

Summary of S&PF National Meeting on Statewide Forest Resource Assessments & Strategies November 17-19, 2009

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Overview

The 2008 Farm Bill amends the Cooperative Forest Assistance Act, requiring each State to complete a “State-wide assessment of forest resource conditions” and a “long-term State-wide forest resource strategy” by June 2010 to be eligible to receive funds under the Act. There was a State & Private Forestry (S&PF) National Meeting on State Assessments and Strategies held November 17-19, 2009 in Broomfield, CO. The purpose was to provide a forum for State and regional planners, GIS specialists, and others to share information, data needs, and methodology relevant to State Assessments and discuss approaches for State Strategies and future S&PF reporting requirements. There were 140 participants with representatives from 39 of the 50 States and 9 islands/territories.

This document provides a summary of information shared and discussed during the National Meeting on State Assessments and Strategies. There were also regional-level meetings held in conjunction with the national meeting. Prior to the meeting, States were asked to submit pre-work on their approach, status, and other information related to the development of the State Assessments and Strategies. A separate document is being prepared to provide a summary of those pre-work results. Additional meeting summary documents and presentation files are posted on the National Quickr Site for State Assessments and Strategies (<https://www.notes.fs.fed.us/LotusQuickr/stateassessmentsandstrategies>). Please see Appendix A for instructions to gain access to this site, or contact Paula Randler (pbrandler@fs.fed.us, 202-401-4489).

Vision for Statewide Forest Resource Assessments and Strategies

Jim Hubbard, Paul Ries, and Jeff Jahnke opened the meeting with visions for State Assessments and Strategies:

Remarks by Jim Hubbard, USFS Deputy Chief for State and Private Forestry

- **Flexibility for States to develop their State Assessments and Strategies**—The coalition that was pulled together while drafting the Farm Bill did not have a lot of U.S. Government involvement and the sideboards are not very restrictive. When asked, “How do we know when we get it right?” Jim replied that “You would know better for your State.” Good work is underway on the State Assessments and Strategies and it is up to the States to help define how to strategically integrate programs, effectively engage partners, and to identify meaningful priority landscape areas that are associated with compelling resource management concerns. If we get this right—it should dramatically change the way in which we think about and deliver our programs—partly because we should have much more support for what we do.
- **Looking to States for priority areas**—He is being asked by the Administration for priority landscapes. As a shared effort, he looking to the State Assessments & Strategies as important in answering that question.
- **Further coordination**—State and Private Redesign is about making a difference on a landscape scale and he is interested in what else we can do together, to make these Assessments and Strategies what Congress intended, and, taken in sum, our collective vision for the future of State and Private Forestry?

Remarks by Paul Ries, USFS, Director of Cooperative Forestry

- **Working together to maximize impact**— This is about forming a shared vision for the future of State and Private Forestry. In amending the CFAA to include State Assessments and Strategies, Congress intended that we work together to assess our forest conditions, threats, trends and opportunities and to identify shared priorities to strategically focus resources to maximize our impact on the landscape.
- **Further emphasis on this effort**—Recently, the relevance of this work has become increasingly apparent. With the Secretary of Agriculture calling for an “all lands” approach and an OMB Memo on developing effective “Place-Based policies leverage investments by focusing resources in targeted places and drawing on the compounding effect of well-coordinated action.”
- **Use existing information**—States are called on to be thorough and comprehensive assessment and to work across programs and with partners to use existing information and assessment work.
- **Priority areas are part of conservation planning**—The Farm Bill requires States to include priority areas in assessments—using key principles from the emerging science and practice of conservation planning to identify priority landscapes is part of the vision for Statewide Assessments and Strategies.

Remarks by Jeff Jahnke, CO State Forester

- **The State Assessment needs to fit your State**—In Colorado, due to forest health issues increasing public awareness, there was a need for assessment and planning regardless of the Farm Bill requirements.
- **Science-based Assessment**—They tried to keep the State Assessment science-based and keep the values out. They will take the results of the Assessment back to the participant groups to build the Strategy.
- **Why identify priority areas?** It is the most effective way to communicate priorities to the public, partners, and to obtain funding and to focus scarce resources (many of our partners have done so). Our challenge, and opportunity, is to use landscape approaches in our Assessments and Strategies to identify priority landscapes that incorporate the full spectrum of forest conservation issues.
- **USFS and States working together**—The USFS does not have all the answers, but collectively, we do. We need to work together to meet Congress’ intent so they can reward us!

State Assessment Roundtables

Facilitated by Sherri Wormstead (swormstead@fs.fed.us, 603-868-7737), USFS Northeastern Area S&PF, participants engaged in small group discussion focused on Assessment approaches, GIS methodology, stakeholder involvement, incorporating other plans, and support needs. The assistance and support needs shared during these sessions are summarized on page 12.

Overarching Points from Small Group Discussion:

- The Assessments and Strategies need to be living documents, flexible to meet changing needs, and revised and improved as time goes by so that the Assessment and Strategy improves with time.
- There is some concern about whether the State Assessments will be compared or rolled up into a national assessment and used to allocate funding. States would like to know more about the FS priorities and intentions for using the State Assessments and Strategies.
- How do we incorporate other plans into our State Assessments and Strategies? Specifically NFS Forest Plans, Legacy priorities, other federal agencies' programs and priorities.
- The islands have some unique challenges in this process, such as developing an Assessment across multiple islands, which each have their own unique issues, separate governments, and cultural/value differences.

Summary Points from "Issue-Based Assessments" Roundtable Discussion

- Some States developing an "issue-based" assessment initially drafted a set of issues internally and then vetted with stakeholders, others started with stakeholder groups to develop the initial set of key issues. The issues then provide a framework for the sections of the State Assessment.
- States utilized a combination of on-line surveys and stakeholder meetings to develop and narrow the set of issues. Some used the national themes and objectives as a framework for the issues.
- A key to issue-based assessments is to do a good job stating the issue—to help identify priorities.
- It can be difficult to identify multi-state and international issues.
- It is a challenge to depict issues that do not lend themselves to geospatial analysis.

Summary Points from "Criteria & Indicators-Based Assessments" Roundtable Discussion

- The Criteria & Indicators (C&I) of forest sustainability provide an internationally-agreed to, holistic, comprehensive framework that is helpful for organizing the State Assessment.
- The C&I help keep the State Assessment science-based; saving value discussions for the Strategy.
- A challenge is synthesizing information across the Criteria and Indicators.
- Data quality and availability is an issue for obtaining data for all the Criteria and Indicators, however, tabular data can often be used when there are gaps in spatial data.
- A few States have much experience with using the C&I (OR, ME, WI). In the Northeast and Midwest, the State forestry agencies and Northeastern Area S&PF have developed a base set of 18 indicators, and compiled data, following the national Criteria. Participants would like to see how C&I are matching up across States and a crosswalk of the C&I to the S&PF national themes and objectives.

Summary Points from "Geospatial Analysis" Roundtable Discussion

- States are conducting geospatial analyses using a variety of approaches to identify priority areas, examples:
 - Identify the issues, find the best geospatial data for each, and overlay without weighting.
 - Define broad issues, find data pertaining to each, and weight each data layer.
 - Conduct a geospatial analysis for each of the three national themes.
- Some expressed the desire for clearer guidelines for geospatial analyses, better examples of approaches, and how to present non-spatial issues and outcomes along with spatially defined ones.
- There are a variety of ways to aggregate pixel-based geospatial analysis, e.g., some are conducting 30 m pixel analysis and then aggregating by watershed, ecoregion, etc.
- There is some concern about weighting geospatial layers to identify priority layers—how to come up with weights and who is involved?

Summary Points from “Stakeholder Involvement” Roundtable Discussion

- States are engaging a variety of stakeholders in the State Assessment and Strategy and have asked for input in a variety of ways, e.g., on-line surveys, face-to-face meetings, one-on-one meetings/calls.
- Several States expressed difficulty in engaging stakeholders, e.g., only a small percentage of stakeholders invited to a meeting show up. Some wonder if they have good representation of stakeholders and issues.
- Some States will do more interactive stakeholder involvement when developing the Strategy.
- Some States are having particular difficulty in engaging the National Forest(s). Some that initially had trouble with this were persistent and now feel the NF is at the table.
- One State commented that direct e-mails with specific questions to agencies, NGO’s, etc. worked well. Others have taken a “roundtable” approach—inviting the agencies and partners to work together.

Summary Points from “Incorporating Other Plans” Roundtable Discussion

- In addition to the Community Wildfire Protection Plans and State Wildlife Action Plans, a variety of existing assessments and plans are being consulted as part of the State Assessment and Strategy process, e.g., S&PF Program plans (Urban & Community Forestry, Forest Stewardship, Forest Legacy); Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plans; watershed plans (including the Forest, Water, & People analysis); existing State and county plans; State climate change strategies; and other stakeholder’s plans.
- It is important to consult with the agencies/organizations that developed the relevant plans, to engage in a discussion about overlap in the priorities and to collaborate on strategies they can work on together.
- It can be difficult to incorporate CWPPs because they are “all over the board” in some States.
- Some States have applicable data available from the State Wildlife Action Plan that they can incorporate into the geospatial analysis for the State Assessment. For others, there were no spatially defined priorities so it is more difficult to incorporate geospatially. Some states are having difficulty obtaining the SWAP data.
- States would like examples of how others are incorporating other plans and there is interest in seeing how the various plans come together.
- Questions about the Forest Legacy Program requirements were raised—see page 11.

Accomplishing Conservation Goals in Priority Landscapes Panel

A panel of four presenters provided examples of using priority landscapes to accomplish conservation goals:

Missouri Comprehensive Wildlife Strategy and Stakeholder Group Case Study

Gus Raeker (Gus.Raeker@mdc.mo.gov, 636-221-7379), Missouri Department of Conservation

- Missouri’s approach to developing priority areas for their State Assessment provides a great example for other States to follow. Two elements of their approach are especially notable:
 - They identified a combination of large named landscapes and smaller dispersed unnamed areas;
 - They clearly analyzed the overlap of forest priority areas with the State’s Comprehensive Wildlife Strategy (State Wildlife Action Plan).
- Multi-partner focus on large priority landscapes is already yielding results, as evidenced by the Missouri River Hills case study.

The Cascade Agenda

Dan Stonington, (dans@cascadeland.org, 206-905-6903), Cascade Land Conservancy

- The Cascade Land Conservancy is a private, non-profit organization that is using priority landscapes to organize partner efforts in western Washington.
- Their efforts through The Cascade Agenda project involves identifying priority areas for preservation and protection of habitat and native ecosystems, and for conserving working forests and farmlands.
- They are using a number of innovative strategies for acquiring development rights; demonstrating the diversity of strategies that nongovernment partners can bring to the table for the State Strategies.

Bird Conservation Joint Ventures, Landscape Conservation Cooperatives, & Longleaf Pine Restoration

E.J. Williams (EmilyJo_Williams@fws.gov, 478-994-1438), Migratory Birds and State Programs, US Fish and Wildlife Service

- Maps of priority landscapes are the ticket into land use conservation discussions in the 21st century—if you haven't got a map, you aren't in the game.
- The wildlife conservation community has pioneered use of priority landscapes for focusing partners on common goals. There are many examples to look at and learn from. Your State's Wildlife Action Plan may be a good place to start.
- Joint Ventures are geographically-based partnerships for bird conservation, generally coordinated through the US Fish and Wildlife Service. These partnerships have led the way in developing approaches to landscape-level conservation planning. They may be useful partners to engage in your States.
- The US Fish and Wildlife Service is facilitating establishment of multi-partner Landscape Conservation Cooperatives, with significant funding committed to the effort. States should determine what related opportunities may exist for incorporation into their State Assessment and Strategy.

The Nature Conservancy Landscape Conservation Priorities

Paul Trianosky (ptrianosky@tnc.org, 423-727-1294), The Nature Conservancy

- The Nature Conservancy has a well established framework for conservation planning that involves identification of priority landscapes. These landscapes are being used to focus multi-partner efforts across the country (and the world).
- The Nature Conservancy is ready to work in partnership with State forestry agencies in developing and implementing Statewide Forest Resource Assessments and Strategies.

Delineating Meaningful Priority Areas

Tim Mersmann (tmersmann@fs.fed.us, 404-347-1649), U.S. Forest Service Region 8, presented an overview of the range of choices in identifying priority areas, including intended uses, design criteria, and analytical methods. Priority areas can be identified in State Assessments in a variety of ways: as pixels, named landscapes, watersheds or counties, data-derived landscapes, networks of hubs and corridors.

How you define your priority areas depends on your decisions on several *design criteria*:

1. **How do you expect to use priority areas?** Main uses are to communicate priorities to the public, partners, and funders, and to guide delivery of programs to maximize benefits.
2. **What is the scope of your priority areas:** single-issue, program-driven, comprehensive? You may have a combination of these.
3. **What scale will be most useful?** You obviously need to be able to show priority areas at a statewide level. Do you also need priority area maps that work at the local or county level for use by those making on-the-ground decisions about program delivery?
4. **What grain or resolution will work best for your intended use?** Often, prioritization at the pixel level can result in very finely-grained priority maps that are not well suited for communicating priorities or for making program delivery decisions. Some aggregation into landscapes is necessary. Aggregation to large watersheds or counties may be too coarse. Aggregation to 12-digit HUCCS is generally of appropriate grain. Alternatively, "roving window analysis" can aggregate priority pixels at a variety of levels, allowing capture of finer-grained features such as riparian areas, while eliminating widely-scattered individual pixels.
5. **Will you represent priority areas as two classes (priority, not priority) or more (high, medium, low)?** Generally for performance measures two classes are needed: is an accomplishment inside or outside of the priority area?

Defining priority areas requires iterative work between program planners and GIS specialists. Planners must identify the inputs and their weights which GIS specialists translate into analysis models.

State Wildlife Action Plans

Terra Rentz (trentz@fishwildlife.org, 202-624—5429), Teaming with Wildlife Program Associate (<http://www.teaming.com>) with the Association of Fish & Wildlife Agencies gave a presentation on the State Wildlife Action plans (SWAPs). Taken as a whole, these plans represent a national action agenda for wildlife.

- Like State Forest Assessments, SWAPs take a multi-scale approach to conservation and management.
- SWAPs highlight the necessary species and habitat conservation measures that are required within State Forest Assessments and thus are a shortcut to meeting wildlife objectives.
- State wildlife agencies want to and can help—just tell us how!
- Strong, collaborative plans set the stage to achieve greater funding support for wildlife and forest management.

Congress charged States to develop “comprehensive wildlife conservation strategies” addressing eight core elements. The following outlines the eight core elements and lessons learned for each:

1. **Wildlife distribution and abundance focused on species of greatest conservation need (SGCN)**—they discovered over 10,000 species at risk of becoming threatened or endangered across States.
2. **Habitat extent and condition essential for SGCN**—Course filter approaches to habitat analyses works for some but not all SGCN.
3. **Problems affecting species and habitats and research needs**—Greater recognition that research should be tied to an adaptive management framework.
4. **Conservation actions and priorities**—the development of Best Management Practices helped to expand reach and effectiveness of the plans.
5. **Monitoring and evaluation**—Coping with lack of data and financial capacity; heightened need for a national monitoring framework.
6. **Plans to review and revise**—Plans need to be flexible to operate under changes in political climate both in development and revision.
7. **Coordination with other agencies, planning efforts**—Integrating existing conservation plans allow for a fresh perspective and synthesizing methods versus duplicating efforts.
8. **Broad public participation**—Identifying and engaging diverse stakeholders early leads to long term support and success.

Overview of S&PF Performance Measures

Jaelith Hall Rivera (jhrivera@fs.fed.us, 202-205-1438), USFS Fire and Aviation Management, is the USFS lead for the development of S&PF Performance Measures and presented an update on S&PF Performance Measures.

Timeline of the process for developing the S&PF Performance Measures:

- Summer of 2008: the Demonstrating and Communicating Results Redesign Team was tasked with developing and piloting performance measures for competitively funded Redesign projects. S&PF also began a review of all of existing performance measures across its programs.
- August, 2008: At a RIC meeting, the Forest Service agreed to develop a proposal for a performance management framework for all of S&PF, building on the measures developed and tested earlier that year.
- January, 2009: A team of S&PF and State personnel, Framework Working Group, developed a proposed set of core performance measures for all S&PF activities, based on the National Outcomes and Objectives.
- April, 2009: The proposed measures, which were under reviewed by the RIC since January, were provided for review and comment to USFS and State personnel.
- August, 2009: The RIC spent concentrated time assessing the measures.
- December, 2009: The RIC approved the S&PF Performance Measures.

Key principles that guided development of the S&PF Core Performance Measures:

- There should be one core set of measures that relate to the National Priorities and Objectives to tell the best story of all our S&PF work at a national level.

- Use existing measures and data already being collected as much as possible.
- Focus on outcome-based measures.
- The core set of measures should relate to the priority areas, but measures will capture contributions from activities/programs in all areas.

An important bottom line: These measures don't have to capture everything S&PF does—qualitative methods of telling our story are also important. Also, not all measures will be appropriate for all projects and not all projects or programs will contribute to all of these measures.

These measures are embedded within the guiding framework provided by the Farm Bill: National Priorities, Objectives, and Outcomes. They will allow us to consistently report accomplishments for these Priorities, Objectives, and Outcomes across S&PF (states and FS). This system will better meet Congressional and OMB expectations. The measures will help us make decisions about projects, assess where we are doing well and where we can improve, and tell a consistent, compelling story annually.

These measures will not replace current program measures—In other words, we are not getting rid of any current measures right now. Over time, this core group of measures should become the best way to tell our story, and some of the other required measures (i.e. PART, FS and USDA Strategic Plan, etc.) will likely begin to more closely align with these measures. Building on the success of WebDet/WinDet, the plan is to continue to improve FS and State ability to report accomplishments spatially. This will enable us to “tell our story” more efficiently and effectively and more easily demonstrate accomplishments in priority areas using visual aids, like maps. Spatial accomplishment tracking and reporting will reduce the need for laborious data collection, cumbersome calculation methodologies, or reliance on models.

Tie to State Assessments and Strategies—Exactly how these measures will fit with State Assessments and Strategies and other elements of Redesign continues to be something we are figuring out together. In general, State Assessments/Strategies will address the National Objectives and Outcomes. State Strategies will identify strategies for achieving these National Objectives and Outcomes on the priority landscapes identified. The associated Performance Measures will be used to measure and assess program performance (i.e. were desired outcomes achieved?) for all of State and Private Forestry in these three Priorities, particularly in priority areas.

Where do we go from here? The core set of suggested performance measures has changed a bit over time as the RIC reviewed them and comments from States and FS personnel were incorporated. There are now 20 suggested core performance measures organized around the 11 Objectives/Outcomes.

The Framework Working Group determined that 7 of these suggested core measures should be crafted as “pilot” measures. These are measures that capture accomplishments in areas that S&PF currently does not track. The Working Group determined that they would be most effectively tracked and reported spatially (which we don't yet have the capacity to do). As such, national reporting will not be required for those measures when implementation begins. Instead, they will be phased in over time as the data necessary to calculate them becomes available. These pilot measures are focused on Air Quality, Water Quality, Wildlife and Climate Change. In the next phase of work on them, small groups of staff experts from both the FS and the states will be brought together to develop definitions, business rules, and calculation methodologies for each new measure.

For the “current” measures, the existing framework for measuring and reporting will be retained—though a high-level review of the definitions, business rules, and calculations for these will be conducted. States and the FS will continue to report on these current measures as is currently required.

Concurrent Sessions

Concurrent sessions ranged from issue-specific presentations to demonstrations of tools for State Assessments.

Colorado Dashboard: Activity Tracking—Christina Ferner, Colorado State University. This presentation discussed the implementation of the forestry dashboard, which is one part of the Colorado State Forest Service enterprise GIS system. The dashboard works as a front end viewing tool for the WebDET activity tracking system as well as providing maps and reports reflecting state forestry accomplishments to internal and external audiences.

Responding to Climate Change: Concepts in Adaptation & Mitigation—Chris Swanston, USFS Northern Research Station, Northern Institute of Applied Carbon Science. Climate is changing, but the uncertainties of future changes make planning for adaptation and mitigation difficult. Designing long-term land management strategies within the context of climate uncertainty adds yet another layer of complexity, but failure to consider climate change appears increasingly risky. This presentation touched on mechanisms of climate change and ecosystem response. He delved more deeply into practical adaptation and mitigation, and discussed concepts of dealing with uncertainty in a changing climate.

Tracking Spatial Accomplishments: WebDET/WinDET—Tom Luther, USFS NA State and Private Forestry; James Melonas, USFS Cooperative Forestry. Administered by USFS, implemented and delivered by State forestry agencies, WebDET is a web-based data entry and report writing tool that allows field foresters, working with private landowners, to prepare Forest Stewardship Management Plans, record contact and other attribute information of the plan property, track plan implementation accomplishments, and spatially display and analyze plan locations and associated activities. WebDET is accessible through a web browser, requires no desktop GIS software or software expertise, and is an extension of the Spatial Analysis Project. WinDET is an extension to WebDET. It is a desktop application that allows non-technical users to run an interface that mimics the plan preparation functionality of WebDET. This stand-alone application runs on a personal computer, independent of the internet.

Forest Inventory Datae On-line (FIDO) Workshop—Liz LaPoint and James Menlove, USFS Forest Inventory and Analysis. FIDO (Forest Inventory Data Online) is a web-based tool for summarizing FIA data. The FIDO tool provides users with the ability to create tables and maps without necessarily having a deep understanding of the complexities of FIA data. They walked participants through the steps to create custom reports and maps using the readily-available templates, using filters to manipulate templates, save and re-load configurations, and build their own report using a blank template. Participants were also introduced to other web-based tools that use FIA or FIA-derived data, including EVALIDator, Woodland Owner Survey, and Timber Products Output. They learned how to access downloadable data and tools that can be used off-line.

Ecosystem Services and Landserver—Al Todd, USFS Cooperative Forestry; Will Price, Pinchot Institute They discussed the concepts of ecosystem services, the types of markets emerging, management strategies for forest ecosystem services and information needs for building market-based approaches for decision-making. Landserver was used to provide a demonstration of the concepts presented. Landserver is a prototype on-line system that was developed for use in the Chesapeake Bay Bank to match landowners to ecosystem markets. It accounts for conservation practices that produce ecosystem services from private forests and provide tools that can link landowners to available markets. Landserver is being tested in Maryland and Delaware.

Web-based Geospatial Assessment Tool—Mike Barrowcliff, USFS State and Private Forestry Overview/Status of National web-based geospatial decision support system which provides a standard framework capable of supporting analysis of custom data-sets and alternatives tiered to the three National redesign themes.

Agroforestry Practices—Rich Straight, USFS/ NRCS National Agroforestry Center Agroforestry practices including green infrastructure have the potential to address many of the significant issues that will be brought out in the Statewide Forest Resource Assessments and provide a framework for their prioritization. A wide variety of practices—silvopasture, windbreaks, and other "working trees" applications for rural and urban areas—lend themselves to being applied across the landscape in high priority areas. This session

had three goals: 1) provide a better understanding of how agroforestry practices can be a part of State Assessments and Strategies, 2) describe some of the tools available to help design agroforestry practices and prioritize where on the landscape to apply them, and 3) provide States an opportunity to see ideas and experiences on utilizing agroforestry practices in State Assessments and Strategies.

Forests to Faucet—Emily Weidner, USFS Cooperative Forestry, Ecosystem Services

The Forests to Faucets assessment expands on the recently publicized Forests, Water, and People report and aims to: 1) show which land areas are most important to surface drinking water supply, 2) describe the extent to which forests are currently protecting these areas, and 3) identify threats that may affect the forest's ability to provide clean surface drinking water. Using GIS and readily available national data sets, we aim to address these objectives and provide results that can aid decision-making, fill data gaps, identify opportunities for ecosystem service market partnerships, and integrate with existing programs such as the State Forest Assessments.

Assessment Toolbox for ArcGIS—James Melonas, USFS Cooperative Forestry, Forest Stewardship Program

The Assessment Toolbox is a set of tools for ArcGIS that walk you through a geospatial assessment process to identify priority landscapes. There are four main steps: 1) Reclassify your data layers; 2) Assign weights to your layers; 3) Perform a weighted overlay; 4) Aggregate your final analysis to a meaningful landscape unit of your choosing (such as watershed or ecological zone). The tool was designed in model-builder, so is customizable to suit your needs. During this session, he demonstrated the toolbox using sample national data.

The latest from FOTE: Private Forests, Public Benefits—Paula Randler, USFS Cooperative Forestry

The Forests on the Edge (FOTE) publication series has produced several high profile technical reports addressing (primarily) the threat of housing density to America's forests. From National Forests to private forests to urban forests, the series addresses a critical need for peer-reviewed literature about the health and stability of the nation's forests overall. Private Forests, Public Benefits is the latest publication in the FOTE series. This publication describes the benefits of America's private forests and addresses the greatest threats to the contributions forests make to clean air, habitat, timber volume, water, and interior forests. This report, as well as Urban Forests on the Edge and a special edition for Alaska, Hawaii, Puerto Rico, and the Pacific Islands should be available in 2010.

GIS Specialists Work Group

There was a break out session for GIS specialists, led by Frank Sapio (fsapio@fs.fed.us, 970-295-5840), USFS Forest Health Protection. This session included presentations and general guidance for the geospatial component of State Assessments, identification of roadblocks and issues, weaknesses, and discussion on how to improve the process. Presentations were given by Frank Sapio; Tom Luther (tluther@fs.fed.us, 603-868-7710), USFS Northeastern Area S&PF; James Menakis, (jmenakis@fs.fed.us, 406-329-4958) USFS, Missoula Fire Sciences Lab; Frank Krist (fkrist@fs.fed.us, 970-295-5845), USFS Forest Health Protection; and David Jones (wdjones@fs.fed.us, 270-809-6301), USFS Region 8.

Before you begin your analysis:

“Define your problem” is the best piece of advice that a senior GIS analyst can offer. Never blindly take a kitchen sink approach to GIS overlays, where everything is thrown into an analysis with equal weighting without first fully understanding the problem. This approach hardly ever works! Therefore a GIS analyst must always work with a subject area expert to narrow the question(s) at hand as much as possible.

One of the real advantages of identifying priority areas is that they, with the aid of GIS technology, allow us to find areas where we can identify common goals or overlapping management opportunities. This type of work enables us to not only manage limited funds better, but also to manage our resources more efficiently

Delimiting areas of priority:

As a general rule run your analysis at the finest resolution you can, but generate outputs at the coarsest resolution that is tolerable by the end user. This provides flexibility while ensuring we are not overstating map accuracy. Remember a fine resolution analysis does not mean the data is any more credible at that fine resolution.

There are many ways to identify measures of central tendency across a “sea” of pixels. These techniques, zonal statistics, spatial filters, and re-sampling all do basically the same thing—they average pixels. All have different advantages and disadvantages for different types and quality of data.

Why aggregation to units of interest makes sense:

Natural resource managers do not manage pixels, they manage administrative boundaries. Aggregating by administrative units not only “filter out” noise in a map, it gives managers summary information that they can relate to, IE counties, forest boundaries, watersheds, district boundaries etc. Data aggregated this way provides managers the needed flexibility on the ground to identify specific sites of interest using local data and knowledge, something GIS analysis rarely have.

Our data could be in much better shape than it is:

Very little data has been constructed, organized or maintained in support for State and Private Forestry redesign. “Our data kinda sucks” was a quote from a well respected member of our GIS community. This captures the state of data development and maintenance for State and Private forestry. Data sets need to be fundamentally developed from a set of common agreed upon principles and specifications. These data need to be made available and accessible in appropriate formats and need to be maintained through time; so that they truly represent the resource we are trying so hard to manage.

If we had standard, maintained, multi-scaled data-what would that buy us?

As analysts, a solid consistent data framework would allow sharing of analysis techniques and outputs across administrative boundaries. Thus identifying opportunities and culturing collaboration across boundaries.. Said a different way, a multi-scaled data strategy would culture “landscape based” natural resource management across a wide range of scales!

Planning and Program Specialists Work Group

A break out session for the planning and program specialists was led by Karl Dalla Rosa (kdallarosa@fs.fed.us, 202-205-6206), USFS Cooperative Forestry; and Sherri Wormstead (swormstead@fs.fed.us, 603-868-7737), USFS Northeastern Area S&PF. They planned to facilitate discussion about implementing State Strategies, including grant narratives and the State Annual Report on use of funds, however, since most States were in initial stages of their State Strategy, the group decided to discuss approaches for the State Strategy:

Approaches for State Strategies

- Concept that the Assessment is data-driven (value-free) and Strategy is more issue-driven.
- States are organizing the Strategy in different ways, e.g., by strategic issues, by agency programs, by National Priorities, or by Criteria & Indicators of Forest Sustainability.
- Stakeholder involvement is critical and States can draw on stakeholders’ strengths to implement.
- Integrating S&PF and other State programs to address the issues.
- Use existing program and other plans when developing the Strategies.
- Priority areas identify hot spots which are addressed in the Strategy.
- The State Assessment and Strategy can be 2 separate documents or presented as one document.
- Idea of a matrix approach for presenting the strategies, e.g., with the strategies down the left side (rows), with columns for (1) programs that will implement, (2) stakeholders that are important, (3) resources required, (4) relevant national objective(s) for the strategy. There is an example of this in the “NAASF & NA Guide for State Strategies” on-line at: <http://www.northeasternforest.org/FRPC>.

Opportunities for State Strategies

- Develop the State Strategy to be relevant beyond USFS funding.
- Concept of keeping the State Assessment and Strategy “living” documents, e.g., interactive on-line maps, frequent updates, etc.
- These are economically tough times; however that provides an opportunity for re-tooling the State forestry agencies and the way S&PF programs are delivered.

Some challenges in developing State Strategies

- Organizational complexity can be a hurdle.
- How to communicate about “non-priority areas” and Statewide access to State programs.

Thoughts on implementing Strategies and integrating programs

- States will likely still respond to funding advice as we currently do.
- Actions in grant narrative should tier from the long-term State Strategy.
- We can ease into a more integrative approach.
- Some options shared for future grant narratives:
 - Single grant narrative (integrate programs) following organization of State Strategy, e.g., if the State Strategy is organized by 5 key issues, draft the grant narrative to propose annual actions for each of the 5 issues, integrating how S&PF Programs will contribute to the strategies.
 - Show how each program contributes to State Strategy, e.g., draft a grant narrative with a section for each program (as many States currently do) and include a description of how the program will contribute to accomplishing the strategies in the long-term State Strategy.
- Need budget advice that allows program integration in the grant narrative.
- Need guidance on grant and reporting process, including guidance for the State Annual Report.
- There is concern over how funding might be effected if grant narratives are integrated.
- The State Annual Report also provides an opportunity to show integration.

Forest Legacy Program (FLP) Components:

Questions about requirements for integrating Forest Legacy into the State Assessment and Strategy were addressed by Kathryn Conant, Forest Legacy Program National Coordinator:

- States that want to either maintain participation in, or enter into the FLP, must address the Assessment of Needs (AONs) components of the June 2003 FLP guidelines. However, this can be accomplished through two general approaches.
 1. **Integrated:** Integrate the AON components within the State Assessment and Strategy.
 2. **Stand Alone:** Retain an existing approved AON, and incorporate it by reference in the State Assessment and Strategy.
- Identifying priority landscapes does not satisfy the Forest Legacy Area (FLA) requirement; FLAs must be clearly identified. While there may be significant overlap between the areas, or even the same, the FLAs must be clearly identified as such.
- Identify specific goals and objectives to be accomplished by the FLP.
- Describe the process to be used by the State lead agency to evaluate and prioritize projects to be considered for inclusion in the FLP.
- If the State lead agency is not the forestry agency, coordination with the State lead agency during the development of the State Assessment is required.

Issues and Support/Assistance Needs

Throughout the meeting participants were asked to share support needs that the USFS might help out with and to raise issues or concerns. This is a summary of key issues and support needs identified by States.

Key Issues—Participants are looking to the Forest Service to play a stronger leadership and coordination role:

- More information with respect to minimum requirements of the Assessment and Strategy.
- Examples of what a good Assessment and Strategy would include and how they would be structured.
- Assistance with developing the State Strategy.
- Clarification about how the Assessments and Strategies will be used in the future for budgeting and decision-making in the larger scheme, including expectations for updates to the assessments (i.e. how often, for what purposes, how to keep these as living documents). There is concern about how the performance measures may be used, such as for evaluating States against each other.
- Data development: Data quality and availability are constraining assessment work, particularly at the State level. The Data Strategy Team was convened by S&PF to address this constraint, but it currently lacks dedicated staffing and resources.
- Data management: A central national database is needed to tie assessments together and track core S&PF performance measures.
- Assessment and data management tools: USFS should continue to invest in tools such as WebDET, which can assist with and enhance assessment work, and provide for more consistency and standardization.
- Many States are requesting assistance to make full use of resources available, including partnerships (NFS, Tribes, others) and existing plans/assessment work.

Few States had identified place-based priority areas

- Experience with State Wildlife Action Plans illustrates the importance of identifying priority areas that are “places”, with compelling resource management concerns that resonate with the public.
- Priority areas should be more than polygons in space; the public and stakeholders should be able to identify and support the prioritization of specific places.

Support and Assistance Needs

- Develop and support an on-line collaboration forum for States to share ideas, lessons learned, techniques, and data with their peers.
- Facilitate identification and delineation of multi-state priority areas; across States and regions.
- Encourage and support better engagement with National Forest System units, particularly in the implementation phases of the assessments and strategies.
- Share techniques on how States can better communicate and engage with stakeholders, especially Tribes.
- Respond to specific GIS technical assistance needs as States encounter obstacles.
- Share examples for incorporating Forest Legacy AONs into the State Assessment and Strategy.¹
- Identify and share early, good examples of State Strategies, e.g., showing a matrix of strategies.
- Identify and share ways for incorporating Community Wildfire Protection Plans (CWPP) and other existing planning documents into Assessments and Strategies.
- Host webinars on specific topics, such as incorporating CWPPs, engaging Tribes, and GIS decision-support tool demos.
- Improve coordination with the NRCS programs, such as EQUIP.
- Provide information on the roles and responsibilities of the Redesign Implementation Council (RIC).
- Need a framework for integrating program grant narratives and the State Annual Report on use of funds.
- Guidance on what type or extent of changes to the State Assessment/Strategy will require formal approval.
- For Islands: would like assistance translating documents.

¹ Note: there is a national letter coming out on incorporating Forest Legacy Program elements into State Assessments and Strategies.

Bringing it Together: A Path Forward

Karl Dalla Rosa (kdallarosa@fs.fed.us, 202-205-6206), USFS Cooperative Forestry reviewed some of the short and long term action items and recommendations developed as a result of this meeting and provided closing comments. He thanked all participants for their active participation. He noted that some folks were disappointed that we didn't provide more additional guidance, but, in working with the Redesign Implementation Council, that is not perceived as a Forest Service role. Each State has to assess their needs individually. As outlined above, there are some additional ways that the USFS can help with that.

Some “take-home” points in conclusion:

- **We need to use the resources we have available**—consult existing assessments and plans and take advantage of partners eager to help us.
- **Value of priority areas**—we are not just talking about spots on a map; they are places and should have identities, names, and value for the public, congress, etc.
- **Partners are critical**—leveraging partnerships, etc. This takes time, but in the end it is worth it. Strong collaborative plans set the stage for more support.
- **The Strategies are living documents**—not static documents to put on the shelf and just update every 5 years. We talked about what we need to do as the USFS to help with that (so approval process doesn't hinder that).
- **Think long-term**—the Cascade Conservancy was looking at the landscape 100 years from now. Having a vision can do a lot for long-term planning and investing and engaging partners and congress.
- **The idea that Assessments and Strategies are multi-scale**—An important role for the USFS is figuring out how to pull all this together in a way that can be communicated at the national and regional scale. We are developing tools that will enable us to do that, e.g., development of a central geodatabase to help strategically plan for the future in a way that makes sense.
- **Data quality is a concern/restraint**—USFS needs to step forward and fill a critical role to help address that. There are ways we are working towards this.

Appendix A. National Quicker Site for State Assessments and Strategies

As requested during the national meeting, the USFS set up an on-line collaboration forum for States to share ideas, lessons learned, techniques, and data with their peers. State and Federal staff working or supporting the State Assessments and Strategies are encouraged to create a log-in so they can access this site.

Follow the instruction below to gain access to the National Quicker Site for State Assessments and Strategies:

1. To create a log-in name, visit: <https://wwwnotes.fs.fed.us/registration.nsf>
 - If you are a Federal agency employee, please read the fine print on the above site for FWS, BLM, FS, and other land management employees. The authentication is your full name and your Internet password. The Internet password is the same as your Sametime/webmail password (NOT your windows password).
 - All others should enter the required information (First and Last name as you wish to be referred to).
 - For "FS Contact Person" put: Paula Randler
 - For "Requesting Access due to following" put: Quicker Access
 - Make your own password (with at least one number) and enter a "challenge word" to use in case you forget your password. Write down your challenge word so you can use it to retrieve your user name or password if you forget them at a later date.
2. You should receive an E-mail stating that your registration has been accepted, however, you will not have access to the site until you complete step 3.
3. When you have done this, E-mail Paula Randler at pbrandler@fs.fed.us, with your First and Last name as entered on the registration site (if you included a middle initial at registration, send that too). She needs your registered name to give you permissions on the site.
4. When Paula has given you permission to access the sites, you will received a confirmation E-mail and will have full access to participate in discussions and view and post documents.

If you have questions about this Quicker site or have problems obtaining access, please contact Paula Randler at: pbrandler@fs.fed.us or 202-401-4489.