Professional Ethics for Natural Resource and Environmental Managers: A Primer

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Dedication

To my students,
who teach me something every day
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On behalf of our School and its faculty and students, I am happy to introduce this short book to what we hope will be a large audience. It goes without saying that a high standard of ethical behavior is required for leaders in land management, nonprofit organizations and advocacy groups, government, and elsewhere. Our world can neither advance the economic well-being of its citizens nor manage its environment sustainably without a major focus on professional ethics. Lloyd Irland’s book will meet a major need by providing an excellent overview of this important topic.

Here at Yale, and at other institutions training young people for new roles in environmental management, we have been grappling with the best ways to cover this subject. We offer courses in environmental ethics, professional ethics, special workshops and brief training sessions. But we are still experimenting to find the best way to provide ethics training to our graduate students.

This book sums up and makes available in condensed form many years of work and discussion on the subject of professional ethics by Irland, who teaches ethics at our environment school here at Yale. We hope that wide availability of this book will enable our students, as well as students and professionals around the world, to open up their education on professional ethics effectively. I am certain you will find it useful.
Acknowledgements

A book like this emerges over many years, with the aid of many people. Dave Kittredge of the University of Massachusetts drafted me to develop a short distance-learning course, whose materials became the nucleus of this book.

At risk of omitting mention of some, I’d like to note the efforts of Rondi Doiron in assembling this manuscript for print, and of Jane Coppock, Editor of the Yale School of Forestry & Environmental Studies Publication Series, who supplied many helpful suggestions and saw the book smoothly through the production process.

We are grateful to the following organizations for permission to reprint material previously published: Cambridge University Press, Association of Consulting Foresters, and the Society of American Foresters, and also to the American Fisheries Society, The Land Trust Alliance, Canadian Institute of Forestry, the National Association of Environment Professionals, and the Wildlife Society for permission to reprint their ethics codes.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge the many foresters and students who engaged in discussions with me on these issues over the years, helping me to gain perspective on these issues and how to help people understand and resolve them.
Note to the Reader

This short book offers a primer on professional ethics. Many practitioners and students have felt a need for an accessible introduction.

The book includes material that has been used in a one-credit reading and discussion course at the Yale School of Forestry & Environmental Studies for several years, and also in our one day Professional Ethics workshops. It offers several articles, most previously published, that discuss specific issues in more detail. Finally, it offers a series of resources for learning and an appendix of ethics codes of several major professional societies. While the codes are all available on the Web, it seemed to us that placing them together with the introductory material would be an aid to learning.

In the previously published items, minor edits have been made to delete citations to superseded documents or otherwise avoid confusion. Their literature citations have been retained with them and not moved to the end in a comprehensive bibliography section.

My hope is that this book will ease the learning curve both for students and for mid-career people who are shouldering new responsibilities in natural resource and environmental management careers. Ethical issues can and will arise in private employment, for consultants, for government officials, and in the nonprofit sector. A little preparation will go a long way to help you navigate these choices in ways that you will continue to feel comfortable about in the future, and that you would feel comfortable explaining to one of your own children or family members.
NOTES ON THINKING ABOUT ETHICAL DILEMMAS

1. Life in the market, in administrative, political, advocacy, social change, and consulting settings, can be messy. Get used to it.
2. Awareness of potential ethical problems, leading to early detection, is critical.
3. Problems can be avoided or dealt with if detected early enough.
4. Legitimate personal loyalties often conflict. Not all of these conflicts are ethical problems.
5. Mandates in agency rules and professional society ethics codes often conflict.
6. Many ethical dilemmas have more than one right answer.
7. Developing skills in ethical reflection can help.
8. Keep learning: treat ethics as a lifelong study, not a one-time curriculum requirement.
9. “Ethics is not an exact science” – R.S. Miller