

Global forest information: a regional approach

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Abstract

In 1996, several international organizations met in Portland Oregon USA to address current and emerging problems related to monitoring the world's forests. Improving forest monitoring efforts has become increasingly important as national and international initiatives call for sustainable, diverse and productive forest ecosystems. The meeting (World Forest Monitoring Workshop) was attended by both users and providers of forestry information; and included representatives of national monitoring programs, inter-governmental agencies, non-governmental organizations, international research institutes and the forest products industry. The group's specific objective was to "develop a framework for cooperation between nations and other interested parties with the objective of improving forest monitoring on a worldwide basis."

The outcome of the workshop was an action plan to support both national monitoring and international efforts by establishing a global forest information network. Participants stressed that the network must be simple for users, decentralized, and adaptive to meet future forestry information needs. The network would be comprised of regional nodes, located at existing forestry institutions, that would facilitate the flow of forestry information within their region and, through internodal links, across regions. Information transmission would likely place a strong reliance on the Internet. The regional nodes would not generate or store data, nor would they be responsible for dictating information requirements; they would simply serve as information links. The resulting structure would provide a central location, per region, for accessing current forestry information.

Since the 1996 workshop, discussion on both international and regional levels have taken place. On the international level, discussions among IUFRO, EFL, CIFOR, FAO, WCMC, OFI and others have led to the idea of a consortium operating an information system on the Worldwide Web. Those discussions continue at an IUFRO 4.02 workshop held in conjunction with this conference.

On a North American level, a strategic planning process for the operation of the North American node has been developed. This process places heavy emphasis on conducting a forest information user's needs assessment, and includes an information provider's capacity assessment. The planning process will also identify information system technologies that support information exchange and retrieval. The resulting strategic plan will also assist in the identification of an appropriate forestry organization to house the North American information node.

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