Environmentalist To Discuss Forestry

By David A. Maltz

Lou Gold came down from the mountaintop last night to speak to an audience at Boston University.

Gold, who sees himself as a "pied piper of ecological idealism," spreads a message about the long-term damage being done to public forest lands for the sake of short-term commercial convenience. Both the message and the messenger are very extraordinary.

Gold began his career as an urbanite, attending the Illinois Institute of Technology and completing PhD work in Political Science at Columbia University. He taught at Oberlin College and was on the tenure track at the University of Illinois.

Then he left. "I found I didn't feel right anymore. I needed to find myself ... so I chose a place to go that was as far from a metropolis as possible."

Gold chose to retreat to Bald Mountain in the Siskiyou range on the Oregon-California border. Two days after arriving, he was shown an immense track of ancient forest scheduled to be cut down by commercial loggers, and within a week he was "illegally sitting in front of bulldozers." His trip up to the crest of Bald Mountain was intended to last 5 days, but it grew to 56 days, as other hikers began to bring him food in exchange for his stories. Says Gold, "Six months after running away, I was in politics up to my neck, and married to a mountain to boot."

During the winter, Gold now spends his time traveling throughout the country speaking about the imbalances in the U.S. Forest Service's land management, giving a crash course in forest ecology, and calling his audiences to action. He uses a combination of slides, stories, and music to convey the feeling of walking among living trees 25 stories high and over 500 years old to those who spend their time among carefully trimmed trees not older than 50 years.

Throughout his talk, Gold mixes hard science with a sense of anger at the destruction that has occurred and a hope that the remaining ancient forests will be saved. He prefaced his comments on commercial logging with the statement, "This may surprise you, but I'm in favor of logging, in the right place and in the right way."

The facts he presents are often startling. "Many Americans are unaware that there is a difference between a U.S. National Park and a National Forest. Ancient trees [in the northeast] are coming down at a rate faster than the Brazilian rain forest — and it's happening with the assistance of taxpayer dollars."

To solve the problem, Gold advocated negotiations with the timber industry to address the issues of mechanization in logging and the division of forest into protected and commercial segments.

Lou Gold will speak tonight at MIT in 6-120 at 7:30 p.m. Admission is free.