

“Linking Science to Practice”

NCSSF-NFF Users’ Needs Workshop Summary

April 22-23, 2003 – Alexandria, Virginia

INTRODUCTION

On April 22-23, NCSE’s National Commission on Science for Sustainable Forestry (NCSSF) and the National Forest Foundation (NFF) convened a workshop designed to improve communication and understanding between the users and producers of sustainable forestry information. The users’ needs workshop brought forestry practitioners, managers, and policymakers together with research scientists to establish a dialogue to improve biodiversity and sustainable forestry practices.

During the first day of the workshop, researchers from five NCSSF projects presented their preliminary results and answered questions about their work. The researchers then asked the workshop participants to respond to questions about how to make the project findings most relevant to the users’ needs. The questions for users’ included what information and tools they use in making decisions and how they use information as well as specifics about applications and currently utilized information resources. The NCSSF projects presented for users’ feedback were:

1. Define Core Biodiversity Indicators for Sustainable Forestry (John Hagan – Manomet Center)
2. Identify Biodiversity Research Needs on Forest Fragmentation (John Kupfer – U. of Arizona)
3. Synthesize the Existing Information on Biodiversity and Water (Michael Huston – ISESI)
4. Evaluate the Role of Ecosystem Restoration in Biodiversity (Robert Mitchell – Jones Center)
5. Evaluate the Needs and Requirements for Decision Support Systems (Norm Johnson – OSU)

The second day of workshop involved facilitated sessions where users’ articulated their applications and needs for biodiversity and sustainable forestry information. There were also discussions of how to effectively communicate and transfer research results and related information to decision makers. The results of a survey (below), in which the participants were among the interviewees, was discussed and elaborated upon to refine our understanding of their information requirements. In addition, NCSSF sought users’ input on other science-based information needs they would like the program to address.

Prior to the workshop, NCSSF and NFF conducted a survey of forestry professionals in order to begin identifying their priority information needs related to biodiversity and sustainable forestry practices. The interviewee selection process began with a nationwide set of over 60 leading forestry professionals roughly divided between field, management and policy level practitioners. A total of 35 people were interviewed by telephone in February, March and April 2003. The interviews were conducted using a standardized survey instrument provided to the subjects in advance to allow them to anticipate and effectively respond to the questions (see “Summary Results of the 2003 User Needs Survey”).

FINDINGS

Forestry professionals at the workshop expressed a number of pressing information needs, such as: a synthesis of biodiversity and sustainability indicators that take into consideration the dynamic nature of forest stands and resources; an evaluation of best management practices and their effectiveness in real world situations; and, a comprehensive inventory of the data and tools available to forestry professionals.

Workshop participants stressed the need to involve multiple stakeholders in monitoring and evaluation and to better communicate and coordinate research efforts and resources both within the field and in the dissemination of information. They also emphasized the importance of **accessible**, relevant and shared data, as well as the need for a clear working definition of biodiversity.

The summary of findings is listed below and reflects the users' (workshop participants') comments and views. Unlike the individual phone surveys conducted, the workshop provided an interactive forum for input and facilitated a dialogue between participants. Redundancies found between the User Needs Survey Report and this User Needs Workshop Summary exists because of the overlap between survey interviewees and workshop participants. Overlaps between findings in the Workshop Report categories are also prevalent because of the nature of the information needs and barriers.

I. TOP NEEDS (most frequently cited by users)

- Enhancing communication between producers and users of knowledge (purpose of workshop)
- Improving information – analysis and synthesis; “explain what we already know and significance”
- Providing clear, consensual, and positive definitions of sustainability and biodiversity
- Developing measures of success – What is conservation success? How do we know that we are achieving sustainability?
- Engaging multiple parties – local communities, non-industrial private land owners, etc.
- Keeping the message simple – synthesize information and translate into meaningful results

MAJOR BARRIERS

- Polarization within society of values/perception of biodiversity (goal versus barrier).
- Lack of adequate funding for monitoring, management, training and research.
- Ineffective “marketing” of research (before and after projects). Defining who will use the research? What are the specific information needs of users? Need a better understanding of what is needed; public values.

II. Other Barriers/Opportunities to improve management for biodiversity and sustainability:

- Research results should be transformed into relevant, accessible, usable information
- Need more site specific information
- Make it easier to find the “right” information and make it easier to find out what is known
- Lack of people and resources to address biodiversity and sustainability mandates
- Gauging management/conservation success (will we know it when we see it?)
- Multiple use management efforts (trying to do too much on a given piece of land)
- Perception of biodiversity as the enemy – protection of biodiversity seen as a threat to some
- Need to make biodiversity economically viable/appealing to owners and managers
- Non-industrial, private landowners lack resources and knowledge to carry out biodiversity
- Need to cater to diverse groups of users
- Need a better understanding of public values
- Involve local communities, youth, and media in data collection and information dissemination
- Bring disparate data together into meaningful reservoir – need a comprehensive database
- Comprehensiveness working against us (biodiversity is everything, how do we manage that?)
- Dueling scientists – How do non-specialists know who is right? Which theory is correct? Ongoing issue that can undermine credibility of science.

III. Users' suggestions for things to serve their needs

- Distill scientific knowledge into something the general public can understand
- Examples of best management practices (BMPs) working on the ground
- Define biodiversity in a way everyone can use
- Need a “Jacques Cousteau” of forestry – someone to speak to the public
- Market research – find out what is wanted first and produce only what there's a market for
- Engage the people – anecdotal stories sell
- Need to bring issues to congressional circles

- Make biodiversity appeal to interests of non-industrial, private landowners
- Create partnerships to deliver material and information to public

IV. Current and available tools and information used by decision makers

- Information on species status and trends
- Existing publications, models, technical notes
- Workshops, technical sessions
- Cost/Benefit analysis
- Surveys
- Maps/GIS
- Technical and applications publications
- Inventory data and synthesis

V. Additional tools and information needed

- Inventory system – “one-stop-shopping” for users’
 - Coordinated analysis
 - Who’s doing what?
 - Synthesized data into meaningful information for users
 - Regular monitoring
 - Landscape level information
 - Fill the information gaps in space, time and forest types
- Map social & economic patterns over biodiversity & sustainability patterns (overlay)
- User friendly data and tools
- Virtual reality forests to explore and visualize consequences of management options
- Qualitative analysis of best management practices (BMPs)

VI. Breakout groups

On the second day, workshop participants broke into three self-directed groups to: 1. Determine how to encourage better communication between the users and producers, and 2. Recommend research projects or themes for future NCSSF projects. A summary of recommendations follows:

- Who will do the translating/communicating of information from researchers/producers to users/practitioners?
- Need to fill incentive gaps – educate and encourage people of biodiversity considerations
- NCSSF projects can improve scientific basis for sustainable forestry, but need to communicate and implement to users – should be an integral part of funded projects
- Research topics must be relevant and should involve the community and various audiences at the beginning stages
- Commission in unique position (cross-section of interests) to legitimize information gathered and should use that position to convene, gather and disseminate information. The Commission can play major role in depolarizing the issues.
- Fund projects based on who the key constituents are, what they need and determine how to communicate information to them

- Determine where the social and economic opportunities are for forest communities in managing sustainability for biodiversity
- Fund follow up projects that looks at the results of previous NCSF projects – for example, coordinate site-specific pilot projects in various regions and determine how results can be best implemented
- Fund projects that involve synthesis of monitoring methodologies and protocols
- Provide incentive on both ends (users and producers) to produce better information
- Implementation needs to have equal footing with development
- Must determine the audience, who uses or needs this information (forest managers, practitioners, public land managers), the channel (actively updated website, abstracts), and the message (applicable tools).

LIST OF WORKSHOP USER PARTICIPANTS

Meadow Barr	Shasta Energy Group
Carol Ekarius	Coalition for the Upper South Platte
Martin Goebel	Sustainable Northwest
Paul Carlson	Land Trust for the Little Tennessee
	Southern Appalachian Man and the Biosphere (SAMAB)
Robb Turner	Foundation
Gary Schneider	Partners of the Cherokee National Forest
Lloyd Irland	The Irland Group
Kenny Fergusson	Huber Resources Corp.
Harry Hafer	Cradle of Forestry Interpretive Association
Peter Bates	Western Carolina University
Ajit Krishnaswamy	National Network of Forest Practitioners
James Grace	Pennsylvania Bureau of Forestry
Scott Wallenger	Mead Westvaco
Bob Simpson	American Tree Farm System
Nick Brown	NatureServe
Andrea Bedell Loucks	Pinchot Institute
Michael Goergen	Society of American Foresters
Mikki Sager	The Conservation Fund
Mike Washburn	FSC
Marc Bosch	USDA Forest Service
David Pritchard	National Hardwood Lumber Association
John McNulty	Seven Islands Land Company