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Comments

In the proposed U.S. Forest Service's proposed rule, several changes are made in order to increase public participation, creating an adaptive management system reflecting public values. While a noble goal, the Forest Service needs to create an outline for how public participation will be weighed. Inevitably, the Forest Service will receive incompatible comments. How will regulators weigh these divergent comments? Two ethical rubrics exist for evaluating the utility of public values: utilitarianism and Kantian ethics.

Utilitarianism assumes, at its simplest, that a morally right action is one in which the consequences of the action make the most people happy, or decreases the most amount of pain. An important factor is that utilitarianism defines everyone's pleasure and/or pain matters equally. A moral decision is reached by comparing the pleasures caused by an action to the pain that may result, in a maneuver named "utilitarian calculus."

Kant's ethic is derived from Genesis, that man was created in the image and likeness of God, and given dominion over all the earth. In being like God, humans are superior, which Kant finds evidence of in humans being rational agents, who are autonomous. It is only to these rational agents that morality applies. Actions are decided based only on duty: the rational agent must always do what is right. The rational agent may determine what is right through two categorical imperatives. The first states that the principal of an act must be able to apply universally, otherwise it is not morally permissible.

The Forest Service must decide how to value public input: all public comments weighed equally (utilitarian) or allowing comments that identify issues effecting social and economic concerns over purely environmental issues (Kantian). The evaluation of public comments will affect the ability of the Forest Service to revise forest management services. The goal of preserving multiple use on federal lands requires that the Forest Service identify a structured, transparent method of valuing public comments.

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