



# Roundtable on Sustainable Forests

*A Partnership for the Future*

## **Workshop on the Integration and Synthesis Group's Conceptual Framework**

### **SUMMARY**

**November 16, 2004 – Alexandria, VA**

The Roundtable on Sustainable Forests (RSF) organized a workshop on the Integration and Synthesis Group's (ISG) Conceptual Framework, which was held on November 16, 2004 in Alexandria, Virginia. Attachment A is the workshop agenda, and Attachment B is a participant list. [Click here](#) to learn more about the purpose, organization, and history of the ISG.

The workshop's objectives were:

1. To learn about and provide feedback on the ISG's multi-tiered Conceptual Framework, which is intended to serve as a basis for integrating and synthesizing criteria and indicator sets for forests, rangelands, minerals, and water resources.
2. To explore how the ISG Conceptual Framework connects to the current Montreal Criteria and Indicators (C&I) and whether it can serve as a factor in determining how to refine the C&I through the Montreal Process.

### **PRESENTATION OF THE ISG MULTI-TIERED CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

Ted Heintz of the White House Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) presented the conceptual model, and his presentation served as the basis of workshop discussion. Mr. Heintz's presentation is available in the *Meeting and Workshop Summary* section of the [Roundtable's website](#). A document that provides a detailed description of the conceptual framework is available on the site as well. Mr. Heintz explained that the ISG's work is an indicator organization and interpretation exercise, not a modeling exercise. He emphasized that the ISG's work is part of a long-term process to understand the relationships between humans and the rest of Earth's ecosystem and that this process requires consideration of both knowledge and values. He also explained that the ISG has employed a hierarchical approach to organizing information and developing its systems-based framework. The top of the hierarchy is the most general "tier" of the framework. Lower tiers provide progressively more detail.

### **QUESTIONS AND CLARIFICATIONS ABOUT THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

The highlights below reflect the discussion that followed the presentation, but should not be interpreted as consensus statements.

- In Tier 0, the line between the natural and human systems should probably be described as a zone of overlap and interaction, not a dividing line.

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- In the conceptual framework, “current environmental condition” refers to a particular condition measured at a discrete point in time. It differs from “capital” in that capital is the durable capacity to produce value (in the form of fish, timber, clean water, etc). Distinguishing between indicators of durable capacity and indicators of conditions requires careful consideration because many of the conditions of interest affect capacities. For example, soil conditions affect the durable capacity to produce timber.
- All changes in conditions and capacities result from processes. The initial conditions and ending conditions are state variables.
- All markets are on human side of the framework. The environmental side captures the processes that produce resources that are extracted and used to produce goods and services sold in markets.
- Human interactions with the environment are included in processes flowing from the human side to the environmental side.
- The phrase “spiritual and religious experiences” may not be well received by indigenous communities. The model should use a term that reflects a way of life, not just the act of having an experience.
- The ISG’s conceptual framework is not a model designed to project future conditions. It is designed to be a basis for developing and interpreting statistical indicators that provide feedback about the consequences of human interactions with the environment, allowing people to understand changes and relationships among parts of the system. Based on that understanding, society can determine whether actions and their consequences are reflecting societal values.

### **CONNECTIONS TO THE MONTREAL C&I**

The highlights below reflect comments made by one or more participants and should not be interpreted as consensus statements.

- With regard to the Montreal C&I, a group of ISG participants from the RFS agreed that the majority of the indicators in Criteria 1-5 (the biophysical ones) represent states. However, there was some debate as to whether specific indicators represented capital or condition. Criterion 6 contains a mix of states in the human subsystem, though there are some indicators that measure processes in the human subsystem. The majority of indicators in Criterion 7 measure processes.
- The Montreal C&I were designed to provide useful information to forest managers. At the same time, it was also recognized that countries had limits with regard to the number of indicators to which they could respond. The latter point was an important consideration in terms of institutional ownership.
- The people responsible for inventory and assessment want indicators that contain both structure and process. Process indicators help determine how to achieve desired outcomes. A systems approach to indicator development can help identify such indicators.
- Indicators provide an awareness of problems like warning lights on a car’s dashboard, but do not show what actions to take. If you see a warning light on the dashboard, you have to do more in-depth investigation to determine what part of the car needs repair. The ISG framework attempts to organize the indicators that would be useful to identify problems, diagnose their causes and determine how to act to improve the situation.

### **POTENTIAL NEXT STEPS**

The highlights below reflect comments made by one or more participants and should not be interpreted as consensus statements.

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- Future ISG progress reports and presentations should do more to explain how the framework addresses the purposes for which it was developed. It might also be useful to have a shorter piece for more rapid digestion by a wider audience.
- The ISG should work with other organizations to communicate its work to the scientists developing the next iteration of the *National Report on Sustainable Forests* and others, both domestically and internationally, working with indicators and with resource inventories and assessments.
- Additional effort should be taken to make the distinction between capital and capacity more clear.
- The judgment box in Tier 2 needs to be described in more detail to explain the kinds of decisions and factors that it encompasses.
- Mapping the Montreal C&I to Tier 2 of the conceptual framework would be a good step toward communicating the content and potential value of the framework. Doing so could catalyze a discussion on the areas where more and/or better indicators are needed and where existing indicators may be redundant. The indicator map could be an informative tool for participants in the Montreal C&I revisions process. It would also reveal how complex and potentially confusing the wording of existing indicators can be and how more clarity might be achieved by relatively small changes in wording.
- For the ISG's future discussions, it would be useful to map the indicators from the other natural resource roundtables as well.
- Such an indicator mapping exercise and the learnings that flow from it could potentially advance domestic progress on criteria and indicators beyond where refinements in the international process are likely to go, while still remaining consistent with those processes. It could also help to increase the understanding of participants in all of the Roundtables regarding the evaluative part of the framework.

**ATTACHMENT A. WORKSHOP AGENDA**

**Roundtable on Sustainable Forests Workshop on the  
Integration and Synthesis Group's Conceptual Framework**

**Workshop Objectives:**

1. To learn about and provide feedback on the ISG's multi-tiered Conceptual Framework which is intended to serve as a basis for integrating and synthesizing criteria and indicator sets for forests, rangelands, minerals, and water resources.
2. To explore how the ISG Conceptual Framework connects to the current Montreal Criteria and Indicators (C&I) and whether it can serve as a factor in determining how to refine the C&I through the Montreal Process.

12:30 p.m.     **Registration**

1:00 p.m.     **Welcome, Introductions and Agenda Review**

1:20 p.m.     **Presentation of the ISG Multi-Tiered Conceptual Framework**  
*Ted Heintz, White House Council on Environmental Quality*

2:00 p.m.     **Opportunity for Questions and Answers and Initial Feedback on the  
Conceptual Framework**

2:45 p.m.     **Presentation on How the ISF Conceptual Framework Could Relate to the  
Montreal C&I -- RSF Members of the ISG**

3:00 p.m.     **Break**

3:15 p.m.     **Plenary Session**  
*Participants will discuss how the Conceptual Framework relates to the current Montreal C&I, whether it can be revised to make it more suitable as a basis for refining the C&I in a manner that promotes integration and synthesis, and whether it can serve as a factor in determining how to best refine the C&I through the Montreal Process.*

5:00 p.m.     **Adjourn**

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