

Agenda Item No: 2
Title of Issue: State Forests Management - Issue 2
Objective #3 - Systematic Evidence Review
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SUMMARY

This agenda item is a status report on a “Systematic Evidence Review” (SER) pilot project, and describes next steps.

CONTEXT

Following a report on SER from the Institute of Natural Resources (INR), the Board directed staff to explore the concept of “Systematic Evidence Review” through a pilot project.

The pilot project is meant to be a way of learning about the process, pros and cons of SER. The pilot project and other material will also provide a basis for staff to develop draft principles that will guide the development of a general but consistent agency process for synthesizing “best available science” that comes before the Board.

BACKGROUND AND ANALYSIS

In developing a work plan with the Board, program staff identified the following Board and program work products associated with SER:

- The Board will advise staff *on principles that will guide the development of a general but consistent agency process for synthesizing “best available science” that comes before the BOF.*
- The Board and agency *can act as a catalyst and proponent of developing SER-like approaches for natural resources.*

Staff has worked with INR to initiate a small scale pilot of an SER-like approach to learn more about the process through direct application. While the science assessment product of the pilot will be useful, the main objective is to learn more about applying an SER-like process.

The SER question being addressed in the pilot project is: “Does instream wood placement affect salmonid abundance, growth, survival or habitat complexity?”

INR identified two scientists that were interested and willing to conduct the review – Guillermo Giannico from the OSU Fish and Wildlife Department, and Kelly Burnett of the PNW Research Station. In addition, INR secured expertise in the area of library science – Janet Webster, of the Hatfield Marine Science Center - to lead the literature search strategy. The SER question was refined with the input of technical specialists, and with input from Jeff Light (Plum Creek) and Brent Davies (Ecotrust). At the September 5, 2007 Board meeting, staff will summarize the work done to date, and the expected timeline for completion.

The final project report will include an SER addressing the effectiveness of in stream wood placement. In addition, the following are some evaluation questions that are integrated into the pilot project, and will be addressed in the final project report:

Overall, does the application of SER-like process add value at a reasonable cost?

- Did the development of specific review questions and a search protocol enhance the likelihood that the results of the literature search are repeatable?
- Were the draft evidence quality hierarchies possible to apply? Are there ways they could be improved? What level of expertise was/is required to apply the hierarchies?
- How is grey literature best handled in the search and evaluation process?
- How did the costs (time, money) of the approach, compare to the benefits of the approach? What advantage, if any, did the SER-like process used have over a traditional literature review?
- Under what circumstances would this process be most valuable and add value beyond that which is provided by a more traditional literature review?

Over the long term, the Board and the Department could monitor the success of applying the approach through a series of monitoring questions such as:

- If SER-like principles are adopted and applied within the Department's work, is the Board more confident in the scientific basis of their decisions? Is there less disagreement among stakeholders about the nature of the technical information?
- Are SER principles being applied more broadly in the natural resource arena?
- If principles are adopted more broadly, is there more inter-agency agreement on how to conduct science assessments?
- Does the agency have the funds to apply SER-like processes?

NEXT STEPS

January 2008 – Report on pilot project results. Depending on the timing of pilot completion, the presentation of the report may be combined with the presentation of draft principles that will guide the development of a general but consistent agency process for synthesizing “best available science” that comes before the Board.