



## NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF STATE FORESTERS

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Memo

March 11, 1998

To: Dinah Bear, Council on Environmental Quality  
Ruth Saunders, Office of Management and Budget

Re: Forest Inventory and Assessment

**1998  
Executive  
Committee**

*President*  
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Missouri

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The Forest Service is trying to place greater emphasis on the President's commitment to sustainable management of US forests by the year 2000 through greater use of the Criteria and Indicators for Sustainable Forest Management embodied in the Santiago Declaration for the conservation of temperate and boreal forests. These Criteria and Indicators (C&I) constitute a comprehensive and integrated set of variables which must be accurately measured over time to provide a clear picture of forest conditions in a given country.

As you know, the C&I were developed and agreed to by the United States and 12 other countries making up what is known as the Montreal Process, a group of nations representing 90 percent of the world's temperate and boreal forests. Within the C&I framework, the Criteria represent broad level values or general categories of attributes associated with forests.

The criteria are as follows:

1. Conservation of biological diversity;
2. Maintenance of productive capacity of forest ecosystems;
3. Maintenance of forest ecosystem health and vitality;
4. Conservation and maintenance of soil and water resources;
5. Maintenance of forest contribution to global carbon cycles;
6. Maintenance and enhancement of long-term multiple socioeconomic benefits to meet the needs of societies;
7. Legal, institutional, and economic framework for forest conservation and sustainable management.

Each of these criteria is further delineated by a number of specific indicators which are designed to actually measure the elements of forest condition and track changes. The objective of the C&I is to provide national-level data that will allow citizens and resource managers to accurately evaluate the status of forest management and to debate policy options using common data.

**First Approximation Report:** The Santiago Declaration required Montreal Process member countries to develop a first approximation report. The USDA Forest Service, through its research staff, had the lead for the Federal government in preparing the first approximation report for the United States. The Forest Service, through the Keystone Center, used a stakeholders group to guide the data collection and interpretation efforts.

The report revealed that for many of the indicators, inadequate data is available to make sound judgments about status and trends. There was also fairly strong consensus among the stakeholders that the C&I are a good framework to guide future forest resource assessments and inventories.

While the FAR provided a first glimpse of how measuring the C&I might work, the process was deficient in many respects. Many of these deficiencies stemmed from lack of comprehensive data about forests from all forest ownerships. To make implementation of Criteria and Indicators successful, the Forest Service should be given the lead for the Federal government for data collection and assessment to eliminate lag times and other problems in existing inventory programs.

**Forest Service Inventory and Monitoring Efforts:** The USDA Forest Service has a broad mandate to inventory, monitor, and assess all forest resources in the U.S. They do this through myriad programs.

These monitoring programs are designed to accomplish a variety of objectives and do not necessarily produce compatible data that is easily aggregated to the national level. A recent GAO study found that within Forest Service regions, individual national forest monitoring systems do not provide comparable data. The only two "nation wide" forest inventory and monitoring programs are applied to only a portion of the landscape. For instance, Forest Health Monitoring plots have not been established on National Parks or National Wildlife Refuges. Forest Inventory and Analysis plots have only recently been re-established on the national forest system, and were only recently extended to National Parks. No state forests or parks (which amount to about 5 percent of the forest land in the country) are included in either system.

**The Potential for Integration:** Several other Federal agencies have their own inventory systems. Information from these different monitoring efforts can be combined to help assess conditions and trends in the Montreal Criteria and Indicators. It is neither necessary nor desirable to have the Forest Service do all the data collection. Other Federal agencies have different mandates for resource monitoring and inventory. The Biological Resources Division of USGS is largely responsible for inventory and monitoring of biotic resources; EPA has responsibility for water quality data and other environmental quality data. Each of these agencies should continue in their area of expertise, with the Forest Service serving as the focal point for data collection standards as well as for collecting specifically forest-related information. Doing so would fill a strongly felt public need for good information about forest resources.

It makes logical sense for the Forest Service to compile and report on the status and trends of all the forest resources of the country. They invest nearly \$200 million annually in such inventories and assessment currently, and they are the only Federal agency with a mandate to conduct inventories and forest health monitoring on all ownerships. They also have the staff and data management capability to take on this task. Accomplishing this integration will require a recognition by all Federal land management agencies that the Forest Service is the lead federal agency for coordination of forest inventory, assessment, and monitoring.

We hope you will also encourage the agency to collaborate with public and private entities who can provide quality assured data that will help them report more accurately and fully on the Montreal Criteria and Indicators. A collaborative process could be facilitated by the use of an advisory committee or steering committee that will help the agency implement this effort and establish data standards. Such a system would work best if it is used in conjunction with peer review of data sets, perhaps by the National Research Council.

**Action Needed:**

- I. The White House should direct the other Federal agencies with natural resources inventory and monitoring responsibilities to work with the Forest Service so that all data gathered is compatible, timely, and informs the Montreal Process C&I. This includes the Environmental Protection Agency, the various agencies within the Department of Interior, and the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service.
- II. Adequate funding must be made available within the Forest Service budget to support the Forest Inventory and Analysis Program, the Forest Health Monitoring Program (which cover inventory on a substantial portion of the nation's private forests), and the expansion of the appropriate inventory, monitoring, and assessment protocols to all Federal public lands.


III. The Forest Service must establish a process for public involvement in the collection of C&I relevant data, including adequate quality control mechanisms such as peer review, and for public review of the compilation and interpretation of such data.

Accurate data, gathered for a wide variety of forest resources, is in the interest of the entire community concerned with sound forest management and the protection of forest resources. We thank you for your attention to this important issue.


Sincerely,



National Association of State Foresters



World Wildlife Fund




American Forest & Paper Association



Society of American Foresters



National Audubon Society



Global Forest Policy Project