nursery must operate.

Then, I will describe a few examples of reactive and pro-active efforts to work with our public and neighbors.

I will describe a situation which was, given perfect hind sight, poorly handled and remains unresolved today.

Finally, I will share a bit of my philosophy about neighbors, and end with some concluding words of advice.

SOCIO-POLITICAL FACTORS

I call this Taking Stock. Each manager should develop a sense of the social and political factors which affects your site.

¹Paper presented at Intermountain Forest Nursery Association Annual Meeting. [Park City, Utah, August 12 - 16, 1991].

²John R. Scholtes is Nursery Manager, U.S.D.A. Forest Service, J. Herbert Stone Nursery, 2606 Old Stage Road, Central Point, Oregon 97502.

Location

The J. Herbert Stone Nursery is located in Southwestern Oregon, 32 miles north of the California border on I-5. As the crow flies, 80 miles due east of the Pacific Ocean (although the roads mileage to the Pacific is closer to 150 miles). The nursery is located along the western edge of a broad valley in which Medford, Oregon is the hub. There are several outlying towns; Central Point, Phoenix, Talent, White City, Jacksonville, and Ashland. These all make up a total population of over 100,000.

Climate

The area enjoys a Mediterranean type climate with a mild wet winter, long spring with frequent rain, hot dry summer and a long fall with warm days and cool nights.

Socio-political Factors

Several factors affect the socio-political environment of the area. The climate just described lends itself to a general out-of-doors awareness by the population.

Southwestern Oregon, again due to its climate, lack of development, relatively unsettled remoteness and natural beauty led to heavy establishment of the anti-establishment.

These factors are also attracting retired persons who are affluent enough to choose this area and to relocate. These folks are generally well informed, socially aware and pro-active both politically and as individuals.

Major cultural facilities including the Britt festival in Jacksonville and the Ashland Shakespearean festival draw politically aware and socially conscious workers, performers, and patrons.

Nursery Facts

The nursery consists of 312 acres. It has a perimeter of approximately 20,000 linear feet. Three major county roads pass along parts of its east, south and west perimeters. There are sixteen landowners adjacent to the nursery.

Status with Community and Neighbors

The J. Herbert Stone Nursery enjoys an overall good relationship with our neighbors. This does not mean that we never get crosswise of each other once in a while, because we certainly do.

Our ability to get along has been built on a long history of informing the public. From the time that the nursery was first conceived and site selection started, the Rogue River National Forest Supervisor, at the time, Don Smith, began meeting with civic leaders and local government officials. Later on, during Nursery development plans, public meetings were held and public comments were considered and acted upon.

One example of a concession that was agreed upon was that we would not use any form of aerial application using either fixed wing or helicopters. Even though we have little use for this method of application and our own adjacent property owners utilize it freely, this concession has proven to be a useful proclamation when visiting with concerned citizens.

REACTIVE AND PROACTIVE

We have experienced a number of instances to which we have reactive.

Flaming Near One Neighbor:

Faced with a court ordered injunction on the use of herbicides, we turned to flaming as a method of weed control along our field roads and open land. One neighbor became very concerned about the possible fire hazard created by flaming near his property.

While we did not admit to any danger, I did negotiate to stop any flaming adjacent to his ownership once grasses started to cure and dry.

To provide him better assurance, I suggested that, even though we would not flame once we determined that his grass had become flammable, we would welcome a call from him letting us know when he felt it was becoming dry.

We stopped flaming at our discretion as promised. We never heard from him.

I followed up with him later in the year when I saw him. He had to think a moment and then replied how well it worked. His concern was gone.

Diesel Engine Noise

We used to grind our cull seedlings using a large tub grinder powered by a diesel engine. I must admit that I was amused by the guttural sound of that big engine taking on power when a charge of seedlings dropped into the grinder. It reminded me of the forest and logging trucks winding up and down the back roads.

Via a phone call from a neighbor above our facility, I learned that not everyone shared my feelings about diesel engine noise. However, through additional mufflers, a check on back pressure on the manifold, additional piping and bracing, we quieted our operation. A check back with the plaintiff assured us that we were back in her good graces.

A far better approach is to be pro-active.

Fumigation

We have long been pro-active about fumigation. Our field foreman or one of his people go door to door and visit face to face with each adjacent property owner prior to fumigation each year. Procedures are explained so the neighbor will not be surprised when they see men dressed in white coveralls wearing masks with huge canisters hanging on the sides of their faces.

These personal visits explaining the process, the precautions we take and the smells they will experience, and why we need to fumigate has prevented any serious problems in the past. We hope to maintain this relationship.

Environmental Impact Statement and
Integrated Pest Management

One final example of being pro-active is our Integrated Pest Management program that has resulted from an Environmental Impact Statement.

We now have folders on each pest we need to consider. Weeds, insects, fungi, and even wild geese have a folder. We have enclosed what is known about the pest; its life cycles, known control methods, and documented levels of damage

We have set threshold levels and predetermined treatment procedures once our threshold level has been exceeded. We also have pest monitoring and treatment monitoring plans.

We have an annual meeting inviting neighbors and interested persons such as the news media and local environmental groups. So far, only a few neighbors have bothered to attend.

I interpret this as an indication that our efforts and openness has assured most folks that we are doing our best and not running some kind of covert operation against them and the environment.

APPLICATION OF HIND SIGHT:

Now for an example of a poor solution.

We have one neighbor with a shallow well which is less than 30 feet deep.

Development of the nursery substantially interrupted the shallow subsurface water flow to this well. An agreement was reached with the property owner that we would intercept water being collected in a perimeter drain constructed around reservoir adjacent to the private property and pipe it to our property line. The neighbor hooked onto this line and ran it to the well to augment the water supply.

Plainly stated, this solution may sound a little bizarre. However, the perimeter drain was 20-23 feet deep which closely approximated the depth of the well. I do not have documentation on the thinking of the engineers but they probably likened this installation to an extended water collection system similar to those used to augment many natural springs.

In return for this work, the Forest Service received a release from liability that was filed with the county. This release stated that the owner would accept any quantity or quality of water from the drain and would become totally responsible for underground flow to the well. Since this agreement and the coupling to the well, there has been a change of ownership and

changes in laws governing ground water. Especially the injection of water into wells.

The new owner is very dissatisfied with the situation. They have hired attorneys and made vocal complaints to various officials. We have been contacted by one attorney, a local watermaster, a zone water master, the State Water Board, the State DEQ, and a U.S. Congressman's aid.

It has been suggested by several that we simply cut off the coupling from the perimeter drain. However, we are bound by the Release of Liability to provide this flow to our property line. Cutting it off would breach this agreement and make us once again susceptible to liability for the flow into the well.

Having received some recommendations from the congressman, we initiated a review of the situation. This review involved personnel from our Regional Divisions of Lands and Minerals, Fiscal and Public Safety and Timber Management plus council from an attorney from the Office of General Council, the review team agreed with the recommendation of the congressman that we purchase the property.

We are currently going through the appraisal process. This issue is over 12 years old and is a long way from being settled. The Forest Service needs oversight approval to obtain the property, funding must be obtained, and a price must be agreed upon between the seller and the buyer.

The moral to this tale is to not enter into any solution unless it is sound. Even what appears sound now may not prove to be even legal ten years from now if it deals with the environment.

PHILOSOPHY

Neighbors have not changed. There have always been "good" and "bad" relations between neighbors.

Being nostalgic souls, most of us recall visiting over the back fence with our "good" neighbors. This process of bonding and communicating is still a good policy today. A policy that we can practice at each of our nursery sites. Realize that we are the suspect ones. We seldom live on the site. We and our crews arrive at the site in the morning, do what ever our program dictates during the day, and then we all drive off in the afternoon leaving toe neighbors wandering what they see and smell. What we do is naturally viewed critically by the folks who do live in the neighborhood.

We are sometimes just as apprehensive about visiting or meeting our adjacent property owners as they are about what we are up to across the fence.

Experience has shown that overcoming this natural apprehension and visiting with each one of those owners pays off. They may not be friendly, they may still dislike our dust smells, noise, etc. but at least we have become a face, a human being who has shown that we do care.

Rules by which to operate

Visit and inform your neighbors:

In addition:

- * Write letters
- * Hold open houses
- * Issue news releases
- * Celebrate accomplishments

Try to settle issues:

- * Meet demands if you can. At least negotiate something to try to satisfy the issue.

Don't give away your basic needs.

- * Do look for opportunity to change those needs to protect the environment.
- * Do not agree to untested methods or Rube Goldberg solutions.