

Book Review by Jan Oosthoek

Harold K. Steen (ed), *Jack Ward Thomas: The Journals of a Forest Service Chief*, Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2004. 416 pp. 28 photos. £22.95.

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This highly readable book, skilfully edited by forest historian Harold Steen, is a wonderful source for anyone who wants to study and understand the changes in forest policy that laid the foundation for US forestry and conservation policies in the 21st century. Not a historical work in the conventional sense, the book is based on the journals of Jack Thomas, Chief of the US Forest Service during the first Clinton Administration between 1993 and 1996. We are fortunate that Thomas kept such a detailed journal and future historians will benefit from his perceptive accounts of intrigue and political machinations in a US government department. The book provides invaluable insights into the shift of forestry policy away from the production driven objectives of the Reagan era to the more conservation focussed policies of the 1990s. From his position as a senior researcher in the US Forestry Service, and finally its Chief, Thomas leads us day by day through the legal and political manoeuvres and wrangling and the lobbying of interests groups, from 1990 until the day he leaves the Forestry Service in 1996. It is not simply concerned with forestry policy but includes accounts of other events in his early days as Chief, such as his touching account of the dramatic deaths in 1994 of 14 fire fighters in a large forest fire in Colorado. His account adds an extra layer to archival material available to the researcher and can be used to corroborate information found in documentary evidence. Personal journals and interviews with key players in forestry and conservation are increasingly important to the modern historian as they improve our understanding of the development of conservation policies and well as general attitudes towards nature and resource management. This book should encourage environmental and forest historians to secure the stories of key foresters and conservationists for future generations.