



# Roundtable on Sustainable Forests

*A Partnership for the Future*

## Core Group Meeting Summary

*June 30, 2011*

*Meridian Institute, 1920 L Street NW, Washington, DC*

On June 30, 2011, the Core Group of the Roundtable on Sustainable Forests (RSF) convened a meeting in Washington, DC. Twelve participants met in person and were joined by three additional participants on the phone. The agenda for the meeting is at [AGENDA](#) and the participant list is at [PARTICIPANT LIST](#).

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### Welcome, Agenda Review, and Opening Remarks

The meeting began with welcomes from the RSF Co-chairs Joel Holtrup, US Forest Service, Michael Buck, National Association of State Foresters (NASF), and Jim Finley, Sustainable Forests Partnership (by phone). The purpose of the meeting was to establish the direction of the RSF for the next year based on the discussion at the June 29 National RSF Meeting and other pressing factors.

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### June 29 National Meeting – Observations and Insights Informing the Work of the RSF

Core Group participants were asked to reflect on the themes identified at the June 29 National RSF meeting to help inform the discussion on future direction of the RSF. Highlights from their comments are below.

#### **Attendance**

- The June 29 meeting was well attended. Participants were engaged and attentive but many of them did not know a lot about the RSF. While fairly diverse interests were represented, private land owners were more heavily represented than at past RSF meetings. There was also an age spread, some ethnic diversity and a fair amount of gender balance. The conservation community and broader environmental community were not well represented.

## The Future of the RSF

- Chief Tidwell delivered some messages of import to the future of the RSF. The RSF is a valuable process, but if the RSF discussion does not go beyond the meeting, the US Forest Service may stop funding the process. He challenged the RSF to address the need to expand the dialogue as it thinks about the future and hone in on what the point of the RSF is.
- The RSF needs to clarify whether it wants to:
  - Provide input on the National Report and the use of it as a resource and reference document;
  - Serve as a sounding board to learn more from stakeholders about the information they need and why they are looking for it to know how the National Report might be useful to them and help them access the information (e.g., how do we translate the information in the National Report so it is usable by the private forest land owner and on the Hill);
  - Interpret the National Report to inform stakeholder activities (e.g., on the Hill);
  - Continue to seed stakeholder action on key sustainability challenges (e.g., outlined in the Sustainable Forests Action Strategy); and/or
  - Foster and develop similar processes targeting different scales in different locations around the country.
- Ultimately, the RSF needs to clarify whether it is more interested in how the Montreal Process Criteria and Indicators (C&I) framework and what we are learning about sustainability are being used, versus how much we are trying to affect sustainable forest management across the country using this framework.
- Participants at the RSF meeting seemed to value the process described for gathering stakeholder input on the draft National Report. To some, the process of developing the National Report seemed of greater value than the Report itself.
- The RSF needs to be open to hearing from stakeholders what else we need to measure and report on so people find more utility in the information provided in the National Report (e.g., new indicator.)
- Laurie Wayburn's comments about public and private investment and related short-term and long-term outcomes was intriguing and merits some additional thought as we look forward to the future of the RSF.

## The National Report

- Meeting attendees were impressed with the richness of data and content of the National Report and overall, the discussion at the meeting reaffirmed the value of it as a resource. In the National Report, the US Forest Service provides important baseline information.
- There was a lot of misunderstanding about what the C&I are, thus there continues to be a need, and role for the RSF, to educate people about the C&I and how to use the data.
- Packaging the data in the current National Report format is of limited value.

- Need a user's guide on how to use the National Report for local land planners, state government, policy makers, conservationists and private land owners. The guidance could tell the user how to access and download the information they need for their scale of application.
  - Consider producing shorter documents, such as documents that focus on regional differences and issues.
  - Focus on getting the messages from the National Report right and disseminate the messages.
  - Pursue migration to more frequent web-based reporting.
  - A huge investment has been made to collect data. The US Forest Service should consider transitioning to downloadable data. Let stakeholders get at the data and use it the way they want to.
  - Many meeting attendees seemed to be more interested in policy implications and with less interest in the public good of providing data on regular basis. The question of whether the National Report is a reference and framework or a call to action was raised.
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## Refreshing and Reloading the RSF: A Tactical Approach

Core Group participants were provided a list of tactical Core Group questions at [TACTICAL QUESTIONS](#). Peter Gaulke, US Forest Service, gave a presentation on refreshing, reloading and retooling the RSF. He noted that the RSF Executive Leadership Team (ELT) had been discussing the future of the RSF for some time, and wanted to open the discussion up to the Core Group. A copy of his PowerPoint presentation is on the RSF website [REFRESHING, RELOADING AND RETOOLING](#).

Mr. Gaulke noted that the ELT recognizes the need to take a fresh look at the RSF accomplishments and potential future directions to guide the RSF into its next phase of being. He reflected that the familiar characterization of the RSF as the only entity/group that brings stakeholders together in an open, inclusive dialogue around sustainable forest management is no longer enough. He suggested this Core Group meeting was the opportunity to expand this frank discussion. He shared the following progression of tactical questions for the group to consider:

- Focus on all U.S. forests versus US Forest Service
  - How do we show measures of success? What have we gotten for putting in \$10million into sustainability world over last 10-15yrs?
  - Whose eyes are we looking through? Federal government? Private owners? NGOs? We have to defend the expenditure of funding on the RSF.
- Internal vs. external views

- When do we have a chance to reflect and gather new ideas/approaches so the RSF is current, bringing in new perspectives, etc. Do we have a mechanism to do that or is it the same group talking about the same things?
- Size and composition of RSF and Core Group
  - How many of our group is really active?
  - Do we have the right players in the group and engaged in the conversation? Is the come one come all approach the best? Or do we need to be more targeted?
  - Do we have the right mix of inside beltway and regional stakeholders? Is the Core Group representative of where we want the RSF to go?
  - Do we have enough and the right DC insiders?
- Fresh and Forward Views:
  - What do we do with new perspectives when they come in? Can we handle those new views?
- Eyes bigger than the Stomach (i.e., money)
  - Budget does not keep pace with our wants and needs. We cannot accomplish what we want to with the resources that we have.
  - We have tried to reach out for other resources but it was bad timing.
  - Horsepower is not equal to wants and needs. Need to calibrate what we can do, with the budget, and also our Core Group horsepower.
- RSF Niche for 2011 and Beyond
  - Need to get our message clear so we can advocate for what is needed.
  - Need to focus in on a specific niche.
  - National Report provides data that can be used in many different ways; also provides a framework (Chapter 3.)
- National vs. sub-national focus
  - We have struggled with this but have been successful. There is an expense to putting our energies at sub national scale. There would be less energy spent on policy if we choose to focus on a sub national scale.
  - What is the balance between national level work vs. sub national work?
  - Maybe we need to focus on one and then the other over time.
- Policy vs. Practice vs. Product
  - Who should be part of the dialogue that RSF is having?
  - Our focus will orient who needs to be part of the conversation.
  - How are any products that we produce going to get the best mileage?

- Unsure if promoting/advocating certain policies would be acceptable for US Forest Service.
- Is dialogue enough? Value added?
  - The RSF represents a full spectrum of dialogue, but there are some key missing stakeholders (i.e., NGOs, market interests.)
  - Can we afford to expand broadly? Will those perspectives dilute the discussion and focus?
  - If RSF does not exist, where will the sustainable forest management dialogue happen?
  - US Forest Service Chief's charge was to broaden, deepen and win public support.
  - Need to take the dialogue out of research and development and put it into the public sphere.
  - Does dialogue help defend the RSF's existence?
- Organizational and Leadership Models
  - Are we organized for success?
  - Rural groups with co-chairs; or national group with national co-chairs
  - Do we want a new structure? Will we get the same results?
  - Looking forward, need to answer what's the best structure to address our niche,
- Communities of Practice
  - Are we trying to reach too many?
- Advocates vs. Doers
  - Which is our role?
  - Where do we get the most mileage?
- Branding the RSF
  - What is our brand? Better dialogue and decisions? Open inclusive stakeholder dialogue?
  - Wal-Mart markets and sells itself. How does the RSF market itself?
- Is the RSF Engaging Effectively?
  - Are we engaging all these groups? Federal agencies, NGOs, Congress, private forests, state and Local Governments, and Industry
- We want to hold a CG meeting focused on this topic of next steps for RSF and focus the energies of the RSF to make decisions about what we have proposed here.
  - We can probably not make an August meeting happen. Perhaps a series of conference calls?

## What Comes After the Rollout

Using Mr. Gaulke's presentation as a starting point, Core Group participants discussed future plans for the RSF. Many recognized that it would be difficult to adequately address all of the questions raised in one Core Group meeting. It was also observed that questions of this importance would better be discussed in person rather than by phone.

### Reflections on the RSF

#### From the RSF website –

*...The Roundtable on Sustainable Forests is an open and inclusive process committed to the goal of sustainable forest management on public and private lands in the United States. Roundtable participants include public and private organizations and individuals committed to better decision-making through shared learning and increased understanding.*

*...In addition to fostering dialogue on sustainable forests, one of the Roundtable's primary areas of interest has been the implementation of an internationally agreed upon set of criteria and indicators for the purpose of developing a shared understanding of current forest conditions and a baseline against which to mark future progress toward sustainability.*

*...The Roundtable... serves as an effective vehicle for information exchange about policies concerning SFM in the United States as well as a feedback mechanism for forest managers.*

*... Participation is not limited to particular groups or individuals, and the Roundtable does not have formal membership.*

*...The Roundtable has utilized multi-stakeholder dialogue as the primary vehicle for inquiry, input, and feedback. This process has created a culture of collaboration and shared learning on a subject that is often fraught with gridlock and controversy.*

#### From the discussion at the Core Group meeting –

##### Mission and focus

The RSF needs to decide what its mission is before it can answer many of the questions Mr. Gaulke raised.

The mission of the RSF is about promoting sustainable forestry in the United States by supporting learning and positive action by stakeholders at different scales. The mission is achieved through dialogues and conversations about sustainable forest management broadly

and C&I as a key tool. The RSF struggles with its core mission. Is the RSF about measurement or management?

**RSF should serve the needs of its stakeholders.** Stakeholders need to be able to see the RSF as serving their needs as well as those of others (i.e., US Forest Service). It may be time for the RSF to broaden its scope to engage a broader set of participants. To help cast the net more broadly, the top priority of the RSF could be web-based applications for getting the data out. Currently, the RSF adds value to processes using the C&I.

**There is National Report cycle and the C&I.** It seems that a lot of RSF energy is expended leading up to and around the release of a National Report, then the energy wanes. The RSF should be about more than the C&I. As forests evolve, C&I evolve. As society evolves, these indicators are going to change. Does/will the RSF still have a role to be the sounding board on the C&I framework for the US Forest Service?

### **Role of the RSF**

**Should the role of the RSF be to solidify policy actions?** Probably not, because of a variety of considerations (e.g., FACA.) Facilitate use of the document? Foster discussion of report at different levels? Facilitate better dialogue to contribute to better data and better decisions?

**The RSF brings a voice to all forests.** Not just National forests. RSF stakeholders care about all forests, not just national ones. RSF events help to highlight the perspectives of many interests on what is happening in our forests.

**The RSF can pull off conversations** - Most local communities and organizations cannot do this on their own. Is the role of the RSF fundamentally about dialogue? Collecting the data is an agency function. Dialogue among stakeholders about the data is what the RSF does. Dialogues may lead to general areas of agreement on certain issues that advocates and decision makers can then take action on. The key is to have some entity, other than the US Forest Service, provide a venue for discussion on hot issues like biomass and climate change. The dialogue feeds the ideas of those who advocate and make decisions.

**Should the dialogue process continue?** Should the RSF continue to convene and have discussions with different groups? If so, the dialogue needs to be structured around questions that are compelling to stakeholders (e.g., community and urban forests..

**Should the RSF be an advocate?** Is the dialogue enough or do we need to advocate? Do we provide a fresh voice by not advocating? Does not advocating in some way make the RSF irrelevant? The RSF could step out more on advocacy for sustainable forestry than it does

now, using organizations like Rural Voices for Conservation Coalition and the Coalition for Eastern Forests as potential models for how to do this.

## **Funding**

To date, the US Forest Service has largely supported the RSF. Is the RSF important to anyone else who has resources to apply to sustainable forest management? Would they support it?

## **Reflections on the RSF from the US Forest Service**

The US Forest Service is a participant in the RSF and a significant one in many ways. The US Forest Service does not want to be responsible for deciding on what the RSF should do.

The mission of the US Forest Service is about sustainability and the sustainability of all of America's forests. If the RSF mission is the same or very similar, what sets the two apart? For the US Forest Service to effectively communicate the uniqueness and value of the RSF, it needs to be able to communicate the niche RSF fills in enhancing the work of the US Forest Service. Some ways in which this might be done are if the RSF were to:

- Convene and facilitate stakeholder input on the production and utilization of the National Reports as resources to the American public.
- Facilitate 'scaling down' the use of the C&I.
- Work on ways to juxtapose sustainable forests with water (i.e., quantity and quality).
- Encourage dialogue on the use of certification of National forest systems as another management tool which is a big sustainability issue.
- Explore whether there are some things that C&I do not address effectively in the United States and foster dialogue on what would fill the gaps? For example, Canada has taken C&I and added some for value within Canada to help them do a better job of assessing how Canadian forests are doing.
- Engage stakeholders in the next phase (i.e., assessment and monitoring) of dialogue on the Planning Rule. Specifically, how we can utilize the RSF dialogue and C&I framework to help facilitate discussion that will inform US Forest Service on inventory monitoring and assessment.

Looking forward, Core Group participants were encouraged to:

- Review notes and materials from the June 29 National Meeting and June 30 Core Group meetings to identify themes that might be considered for the next years' agenda.

- Assume the RSF will continue to convene dialogues on sustainable forest management, local and regional application and reporting, and dialogue on specific topics defined on a yearly basis
  - Look more carefully at how the RSF might effectively contribute to the dialogue on using the C&I to aid in state forest assessments, implementation of the Planning Rule, and using certification as a management tool within the national forest system.
  - Continue to look for ways to actualize the mantra, better data, better dialogue, and better decisions so that it is not just a dialogue but is also tied to actions.
  - Think more specifically about how the RSF might be financed (e.g., who would be involved with fundraising, what organizations would be approached for funds, etc.)
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### Wrap-up and Next Steps

- Meridian will summarize and post the discussion at the meeting on the RSF website.
- A subset of Core Group participants attending the meeting, including Michael Buck, Colin Donohue, Graham Cox, Keith Argow, and Peter Gaulke, agreed to meet by phone following the meeting to continue to map out a proposal for short- and longer-term RSF activities for further consideration by the Core Group and the ELT. The group agreed to focus first on the short-term, using Colin's conceptualization as a starting point.