

National Meeting on Statewide Forest Resource Assessments and Strategies
Executive Summary and Action Items (12/01/09)
November 17-19, 2009

Background

- **Meeting Goal:** 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. The meeting is designed to help states fulfill the 2008 Farm Bill requirement (by June 2010) to complete an Assessment and Strategy in order to be eligible to receive Cooperative Forest Assistance Act funding.
- **Meeting Objectives:**
 - Network and share approaches and methodologies used to help states meet requirements when developing State Assessments and Strategies.
 - Identify specific technical assistance and guidance needs of States as they develop their Assessments and Strategies.
 - Train participants on decision support and spatial accomplishment tracking tools.
 - Provide common messaging on requirements for State Assessments and Strategies, the approval process, and develop recommendations for reporting.
 - Draft a national data strategy to support a “redesigned” S&PF that would serve as a long-term plan for developing useful and consistent data sets and addressing data gaps.
- **Attendance:** 140 total participants; representatives from 48 states, islands, and territories; 20 states, islands, and territories sent more than 1 rep; 39 of the 50 United States were represented.

Pre-Work Summary

- **Participation:** 53 states, islands, and territories completed the meeting pre-work.
- **Limiting Factors:** After lack of time and funding, data availability and data quality are the biggest factors limiting states’ capacity to complete their Statewide Assessment and Resource Strategy.
 - Biggest data gaps: urban forest extent, economic potential, invasive pests and pathogens, invasive plants, climate change, biomass potential, and green infrastructure.
- **Process Check:**
 - The large majority of states are “underway” or “well underway” in developing their Assessments.
 - The large majority of states are only in the initial stages of developing their Strategies.
- **GIS Tools:** Nearly all states are utilizing ArcGIS in developing their assessment.
- **Engaging Stakeholders:**
 - Nearly all states are engaging to a large degree with their State Forest Stewardship Coordinating Committee.
 - 34 States indicated that they are engaging NFS to a large degree.
 - 43 States indicated they are engaging the State Wildlife Agency to a large degree.
- **Greatest Value:** The outcomes states have found to be of greatest value in conducting their Assessment and Strategy are
 - strategic planning,
 - identifying priority landscapes,
 - the potential to attract new funding,
 - developing GIS and planning capacity, and
 - engaging the public and new partners.

Key Issues

Participants are looking to the Forest Service to play a stronger leadership and coordination role.

- Participants expressed a need for:
 - more information with respect to minimum requirements of the assessment and strategy,
 - examples of what a good or great Assessment and Strategy would include and how they would be structured,
 - assistance with developing their State Resource Strategies, and
 - information 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)
- Data Development: Data quality and availability are constraining assessment work, particularly at 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 data-base will be needed to tie assessments together and track core S&PF performance measures.
- Assessment and data management tools: The Forest Service should continue to invest in tools such as WebDET, which can assist with and enhance assessment work, and provide for more consistency and standardization.

Few participants have 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.

Most participants have not yet progressed very far in developing strategies

- In general, most states have been focusing on developing assessments.
- Few have made much progress in thinking about and developing strategies.
- As a consequence, most were not prepared to discuss program integration – or the incorporation of existing plans/strategies.

Many states are requesting assistance to make full use of resources available, including partnerships (NFS, Tribes, others) and existing plans/assessment work.

Immediate Support and Assistance Needs

- Develop and Support an online collaboration forum for states to share ideas, lessons learned, techniques, and data with their peers.
- Facilitate identification and delineation of multi-state priority areas.
- 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.
- Identify and share best practices of states that have incorporated Forest Legacy AONs into Assessments and Strategies.
- Identify and share the best document templates from states that have begun their Strategy documents.
- Identify and share best practices for incorporating Community Wildfire Protection Plans and other existing strategy documents into Assessments and Strategies.
- Host a series of webinars on specific technical topics, such as incorporating CWPPs, engaging Tribes, and GIS decision-support tool demos.