



Roundtable on Sustainable Forests

A Partnership for the Future

2006–2010 Work Plan: 2006 Annual Plan

Mission

The mission of the Roundtable on Sustainable Forests (RSF) is to engage multiple stakeholders through collaborative efforts to advance understanding, assessment and reporting of forest sustainability and adoption of forest resource management in a manner that integrates environmental, social and economic considerations, using the Montreal Process Criteria and Indicators (C&I) as a common national framework.

Purpose

The original purpose of the RSF was described in its current charter (February 2, 2001) “to serve as a forum to share information and perspectives that will enable better decision-making in the U.S. regarding the sustainable management of our nation’s forests.” This purpose is actualized through efforts to:

- Provide a forum for dialogue about sustainable forest issues, including national and sub-national criteria and indicator efforts;
- Broaden and deepen public understanding and adoption of sustainable forest management practices;
- Facilitate the coordinated assessment and reporting of the sustainability of the Nation’s forest resources;
- Communicate and coordinate data and programs within the sustainable forest community;
- Serve as a venue for connecting domestic and global forest issues; and
- Demonstrate on-the-ground benefits of sustainable forest management.

The fundamental approach of the RSF in carrying out its purpose is based on the belief that *better data* will lead to *better dialogue* about the sustainability of the nation’s forest resources, which will in turn lead to more informed, *better decisions* by stakeholders.

Background

Since its inception in 1998, the RSF has focused on the development, implementation, utilization, and reporting of U.S. efforts related to the Criteria and Indicators contained in the Santiago Declaration of the Montreal Process. The predecessor to the RSF, the Stakeholder Group, actively participated in the development of the Montreal Process C&I. Since its inception, the RSF has achieved significant progress and was instrumental in the development and release of the *National Report on Sustainable Forests–2003*. While the C&I have largely been used at the national scale, the RSF recognizes that other sets of criteria and indicators have been developed for use at sub-national scales and is interested in learning more about them.

The ownership and management characteristics of the nation’s forest resources present uniquely difficult challenges in adopting and reporting on sustainable forest management in the United States. Because there is no national program or policy for sustainable forests on all lands, the RSF fulfills a critical role by

providing a venue for all stakeholders to share perspectives and develop implementation ideas in order to broaden and deepen the application of sustainable forest management on the ground.

The RSF is not a decision-making body, but rather an open forum comprised of voluntary participants to share information and perspectives about the sustainable management of the nation's forests. The overall goal is to engage federal, state, private, and non-profit organization leadership in committing to collaborative capacity building that will improve the forest sector's ability to promote sustainable forest management. This work includes making linkages to international sustainable forest issues and other roundtables, forums, and processes focused on other natural resources.

Activities for 2006–2010: 2006 Annual Plan

There are ongoing as well as several planned and potential activities for the RSF to undertake in 2006, many of which would continue work in which the RSF is already engaged. These activities fall under the following themes:

1. Reporting and Monitoring Progress Toward Sustainable Forests
2. Coordinating with Related National Data and Indicator Efforts
3. Fostering Sustainable Forest Management through the Application of the C&I
4. Engaging the Broader Community of Forest Stakeholders at Multiple Scales

As a forum that brings together a diverse network of people concerned about the sustainable management of forests, the RSF provides the opportunity for dialogue and shared learning needed to better understand the effects of actions taken by forest owners, managers, and others who care for the nation's forests. This learning relates to all facets of the RSF's work plan and is facilitated by RSF events, website, listserv among participants, and more.

There are three types of projects that RSF participants might engage in:

1. Work in which the entire RSF engages, such providing input to the next National Report. Ad-hoc working groups lead these efforts.
2. Efforts that are tied to the RSF's mission, but that are specifically proposed by and led by a self-select group of participants (e.g., "champions").
3. Efforts that are external to the RSF, but that might be of value to participants, and might be shared with the RSF at a meeting or through the listserv.

The May 2005 RSF meeting call for papers sought collaborators for future activities that would promote and inform the sustainable management of forests. While the RSF does not directly fund projects, the collaborators contributions were valuable in drafting the work plan. Collaborators will be encouraged to reach out to RSF participants as well as stakeholders outside the RSF forum as a means to obtain needed technical and financial assistance.

1. Reporting and Monitoring Progress Toward Sustainable Forests

The RSF continues to believe the Montreal Process C&I provide a solid foundation for improving and enriching the information base upon which more informed policymaking and collaborative problem solving can occur. Thus, the RSF will continue to focus a portion of its efforts on the continuous improvement of the quality of data that is used to assess the state of our nation's forests, within the framework provided by the Montreal Process C&I. The next national report is scheduled for release in 2010.

The RSF will continue to play a role in the development of the national report through:

- Helping to establish a schedule and process for the report;

- Revisiting the final section (“The Transition Toward Sustainability”) of the 2003 National Report to provide guidance to the federal agencies;
- Encouraging federal agencies to recommit to the multi-agency federal Memorandum of Understanding as a mechanism for coordination; and
- Facilitating coordination of data from other sectors, such as states, NGOs, and universities.

The RSF will also continue to assist the domestic process for refining the C&I for future reporting. The Montreal Process Technical Advisory Committee will be producing a report in early 2006 compiling earlier suggested refinements. Prior to the Montreal Process Working Group meeting in June 2006, the RSF will engage in further discussion on the suggested changes.

Potential additional efforts being contemplated by RSF participants include the development of a prototype monitoring protocol based on common data standards that can be used across agencies and ownerships to collect and analyze data and to report on current conditions and trends of forest ecosystems. Susan Morr  of Oregon State University would lead this effort in cooperation with Keith Reynolds and Norm Johnson.

2. Coordinating with Related National Data and Indicator Efforts

The RSF will continue to communicate and coordinate with other indicator development efforts, including:

- Integration and Synthesis Group (ISG);
- Roundtable Network, which brings together the forest, rangeland, water, and minerals and energy roundtables;
- Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) interagency coordination of development of environmental indicators; including plans for a Collaboration on Indicators on the Nation’s Environment that will draw together the various separate indicator efforts into a comprehensive national system of environmental indicators;
- Heinz Center’s ecosystem measurement report; and
- The National Academies’ Key National Indicator Initiative.

All of these endeavors provide an opportunity to place the work on indicators for sustainable forest management in broader contexts that can provide linkages to environmental, economic, and social processes that interact with forests and forest management, but are usually considered to be outside the forest ecosystem or sector.

Potential additional efforts being contemplated by RSF participants include the development of a formal logic-based specification for interpretation and synthesis of the Montreal Process C&I, which is intended to link into the activities of the ISG. Keith Reynolds of the USFS PNW Research Station would lead this effort.

3. Fostering Sustainable Forest Management through the Application of the C&I

The RSF will continue to foster opportunities for all stakeholders (including private landowners, tribes, communities, etc.) to illustrate the applications of the C&I to their work. The “Multiple Perspectives” effort, which will culminate in a workshop in December 2005, has invited members of the forest stakeholder community to share their views of what they discern to be the key findings in the *National Report* as well as the data gaps that impede understanding. The RSF will identify follow-up activities to this effort. The RSF will also continue to serve as a platform for stakeholder connections, through brief presentations at meetings, postings to the RSF listserv, information on the RSF website, and other outlets.

The National Association of State Foresters (NASF) and the USDA Forest Service has begun to distribute a field handbook designed to help landowners and managers understand the benefits of SFM. "A Stewardship Handbook for Family Forest Owners: Planning, Managing and Protecting Your Woods, Your Investment and Your Environment". Based on comments and experience from collaborators in its use, the field book will be revised and distribution increased as needed.

Another effort will be an exploration of the roles, merits and opportunities of the Montreal Process C&I on the nation's private forests. This effort will be led by the university- and extension-based Sustainable Forest Partnership (SFP), which will work closely with other organizations that serve private forest owners in efforts to define and communicate the concepts of the C&I in ways that are meaningful to landowners and how the principles can be applied.

4. Engaging the Broader Community of Forest Stakeholders at Multiple Scales

Closely tied to the above theme of fostering connections to the Montreal Process C&I is the goal of engaging the broader community at multiple scales. While the Montreal Process C&I focus on national data and reporting, many other indicator efforts are underway that can both inform the Montreal Process C&I effort and learn from it.

The RSF will continue to explore connections to several efforts already underway, including regional roundtables (e.g., the Southern Roundtable on Sustainable Forests), tribal indicator efforts, sub-national indicator efforts (e.g., Baltimore County), and international activities (e.g., the United Nations Forum on Forests), as well as connections to new efforts, such as workshops on ecosystem services. RSF meetings, as well as the website and listserv, will serve as a platform for connecting RSF participants to these other activities.

In an effort to integrate forest sustainability with local environmental management, one specific project will be the facilitation of local government capacity building for incorporating use of the Montreal Process C&I framework in county-scale land use/watershed management in Maryland. This is envisioned as a three-year project, and will be led by Don Outen of Baltimore County and Steve Koehn, Maryland State Forester, in coordination with Gerry Gray of American Forests and Ruth McWilliams of the US Forest Service.

The Pinchot Institute for the Environment continues to lead U.S. stakeholder input activities related to the United Nations Forum on Forests. The Pinchot Institute will release the "Implementing Sustainable Forest Management" report, which builds on the National Report on Sustainable Forests -- 2003. It is a consolidated version of the US national reports on United Nations Forum on Forests on responses to the Proposals for Action, rewritten with a domestic U.S. audience in mind.

Potential additional efforts being contemplated by RSF participants include a research project led by Craig Patterson demonstrating integrated forestry and value added job creation through the application of selective harvesting, local processing, and end-product forest management; another potential effort proposed by Stephen Dewhurst is the identification of the appropriate organizational levels for the regional roundtables, which might vary between regions, and the development of "terms of reference" for the relationship between the regional and national roundtables.

Governance, Participation, and Infrastructure

The progress toward sustainable forest management via the RSF process is entirely dependent on the willingness and commitment of interested individuals and organizations to engage and, to the extent possible, "do work." Further and significant progress toward sustainable forests now requires the emergence and "unleashing" of champions, national and local leaders who are willing to step out and lead

the dialogue, assessment, reporting and application of sustainable forest management efforts. The RSF is more than just showing up at a meeting, but a combination of face-to-face as well as electronic collaborative processes. There are several opportunities and levels of engagement, at multiple scales, that are open to all who are interested in the vision of the RSF.

- RSF Participants – The RSF is comprised of public and private entities and individuals who are interested in advancing the U.S. efforts toward sustainable forests. Participants engage through their involvement in national and regional meetings, electronic interactions, and various work groups (see below).
- RSF Core Group – The Core Group serves as an informal steering committee for the RSF. It is comprised of 12-18 members who have committed to a higher level of voluntary participation in the work of the RSF, including planning national RSF meetings, attending 2-4 Core Group meetings per year, drafting and periodically reviewing the annual RSF Work Plan, and reviewing and commenting on other pertinent RSF documents. RSF participants desiring to serve as members of the Core Group express their interest and willingness to serve to the RSF's Executive Leadership Team (see below).
- Executive Leadership Team – This team provides the overall leadership for the RSF and is comprised of two co-chairs: one from a federal agency with substantial program responsibilities that encompass forests, and one from the non-federal public or private sector. The current federal co-chair is Joel Holtrop, Deputy Chief for the National Forest System, USDA Forest Service. The SFP serves as the non-federal co-chair. Dick Brinker, Dean and Professor, Auburn University School of Forestry and Wildlife Sciences, and Jim Finley, Professor of Forest Resources, The Pennsylvania State University School of Forest Resources, share the SFP's co-chair responsibilities. The team meets by conference call at least quarterly and provides overall direction for the RSF with consideration given to the identified priorities of the participants and Core Group members. The Executive Leadership Team reviews Core Group participation annually as part of the overall Work Plan review process (see below) and will affirm expressions of interest by a letter of invitation to participate in the Core Group.
- RSF Facilitation – In order to provide a setting in which a diversity of views, opinions and perspectives about sustainable forest management are present, it is essential that the RSF be facilitated by an independent, impartial facilitator who is skillful in managing discussions where multiple, and sometimes strongly held, viewpoints are present. A critical element in the RSF's success to date and its potential for future progress is the utilization of an impartial facilitator.
- RSF Work Groups – The work of the RSF is largely done outside of the periodic meetings. Ad-hoc work groups, initiated either by the RSF leadership or by participants themselves, are formed as needed on an ad-hoc basis to carry out specific projects.
- Work Plan Drafting Group – This team of 5-7 RSF participants, representing a diversity of perspectives, will review the Work Plan on an annual basis and submit it to the Core Group for discussion and feedback. A modified draft will then be distributed to the RSF at large for comment, and a final draft will be submitted to the Executive Leadership Team for finalization. Activities will be added and removed as appropriate during the annual review. The RSF's purpose will be used as a tool to review work plan achievements.