



Forestry Research Advisory Council

Report to the  
Secretary of Agriculture

June 1998

# Forestry Research Advisory Council Report to the Secretary of Agriculture

## Executive Summary

**Background:** The Forestry Research Advisory Council (FRAC) was authorized by the 1995 Farm Bill for the purpose of providing the Secretary of Agriculture with recommendations and advice on forestry research. The Council consists of members appointed by the Secretary and drawn from federal, university, state, industry, and nongovernmental organizations. This report summarizes the FRAC meeting of January 12-13, 1998.

**Issues in forestry research:** The increases in worldwide demand for wood and fiber, coupled with increasing national and global concerns for the health of forest ecosystems is causing unprecedented conflicts over allocation, use, and management of the nation's federal forests. Nonfederal forests comprise two-thirds of the nation's total forest acreage and 80 percent of the 490 million acres of forest which are classified as timberland. Nonindustrial private forest (NIPF) landowners own 59 percent of the nation's timberland. Another 14 percent of the timberland is owned by industry and 7 percent is under public ownership (state, county, and local government). Yet overall there is disproportionately little investment in these lands as compared to federal lands and the potentials for improvements in productivity and environmental quality are needed and considerable. The recent National Research Council report on nonfederal forests highlights the situation and recommends increased federal efforts in research, monitoring, program coordination, and information transfer for both federal and private lands.

## Contents

	<u>Page</u>
Executive Summary .....	1
Full Report to the Secretary .....	3
1. Introduction .....	3
2. Issues in Forestry Research .....	3
3. Advice on Research Priorities, Funding Levels, and Funding Mechanisms .....	4
Acknowledgments .....	8
1998 Forestry Research Advisory Council Members .....	9

**Recommendations:**

1. Increase science-based information for the public, landowners, natural resource professionals, and policymakers with an emphasis on forest sustainability, productivity, and environmental quality.

**Actions**—Increase program funding for CSREES/McIntire-Stennis and Forest Service Research programs.

2. Improve the timeliness and precision of inventory and monitoring information for all forested lands.

**Actions**—Convene a conference to coalesce support for Forest Inventory and Analysis, and develop a budget initiative that will provide sufficient funding.

3. Increase the flow of forest management options and research results to NIPF landowners.

**Action**—Convene a meeting of stakeholders to articulate the needs and issues, and develop a strategy to respond to them.

4. Use the FRAC to keep USDA abreast of emerging issues for forestry research.

**Action**—Provide sufficient funding to hold 3-day annual meetings for members who hold rotating assignments. Establish regular, formal feedback from the Secretary in response to FRAC recommendations.

## Full Report to the Secretary

### 1. Introduction

This report has been prepared in fulfillment of the Forestry Research Advisory Council charter (USDA Departmental Regulation # 1042-66, Section 4). The report is a summary of the Council resolutions, accompanied by minutes of the meeting, held January 11-13, 1998, in Washington, D.C. This report is submitted to the Secretary of Agriculture from the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Council.

### 2. Issues in Forestry Research

The increase in worldwide demand for wood and fiber, coupled with increasing national and global concerns for the health of forest ecosystems, is causing unprecedented conflicts over allocation, use and management of the nation's federal forests. The productivity of the nation's forest in terms of goods, services, and benefits is also far below their potential. Yet there is room for optimism as our forests can and should become more productive of the many economic, ecological, recreational, and aesthetic benefits and services they provide. Briefly, the level of investment in productivity and stewardship of forest resources is not unlike the situation in agriculture in the early part of this century.

The above situation is especially germane to the large portion of the nation's forest land under nonfederal ownership. The nonfederal lands are increasingly important to the nation's economic and environmental future. Yet overall there is disproportionately little investment in these lands as compared to federal ownerships. The recent National Research Council Report on *Forested Landscapes in Perspective: Prospects and Opportunities for Sustainable Management of Americans' Nonfederal Forests* highlights the situation and recommends increased federal efforts in research, monitoring, program coordination, and information transfer to the nation's nearly 10 million nonfederal forest landowners.

Nonfederal forests comprise two-thirds of the nation's total forest acreage and 80 percent of the 490 million acres of forest which are classified as timberland. Nonindustrial private forest (NIPF) landowners own 59 percent of the nation's timberland. Fourteen percent of the timberland is owned by industry and 7 percent is under public ownership (state, county, and local government). Most nonfederal ownerships are in the east, however, these nonfederal lands are ecologically and/or economically important wherever they occur. They simply must be managed more effectively if our domestic industries are to remain competitive, if the 1.6 million jobs they provide are to remain viable, if our economy is to grow, if our resource

dependent communities are to be stabilized, and if environmental quality is to meet the demands of our still growing society.

Our landscapes have a mix of ownerships and types of forests including those reserved for a single use, areas managed for multiple purposes, those intensively managed for commodities, and urban forests. Yet landowners and agencies have only modest science-based information to manage these lands to their full potential. Crucial information needs exist for effective site level practices and information on watershed scale response and implications.

At the same time, inventory and monitoring information on our forests has lagged behind as awareness of ecologic and economic needs has intensified. We note in particular that Forest Inventory and Analysis (FIA) is only 1 percent of the USDA Forest Service budget.

We note further that of approximately 16,000 extension staff nationally, less than three hundred address forestry education and technology transfer. Yet the number of NIPF landowners is far larger than the number of farms, and many farmers themselves are also woodland owners. The model for extension in forestry is typically different from the traditional county model, with more concentration of efforts at the multicounty and state levels, and with more partnering with states and industry, but clearly there is a gap in the program relative to the issues and tasks before us.

The National Research Council report emphasizes a number of findings similar to those that FRAC has identified. The remarkably broad attendance and active participation in the recent 7<sup>th</sup> American Forest Congress attests to the interest in the nation's forests. We believe that federal, university, state, and private sector, and interest group collaboration, cooperation, and coordination on these issues are imperative. We must move forward to set priorities and focus fiscal and human resources on the most crucial aspects of forestry research—action required to improve stewardship, productivity, environmental quality, and the prospects for sustainability.

### **3. Advice on Research Priorities, Funding Levels, and Funding Mechanisms**

The FRAC believes the forestry research and extension agenda set forth in the 1990 National Research Council Report, *Forestry Research: A Mandate for Change*, is still very relevant. Much action has also taken place in terms of research focus and collaboration as per the suggestions of that document. The federal agencies and universities and the scientists themselves have led that effort

and it shows in terms of research focused on priority areas and greatly increased interdisciplinary effort. But there has been virtually no positive response in terms of federal funding and organization. The new national Research Council report echoes this concern. We conclude it is now time for a true forestry research initiative at the federal level.

The priority issues to be addressed as part of an initiative concern the development of alternative forest management strategies to provide for productivity and sustainability, forest inventory and monitoring, and information and technology transfer. We have found these issues have broad forestry community support encompassing industry, state, and non governmental organizations (NGOs), and rural to urban society. All these parties see great and lasting national to local benefit from a forestry research initiative.

While there are many avenues in government to pursue this initiative, the FRAC also suggests some actions steps and mechanisms that can maintain and enhance coordination, effectiveness, and early success:

**Therefore, the Council recommends:**

That the Secretary takes the lead in establishing “a forestry research initiative for non federal lands” with a focus on:

1. Increasing science-based information for forest management with emphasis on sustainability, productivity, and environmental quality across the full breadth of ownerships, types of forest, and watersheds. Management as defined here includes that for water, wildlife, recreation, aesthetics and wood products and includes both rural and urban or community forests.

**Action**—The primary research vehicles are the McIntire-Stennis Cooperative Forestry Research Program which funds University forestry research programs and USDA Forest Service Research. These are effective and successful programs that contain much of the nation’s forestry research talent, they are already cooperating, they already have linkages with other agencies, and the former is especially well positioned to assist the information and technology transfer. Harking back to the *Mandate for Change* report, we recommend substantial funding increases for these two programs, both for their short term potential outputs and to build the infrastructure for forestry research in the long-term. Additionally, we recommend part of the funding go to develop a competitive

grants program focused on topical aspects of sustainable forest management research and associated technology development.

**2. Improving the timeliness and precision of inventory and monitoring information for all forest lands, emphasizing both ecologic and economic data.**

**Action**—Regarding forest inventory and monitoring, we reiterate the widespread agreement on the needs in this area. We recommend that the Secretary convene a conference of interested parties to develop a realistic and widely supported budget request to move the FIA toward annual forest inventory methodology, expansion of the analysis of data, and more timely communication of results.

**3. Increasing the flow of forest management options and research results to NIPF landowners and the public.**

**Action**—Given that the Universities and other agencies have a significant role to play in inventory technology development, we also urge the above mentioned competitive grants program to address priority FIA technology needs.

**Action**—For information and technology transfer, the USDA and specifically the CSREES may be the natural lead, but there are other important participants and a need for both articulation of a budget initiative and coordination. In particular, greater coordination seems needed with respect to other agencies, the research programs, the State and Private Forestry Branch of the USDA Forest Service, state foresters, industry, landowner organizations, and consultants. Consequently we urge the Secretary to convene a meeting of these parties to articulate a clear understanding of the budget, organization, and leadership commensurate with the information needs and tasks before us.

**Action**—Regarding a budget for information and technology transfer, we suspect a program at least several-fold larger than the current Smith-Lever and Renewable Resources Extension Act contributions will be a minimum.

4. Advice on council operations—the following actions should be taken to strengthen the Council’s ability to advise:

**Action**—The FRAC should continue with some current appointments being extended to three years and new appointments and/or reappointments should be made when current one year terms expire. The intent is to foster a carryover of experience and continuity in advising.

**Action**—Budget sufficient funds to support at least a three-day meeting annually to provide sufficient time for FRAC members to be fully informed and develop sound and truly useful recommendations.

**Action**—Establish regular and formal feedback from the Secretary to FRAC on the value and usefulness of FRAC recommendations and action taken, if any, on FRAC recommendations.

**Action**—Use these regular and formal communication mechanisms to allow the Secretary to bring *emerging issues* to FRAC and for FRAC to bring such issues to the Secretary.

As background, the current Forestry Research Advisory Council (FRAC) was chartered in April 1993. It succeeded the Cooperative Forestry Research Advisory Committee (CFRAC) whose charge was limited to McIntire-Stennis supported forestry research. Appointment of FRAC members was then made in May 1994 for a two-year period terminating in May 1996. After a gap, the Council was reestablished by new appointments in November 1997, with appointments made for one or two years. Support for Council activities has been provided by the Cooperative Research, Education, and Extension Service (CSREES) and the USDA Forest Service (FS) through the Executive Secretary which alternates annually between the agencies. Council annual operating costs are budgeted and funded by CSREES.

The agenda for this year’s meeting included a review and critique of FRAC operations and consideration of how it might be most effective. The Council believes the timing of our meetings is crucial to providing timely advice to the Secretary, particularly as related to budget. Thus we urge an annual meeting early in the year, and continued communications and perhaps subgroup meetings, or chair and/or co-chair travel as budgets permit. Contemporary communications capabilities, e.g., the Internet, facilitate communication, but they do not replace

deliberation as a group. The FRAC charter is also silent on what, if any response, the Council could expect from the Secretary, Under Secretaries, or USDA agencies.

## **Acknowledgments**

The FRAC gratefully acknowledges the support provided by both the USDA Forest Service and CSREES in conducting the business of the Council.

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