

Now, *that's* a Wicked Problem.

Studying how people with conflicting interests can share the forest
Notable notes in forest research at Oregon State University College of Forestry



What's a 'wicked problem'? A problem with many interacting parts, no right or wrong answer, no clear solution that doesn't conflict with somebody's interests or values. There are many wicked problems in the forests. For example, how can ATVers and snowmobilers, horse riders, bikers, and hikers share trails without conflict? How can forests go through the fire cycles they need to stay healthy while people get wood products and safe places to live?

Bruce Shindler is a social scientist in the Department of Forest Resources. Before coming to OSU, he was a park and recreation manager; he interacted with county governments, the Forest Service, and other agencies. Now, he studies how communities and agencies can work together to find solutions to fractious problems.



"The challenge," says Shindler, "is finding the right process and making decisions that people support." Citizens, scientists, government agencies, and other groups must trust each other before they can work out wicked problems. They have to be able to communicate clearly. They must be willing to try out solutions, talk again, and adapt if a solution doesn't "work." So he's interested in finding out what information sources people find useful and trustworthy.

Dr. Shindler also wants to know what people think about the way ecosystems are managed--especially when it comes to preventing or responding to fires on wild lands.

In addition to his research, Shindler values the chance to teach and advise students in resource management. He's especially excited about an award-winning course, "Natural Resource

Communications," that he's developed with the Forestry Media Center at OSU. Working in teams, students choose a natural resources issue. They design a message, define an audience, and produce a 3- to 5-minute video about that issue. When they graduate, they'll be ready to do their part in solving those wicked problems!

To find out more about the work of Dr. Shindler and other social scientists in forestry at OSU, visit

www.forestry.oregonstate.edu/

