Ian Methven welcomed as Dean of Forestry

(UNBPRI) Equipping future foresters with the knowledge and skills they'll need to cope with tomorrow's technology and the changing perceptions of society is one of the major challenges facing the University of New Brunswick's faculty of forestry. It's also one that its new dean, Ian Methven, has at the top of his agenda.

A member of UNB's department of forest resources in Fredericton for 11 years, Dr. Methven appreciated the magnitude of his new management assignment when he assumed the five-year appointment on July 1. "Some of the dean's leadership responsibilities remain the same over the years: to develop faculty policy, to help attract funding for research and scholarship, and to ensure that programs address contemporary and future needs," he said. "While the responsibilities stay the same, the issues change continuously in terms of the needs of both technology and society."

The dean would like society's perception of foresters to focus more on what they do. "Foresters manage a very complex ecological system to give society what it wants, whether it be timber or recreation. There are, however, conflicting wants in society." While these conflicting wants make the task daunting, Dr. Methven thinks they can be satisfied.

"What we need to do is follow the spirit of what society wants for the environment and balance that with how the objective can be reached. Groups tend to focus on the actions and not the outcomes - and that's how disagreements can arise," he explained. "We have a professional responsibility to ensure the outcome meets what groups in society say they want. Part of the dean's job is to try to establish dialogue with the different groups in society."

Revisions to the graduate studies program and undergraduate curriculum are already under way in the faculty's two departments, forest engineering and forest resources. "We are looking at the degrees we offer, the kinds of students we want to attract, and the graduates we produce. While our students are very successful in getting jobs from coast to coast, we can only expect to continue to do well in our recruiting if potential students see our profession as challenging and interesting."

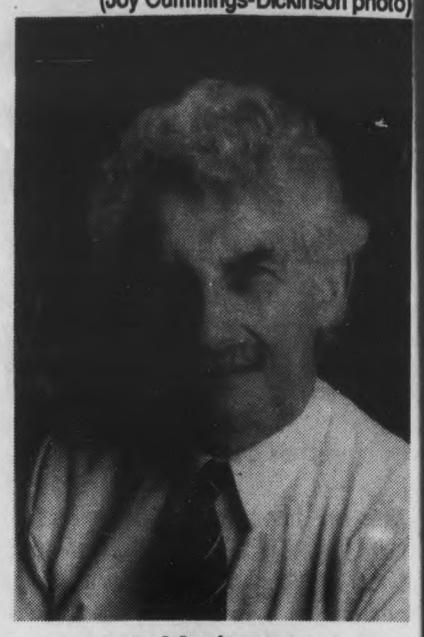
The new dean would like to see more women choosing careers in forestry. "Often our top performing students are women, but very few move on to the graduate level." Women in the profession have indicated to Dr. Methven that they want to get more involved with industrial forestry. "That sector is changing. We're finding our role has expanded greatly in managing the forest for its other values, and that opens up many other fields." Dr. Methven would also like to see more women on faculty and is in the process of trying to understand why there aren't more now.

Also scheduled for review is the concept of professional education and certification. "The process of re-education of graduates involves advanced, intensive courses for possible certification in particular areas of forestry," Dr. Methven explained. "For example, we have traditionally focused on managing forest lands for the commodities and amenities we can receive from them, such as timber, water, recreation and hunting. Now there is a shift in managing a forest for its own intrinsic value: it has rights of its own." Managing, he added, also involves the principle of integrated management with adjacent areas, such as a timber area with a recreation area or park.

Management, natural resources and renewal are subject areas in which Dr. Methven has earned a wide reputation since starting out as an immigrant laborer, ranch hand, pulp cutter, fire tower lookout and conservation officer in Canada during the 1960s. Born in the Philippines, Dr. Methven received his bachelor of science degree in forestry from UNB in 1969 and his doctorate from Duke University in Durham, NC, in 1972. For 10 years before joining UNB in 1979, he was a research officer responsible for a fire effects and fire use program and major contracts in hardwood and mixed species management.

At UNB, Dr. Methven has taught fire management, silviculture, stand dynamics and conservation. "Teaching is an essential job at a university," Dr. Methven emphasized. "It keeps you in touch with the students." To stay in touch, he is teaching three courses this year. Over the years he has supervised 13 theses and dissertations; been a member of the fire science centre; served as director of graduate studies for the forestry faculty and as chairperson of the department of forest resources; and sat on numerous committees at the departmental, faculty and university levels. He has also organized eight workshops; given five invited presentations at international, national, and regional conferences and workshops; and delivered nearly 70 reports and presentations, both published and unpublished.

(Joy Cummings-Dickinson photo)



Ian Methven

Dr. Methven secured over 30 research contracts in the last 10 years. Among the agencies from which he has received grants are Forestry Canada, the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada, and the Donner Foundation. In 1986 Dr. Methven founded his own natural resources consulting and software development company specializing in both forest and fire management.

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