Marion Clawson long has been regarded as one of the ablest and most practical scholars in agricultural and resource economics. Born and reared in Nevada, he received his BS and MS degrees from the University of Nevada and PhD from Harvard University. From 1929 to 1946 he was an economist with the U.S. Department of Agriculture. In 1947 he moved to the Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Department of the Interior, and served as director of BLM from 1948 to 1953. After two years in Israel, he joined the staff of Resources for the Future in 1955 as director of land use and management and eventually also served as acting president.

Dr. Clawson's research career spanned nearly six decades, producing more than thirty-five books and hundreds of articles and other monographs. One of his finest legacies is the practical approach to policy making he devised for application to any natural resources issue. His approach integrates ecological, economic efficiency and equity, sociocultural, and operational/administrative considerations. CHOICES is pleased to present Dr. Clawson's views and key influences on his thought, including John D. Black and Abbott P. Usher.

Policy making for natural resources

An Interview with Marion Clawson

by Gerald F. Vaughn

Vaughn: Among your many excellent books, *Forests for Whom and for What?* (1975) may have the greatest value, because there you offer a practical approach to policy making that can be applied to any natural resources issue.

Clawson: Thank you very much. Yes, I regard it as an eclectic and inclusive approach to resource policy analysis. Cost/benefit and cost/effectiveness evaluations using this approach can contribute to sounder public policy in natural resources management. I elaborated on the approach, including the importance of negotiation to reduce or manage conflicts, in an article for the *Journal of Business Administration* (Fall/Spring 1979–80, pp. 57–66).

Understanding the processes of adjustment in specific resource institutions is essential to formulate sound public policies. I tried to analyze institutional change wherever relevant in my studies, and increasingly I gave primacy to institutional processes.

For example, in my book *Suburban Land Conversion in the United States...* (1971), I analyzed suburbanization as an economic and governmental process. I wanted to examine how and why suburbia arose, and by what processes it has changed and is changing. The intellectual conviction underlying this study is that economic and social programs should be based upon accurate understanding of facts, relationships, and processes.

I think economists have an obligation to assist in inventing new institutions and new processes. The economist should become adept at determining the economic effects that follow a particular course of events or actions. We shouldn't tell people what course of action to take, but we can help them make better decisions on their own.

In resource policy analysis, I learned to look for the most relevant facts, relationships, and processes. Well-executed, definitive studies of special topics are a better use of time and effort than sweeping comprehensive studies that require the same time and effort but tend to be broad-brushed. Limiting the scope of individual research projects both sharpened my focus and, by helping me to allocate my time, increased my productivity. When you get a study to a certain point, is the value gained from another six months spent on that book greater than the value of six months spent on your next book? As economists we can be pragmatists as well as empiricists.

A practical approach to resource policy analysis

Vaughn: What are the main elements of resource policy analysis as you see them?

Clawson: Economists do not have a universal or depersonalized economics; we are dealing with specific, individualized, unique resource problems and the management measures possible for them. Resource policy analysis boils down to a set of six decision-making criteria for each management measure under evaluation.

First, what is the physical/biological feasibility and what are the physical/biological consequences of each resource management measure? Second, what is each measure's economic efficiency; that is, what are its costs in relation to its benefits? Third, what are its welfare or equity implications; that is, who gains and who pays? Fourth, what is its social or cultural acceptability? For instance, a measure might protect a specific resource but infringe on landowner rights without compensation and therefore be unacceptable policy. Fifth, what is the measure's operational or administrative practicality? Do resource users have the skill and technology they need to put the measure into practice? At the program level, is the appropriation of funds adequate? Sixth and last, have the previous five considerations been integrated and reconciled? Attempting to maximize any single objective by itself could lead to a different policy choice than if all criteria are considered together.

Professional analysis contributes more to the first five considerations of each management measure; it has no special power to integrate and reconcile them. For instance, economic efficiency has its place in resource policy analysis but is more important to economists than to most other people. Welfare or equity implications are more important to most people and tend to be most important to public policy makers. The decision-making criteria need to be considered as a whole and reconciled by negotiation to achieve win-win outcomes if possible or tradeoffs or compromises if necessary.

Vaughn: Why do you emphasize negotiation in conflict management?

Clawson: There are limits to the effectiveness of both market and land-use control approaches to resource situations. I explored the characteristics, the advantages, and the disadvantages of private markets and the legislative-judicial approach. The operations of the market are severely restrained; actually, markers in many ways have been repudiated. The legislative-judicial process is somewhat inflexible, expensive, and adversarial; one party wins, the other loses. I concluded that negotiation would, in general, be more effective.

Negotiation has the potential to produce an outcome where all parties gain something. The skills of the labor negotiator may prove more valuable to natural resources management than those of the scientist, economist, or lawyer. Of course, well-done economic research can help to identify possible win-win outcomes as the basis for negotiated settlement of disputes.

For the negotiation process to work, there must be respect and trust on both sides, and a willingness to genuinely seek a better outcome—features that are often lacking. At times it may be necessary to fall back on one or a combination of the other approaches, and the result probably will not be a win-win outcome but, instead, a tradeoff or compromise that leaves some or all parties less than satisfied. Win-win outcomes can be achieved only when all parties seek to reach a mutually satisfying agreement, and such negotiations cannot be forced.

Vaughn: What led you to this approach?

Clawson: I'd say there were three major influences. Certainly my own work experience, in studying public land management, outdoor recreation, forestry, and so many different kinds of resource problems over so many years, influenced me in ways too numerous to mention. I tried to draw conclusions from my own empirical research and analysis of specific resource institutions.

Many persons and events have influenced me importantly, but I can single out two people in particular. As a doctoral student at Harvard I studied under John D. Black, who had keen insights about natural resource utilization and was a major influence. Abbott P. Usher, the noted economic historian at Harvard, knew that historical events are determinately located in both space and time, and he too was a major influence.

John D. Black

Vaughn: What are some important lessons you learned from Black?

Clawson: Black was very helpful to me then, and enormously helpful to me in later years, including participation in writing two of his books, *Parity, Parity, Parity* (1942) and *Farm Management* (1947). In those days, my concern was mostly with farm management, or the economics of the individual farm. I took for credit Black's course on the economics of agriculture, and I audited his course on

price analysis and marketing. His courses were very good, but I had read all of his major writings before I went to Harvard, so I was already familiar, in general, with Black's thinking and the material he assigned. However, Black's methods of thinking and analyzing economic relationships became very important in my work, especially when I studied resource problems more as a production economist.

Vaughn: How did Black help to sharpen your analytical skills?

Clawson: Black was known mainly as a production economist and for his work on agricultural policy. But he always did research on agricultural and forest land problems too. Black helped me understand how to bridge the gap between the economics of the individual farm and the economics of overall land use for a whole area. He made excellent use of technical data to measure one land use against another. In regard to soil conservation, Black showed how soils can be profitably built up by sound management practices. He related submarginality of land to its specific use and the techniques employed in its use. Most importantly, Black revealed what complete reorganization, rather than incremental change, of farm and forest units could do to improve incomes.

Also, I learned a lot about writing from Black. He felt you should carefully think out your article or book before writing it on paper. By better organizing your research and thinking about its policy implications more clearly from the start, the final report needs minimum rewriting.

Abbott P. Usher

Vaughn: What are some important lessons you learned from Usher?

Clawson: From Usher I acquired a particular view of how to study social institutions in meaningful ways. I took his course in economic history. He felt that economic history revolves around the management of resources and that the movement of economic history is due to the reactions between physical resources, technologies for using resources, and social institutions. He was far ahead of his time in studying these reactions. To Usher, the processes—the *how*—of institutional change were of paramount concern.

In resource policy analysis, where resource institutions are central, we too often neglect the processes of institutional change that Usher understood to be vital. He knew that the ongoing development of seemingly the same economic institution, such as land tenure, can be distinctly different from place to place, even within a single society.

Vaughn: Why do you think Usher gave top priority to studying the processes of institutional change?

Clawson: He felt that historical method was too concerned with what happened, where, when, and why, to the neglect of how these things happened. He felt the more vital question is: *How* do things happen?

Vaughn: Did Usher see value in the study of quantitative aspects of social change?

Clawson: Definitely. He felt that economic history has to account for the quantitative aspects of social change, especially population growth and changes in the standard of living (per capita consumption). He sought to describe the resources available to society over long periods and felt that quantitative expression should be given to both actual and potential resources, in physical as well as value units. He saw mathematics and statistics as valuable complements to narrative description and analysis of historical processes.

Vaughn: Thank you, Dr. Clawson. We are grateful and wish you continued good health and happiness. ■