

Advancing Sustainable Forest Management in the United States-2010

A Proposal to the _____ Foundation

Prospectus

Summary: On behalf of the Roundtable on Sustainable Forests, the Pinchot Institute is requesting support for the development of a multi-stakeholder “action strategy” to address priority needs for the conservation and sustainable management of the nation’s, on both private and public lands. This strategy will be based on rigorous examination of the information in a definitive report on conditions and trends in the nation’s forests, to be released by the USDA Forest Service in 2010. Action needs, proposed responses, prioritization, and specific policy recommendations would be developed in a process set to begin in early 2009, and culminate in the release of an independent “companion document” timed to coincide with the publication of the Forest Service report.

Background

The most comprehensive analysis of conditions and trends in the nation’s forests is a report issued recently by the Forest Service. The *National Report on Sustainable Forests-2003* gives a current nationwide overview using the Montreal Process “Criteria & Indicators” (C&I) as the analysis framework. It was published in both print form and on CD, and it can be downloaded at the following link:

<http://www.fs.fed.us/research/sustain>

In an effort to provide a strictly factual, unbiased information on the status of the nation’s forests, the Forest Service limited the extent to which it characterized the conditions and trends described in the report as negative or positive. Participants in the Roundtable on Sustainable Forests, however, found many of the trends disturbing, and saw the need for numerous corrective actions. An action strategy was required, one that would be widely supported, zero in on the top priorities, and build upon existing programs and activities so as not to “reinvent the wheel.”

On behalf of the Roundtable, the Pinchot Institute undertook a study to examine all current actions by nongovernmental as well as government entities to address the challenges of sustainable management in the nation’s forests. The study relied upon a framework based on the UN Forum on Forests “proposals for action,” which called for countries to report on improvements they were making in forest management, relative to the C&I. After the initial analysis, the Institute convened a process involving a diversity of stakeholders to (1) rate the adequacy of the collective US response to each “proposal for action,” (2) brainstorm additional actions that need to be taken, and by whom, and (3) extract from this a short list of near-term priorities, in recognition that all of the proposed actions could not be undertaken at once. The results of the study were presented as a “companion document” to the Forest Service report. The report, *Advancing Sustainable Forest Management in the United States*, is available in print form, as a CD which contains data files not included in the printed document, and as a download at the following link.

<http://www.pinchot.org/pubs/10>

In 2010, the Forest Service will release the next *National Report on Sustainable Forests*. It is expected that this report will provide not only an updated snapshot of the trends and conditions in public and private forests, but will contain an analysis that highlights the major changes in these conditions and trends since the 2003 snapshot. As in its earlier report, the Forest Service will strive to keep this a strictly factual and unbiased presentation of well-documented information. The Forest Service does not plan to include any interpretation of the positive or negative attributes of these conditions and trends, nor recommendations for management or policy actions. However, the Forest Service report will identify a few specific areas in which the time is ripe for decisive action, in both policy and in forest management, to stimulate meaningful public dialogue on what those actions should be.

Proposal

The Pinchot Institute, on behalf of the Roundtable on Sustainable Forests, is seeking support for the development of an independent “action strategy” to be considered in conjunction with the official Forest Service report on changing conditions and trends in the nation’s forests. This action strategy would reflect a rigorous examination of information presented in the Forest Service report, a review and evaluation by the broadest possible diversity of stakeholders and public interests, and policy recommendations for consideration by federal, state, tribal, and community policymakers.

Action Strategy

Public review of the Forest Service report undoubtedly will generate many suggestions for action. But a long list of possible actions does not constitute a strategy. A process is needed for objectively examining the full range of suggestions for action, but then developing a working consensus behind a smaller set of near-term priorities. The 2003 *Advancing Sustainable Forest Management* report illustrated the capacity that exists in the US for action by state and tribal governments, nongovernmental organizations, and the corporate sector—not just by federal agencies such as the Forest Service. Nevertheless, financial resources are limited, and a strategic approach is critical to accomplishing what is needed to conserve and sustainably manage the nation’s forests.

Experience has shown that, given the enormous diversity of interests surrounding forests and the variety of values and services they provide, there are many different perspectives on what is most important about the conditions and trends in America’s forests. Although there may be differing viewpoints on the relative importance of the kinds of changes that will be identified in the *National Report on Sustainable Forests-2010*, experience has also shown that there can be broad consensus on certain findings and their implications. For example, nearly the entire spectrum of forest interests seem to agree that the current rate at which the nation’s forests are being permanently lost to development is unacceptable, and that decisive policy actions are needed to better conserve forests through land protection and economic incentives.

The objective of the Action Strategy process is to bring to bear a diversity of interests in a rigorous examination of the forest conditions and trends, and key changes between the 2003 and 2010 *National Report on Sustainable Forests*. While the official Forest Service reports strive to be “value neutral,” this examination will explicitly consider the implications of the Forest Service reports from a variety of perspectives based on interests and values. With analytical support from the Penn State School of Forest Resources, the hosting of regional workshops by other university members of the Sustainable Forestry

Partnership,¹ and facilitation assistance from the Meridian Institute, the Roundtable on Sustainable Forests will host a process whereby the full array of needs and proposed responses will be identified and articulated. Recognizing that not all of these responses can be undertaken simultaneously, participants in this facilitated process will prioritize among them, emphasizing those on which there is broad agreement that near-term action is necessary. The set of priorities that emerges will form the basis for the Action Strategy and serve as the platform for the Sustainable Forests Policy Forum.

Sustainable Forests Policy Forum

Since the release of the first *Advancing Sustainable Forest Management* report in 2006, important changes have taken place in the federal and state policy context for forest conservation and sustainable management, as well as in the conditions and trends in the forests themselves. Climate change has become the leading environmental issue of our time, and there is extensive discussion at the federal and state level regarding the role that forests can best play as part of a comprehensive strategy for climate change mitigation and adaptation. The policies that emerge during the coming months could have a profound influence on the way forests are conserved and managed, on both private and public lands.

Similarly, renewable energy development has become a national priority, with important implications for the role that forests will play as a carbon-neutral substitute for fossil fuels in electrical power generation (the largest single source of carbon dioxide emissions), and in meeting the ambitious goals set for advanced biofuels such as cellulosic ethanol to substitute for fossil fuels in the transportation sector. The magnitude of the renewable energy challenge, and the assortment of incentives, subsidies, trade tariffs and other public policies aimed at stimulating further renewable energy development, guarantee that energy demands on forests will have a major influence on their future conservation and management in the US.

These and other factors will be taken into consideration in a Sustainable Forests Policy Forum aimed at developing specific recommendations for federal, state, tribal, and corporate policies that effect sustainable forest management. This will not be limited to traditional forest policy, but will also inform decision making processes in other areas of policy such as climate, energy and trade. The results of the Action Strategy process will serve as a primary information reference for the policy forum, and the point of departure for the development of policy proposals intended to support the measures called for in the Action Strategy. The policy forum will be organized by the Roundtable on Sustainable Forests, but will be open to participation by the broadest possible diversity of stakeholders and public interests. The policy recommendations will reflect proposals that are widely supported, but differing views and stakeholder perspectives will also be presented.

Advancing Sustainable Forest Management in the United States – 2010

The results of both the Action Strategy and the Sustainable Forests Policy Forum will be summarized in a report, *Advancing Sustainable Forest Management in the United States – 2010*, which will be released as a companion document to the official Forest Service *National Report on Sustainable Forests – 2010*. The report will be made widely available in a variety of formats—print, electronic (CD), and on the Web. Advanced Web design tools will be used to maximize the degree to which individuals seeking information about forest conservation and sustainable management will be able to access the information in the report through typical Web searches (e.g., Google). In addition, targeted briefings will be provided

¹ The Sustainable Forestry Partnership includes Penn State University, Auburn University, College of Menominee Nation, Cornell University, Michigan State University, Oregon State University, University of Idaho, University of Vermont, Utah State University, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University.

to both governmental and corporate policymakers, as needed, by small but diverse teams representing the Roundtable on Sustainable Forests.

We expect to have their data in hand by the end of 2008. We will do a “change analysis” to identify key differences between the two snapshots. We also plan to convene a process similar to what we did on the previous report, i.e., a multi-stakeholder approach to interpreting the results, identifying needed actions, and prioritizing these into a document that will serve as an “action strategy.”

Timetable

Although the Forest Service report is not scheduled for final release until 2010, it is expected that a review draft will be made publicly available in late 2008 or early 2009. The Roundtable on Sustainable Forests’ Action Strategy process would begin immediately upon release of this review draft. It is expected that the independent report, including policy recommendations, would be completed no later than the end of 2009. The release of the independent report, *Advancing Sustainable Forest Management in the United States-2010*, would be timed to coincide with the public release of the official *National Report on Sustainable Forests-2010* by the Forest Service in early 2010. Briefings for federal, state, tribal and corporate policymakers would then be scheduled on an as needed basis. Formal presentations would be developed to be given at the World Forestry Congress (2009) and in conjunction with the United Nations International Year of the Forest (2011).

Budget

See Attachment 1.