

Upper Mississippi River Forest Regional Roundtable

March 23 - 24, 2004
LaCrosse, Wisconsin
Report Summary

Participants in the Upper Mississippi River Forest Partnership Regional Roundtable gained a greater understanding of the opportunities and challenges they face in managing forests sustainably and the opportunities partnership might offer. Information on the Upper Mississippi River Basin was presented in the context of the local, regional, national and international scope. The Roundtable objectives were:

- 1. Recognize the capacity of the national report, **The State of the Nation's Forests**, to guide national level discussions and recognize the value of sustainable forest management criteria and indicator to local and regional efforts.*
- 2. Gain understanding and exchange knowledge about the status of Upper Mississippi River Forests in relation to sustainable forest management criteria: biodiversity, forest productivity, forest health, soil and water conservation, carbon cycling, social and economic impacts and forest policy and law.*
- 3. Express concerns and ideas/suggestions regarding the social, economic and ecological needs of the Upper Mississippi River and its forests to national and regional policy and decision makers.*
- 4. Provide input to an action plan to make the Upper Mississippi River and its forests economically, ecologically and socially viable at the national, regional and local scales.*

The event, funded by the Northeastern Area State & Private Forestry of the Forest Service, drew over 115 participants from Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri and Wisconsin and others in the United States and from Canada.

Why a Regional Roundtable?

The United States Sustainable Forest Roundtable, a partnership among states, non-governmental organizations and the government prepared a report on the nation's forests in 2003. The national report contained data on 67 indicators of forest sustainability in relationship to the land, the people and the economy. These indicators are also being used by 12 countries in the temperate forest zones to monitor forest health, productivity and impact. In order to gain feedback on the national report, the national Roundtable convened three regional roundtables of forest resource professionals, academicians, researchers, private landowners and concerned citizens including one held in LaCrosse, Wisconsin which convened parties from the Upper Mississippi River basin. The Regional Roundtable was an important opportunity to be able to co-locate with the fledgling Upper Mississippi River Forest Partnership. Here are examples of the national report findings:

- * For the past 100 years, there has been no net loss of forest land in the U.S. though there have been shifts in land use.
- * Increasing forest recreation use is intersecting with decreasing land available for it.
- * Of all the forest species, 88% still exist in the forest which they previously inhabited.
- * Forest fragmentation is real, 50% of all forest land is within 100 meters of a forest edge.
- * Net forest growth exceeds removals by 47% and forest death to natural causes is less than three-fourths of one percent.
- * Private forest lands provide the vast majority of forest harvest.
- * The margin of net growth to harvest is increasing in the West (where most forest land is in public ownership) and decreasing in the East (where most forest land is privately owned).

Why Criteria and Indicators?

When doctors want to monitor the health of a child, they use key health checks, from temperature to blood pressure to paint a picture of the child's health. Economists monitor leading economic indicators to determine the economic health of our country. People in the United States care enough about forests to have embraced a set of indicators to monitor the health of the forest ecosystem, the economic activity they offer and the benefits to society. When people have a vision about what they want the forest to offer, from clean air and water to habitat for plants and animals, to well-made homes, to recreation and scenic beauty, they can identify sustainable forest management criteria and indicators to monitor progress towards their vision. *Criteria* are comparable to large baskets of concepts people care about; Sustainable forest management have seven criteria, from biological sustainability to economic productivity to meeting the needs of people. *Indicators* are the individual items within each basket that are written in such a way to

be measured. The measurements collected are rich data from which science and policy experts and practitioners can understand successes, trends and problems.

Why the Upper Mississippi River Forest Partnership?

The forests of the Upper Mississippi River contribute to water quality and help alleviate conditions that contribute to the problem of a dead zone, or hypoxia, in the Mississippi River and Gulf of Mexico. State Foresters in Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, and Wisconsin and the USDA Forest Service created the Upper MS River Forest Partnership to promote sound forest management in the Basin by encouraging the use of sustainable forest management criteria and indicators to help determine forest and water quality planning and action priorities.

RESULT HIGHLIGHTS

Participants discussed the Montreal Process Criteria and Indicators, developed a vision for the Upper Mississippi River forests and suggested strategic action to achieve those visions.

Criteria and Indicators

Summarizing some of the discussions related to criterion break-out sessions, Michael Huffman of the Missouri Department of Conservation identified several overarching themes:

- * The role of private lands and landowners is crucial to sustainable forest management in the Upper Mississippi River Basin (UMRB);
- * There is a strong interrelationship among the ecological, economic and social criteria and the indicators; None can stand alone.
- * Education has a major and compelling role throughout this process.
- * Information is a stimulus for action.
- * Behavior is influenced greatly by social values.
- * There is a global influence and context to local land use. The connections need to be recognized and understood. For example, as more forest land in the United States is set aside for wilderness, consumption demands greater imports from other countries and the export of American forest industry to countries where timber is offered. As industry leaves the region, private landowners may lose a source of income from occasionally selling timber to offset tax burdens which is leading to fragmentation of large forest blocks.
- * Biodiversity has many interpretations requiring considerable effort among the group to achieve common understandings that can lead to action.
- * People need to understand the links between consumption and resource use and the role of productive capacity in that evaluation.
- * Forest health is difficult to define, will be expensive to monitor, has sizable historic variation and should include urban forests.

Vision

Participants presented visions and strategies for the Upper Mississippi River Basin and the Partnership. They identified important shareholders. Information was synthesized under categories of people and communities, the state of the forest and the supporting structures and capacities. The vision statements are presented here.

1. Leadership

Natural resource leadership within the Basin recognizes ecological, economic and social values cross administrative boundaries and addresses sustainability of forests from the perspective of local needs nested in regional, national and global needs. Leadership engages the forest and agricultural communities in the process.

2. Respect the Role of Private Woodlands and Their Owners

Private woodland owners maintain their forest land as forests and contribute to sustainable forest management through a comprehensive and customized forest plan and it is manifested through a healthy forested landscape.

3. Voice

Leadership gives voice to a diverse array of people groups including, but not limited to: citizens, business, communities, the academy, landowners and farmers so they can contribute their wisdom and experience to help make better decisions about forest and land use policy and practice in a local to global perspective. Leaders ensure people who have direct connection to the land are involved in decision-making. Everyone has access to the forests.

4. Collaboration

Organizations and agencies, public and private, agriculture and forest, local to national, all collaborate by sharing staff, resources and expertise rather than compete to assure forest sustainability and water quality. There is

integrated, efficient, cross-sectoral agency coordination to exchange expertise and avoid overlap with a balanced perspective that considers global trade-offs.

5. Education and Outreach

Education and outreach is manifested by citizens, business, communities, landowners and farmers who are knowledgeable and support sustainable forest and water management because they understand forest values and issues and their unique roles for improving ecosystem health. There is a well-balanced sustainable forest resource education program.

6. Healthy and Optimally Diverse Forests

Healthy and optimally diverse forests are the norm; they are productive, resilient, and sustain their cover of the Upper Mississippi River and other watersheds, particularly through riparian forested areas. The forests in the Basin are healthy uplands and restored floodplains with a diversity of forest composition, flora and fauna. Invasive species are understood regarding their current status and impact on ecological diversity.

7. Viable Forest Products Economic Base

Consumers are living within the means of natural production. This is evidenced by an acceptance that sustainable forest management includes sustainable forest industries, all of which contribute to the economic vitality of communities and the region and support an ecologically rich forested landscape. Family forestry is economically viable. There is an economic return for afforestation.

8. Optimal Species Diversity

There is optimal species diversity to satisfy ecological, economic, social and cultural needs.

9. Land Use and Planning

There is a balance of forest land use to stem fragmentation and maintain and enhance forest function through appropriate land use policy and practice.

10. Research

Research is recognized as a vital component of a vision of healthy forests, communities and industries. Forest and water quality monitoring lead to adaptive forest management. Leaders recognize monitoring is inexpensive, effective and contributes to articulating and validating sustainable forest management.

Strategic Action

Innovative or comprehensive strategic recommendations from participant discussion were synthesized.

1. Develop a forest sustainability report card to evaluate the work at each scale from landowner to community to state, region, nation and international perspectives. Engage the agricultural community and indicators in the Upper MS regional discussion.
2. Prioritize forest resource areas that need to be preserved and those for active management and recreation.
3. Serve all interested landowners with technical and financial assistance programs.
4. Create a better flow of information and education to local levels, including all sustainable forest management criteria and indicators, from biodiversity to carbon sequestration.
5. Ensure the right to practice forestry and restructure the tax system to encourage woodland owners to keep their forest land intact.
6. Create a Landowner Economic and Ecological Alliance for Families, Farms, Fields and Forests (LE²AF4).
7. Reach consensus as communities around prioritization for improved water quality, a healthy functioning forested landscape and a viable forest products industry.
8. Engage the diverse array of people groups in a *roundtable process* that is accountable up and down scales of geographic influence and addresses the roles each level can play to sustain the forest and improve water quality.
9. Jointly pursue the recognition of critical issues, including hypoxia.
10. Interconnect regional and state strategic forest management plans.
11. Design an end-user tax to support a comprehensive educational strategy.
12. Coordinate and provide more effective education and communication to a wide variety of people groups regarding the many forest values.
13. Research and design a holistic Best Management Practices, including biodiversity.
14. Establish healthy riparian management zones through federal, state and local programs that provide both financial and technical assistance to landowners.
15. Ecological services(habitat and water quality) are improved through incentives.
16. Initiate an array of efforts to maintain a viable forest products industry tied to a forested landscape.
17. Develop a demand for locally produced wood products through public relations, policy and promoting certification.

18. Develop a value system so the market does not drive the harvest but individual needs, not wants, drive consumption.
19. Work with policy and decision makers to provide incentives and reward sustainable forest incentives.
20. Develop a research agenda to strengthen locally appropriate indicators, to monitor local trends, to evaluate data on hypoxia so as to delineate strategies and opportunities for improvement.

POTENTIAL FRAMEWORKS

From the synthesis of the participant discussion, several frameworks for action may be perceived to address the long- and short-term strategies proffered.

1. Initiate a Woodland Owner/Farm Owner Task Force for Information and Policy

The Upper MS Forest Partnership supports a task force comprised predominantly (more than 50%) of woodland and farmland owners along with local governments, organizations, agencies and businesses to serve all landowners with technical and financial assistance to maintain a forested landscape, to ensure the right to practice forestry, to restructure the tax system to encourage landowners to keep or restore their forest land and to provide incentives for ecological services, including clean air and water.

2. Design and Implement a Comprehensive, Customized, Coordinated Outreach and Education Process

A Task Force on Forest Resource Education captures the excellent array of both *innovative* and *comprehensive* strategies for education and outreach to landowners (woodland and farmers), citizens and students to realize the vision of healthy forests for healthy water. Pertinent to this issue are the concepts of education to an array of publics on the interrelationship of water and forests: that forests are a solution to some of the water quality issues.

3. Develop a Research Partnership, Delineate a Research Agenda and Engage Research Projects.

A partnership involves the research scientists from public and private institutions as well as agency and organizational leaders, business, communities and woodland and farmland owners to identify research most needed to make the transition from research theory to practice. Topics could include, but not be limited to invasive species, strengthening local indicators of sustainable forest management, interaction of agriculture not already in the indicator sets, forest productivity potential, metrics and data collection in monitoring sustainable forest management, ways to measure change, the relationship of consumption and production, international trade impacts on local communities and a potential power suite of indicators for the Upper Mississippi Basin.

4. Study the Review and Adaptation of the Montreal Process Criteria and Indicators

Participants raised the need to look at the feasibility of incorporating criteria and indicators into the Partnership effort. Participation from woodland owners, community group representatives, including local government and state agency personnel in addition to other traditional participants, such as industry, environmental NGO's and research experts is imperative. State agency staff remain the repository for many data sets and private woodland owners increasingly represent the changing forest landscape in the Upper Mississippi basin.

5. Design and Implement a Local to National Leadership Roundtable Process.

Leadership is needed to inspire the political and civic will to employ forests as part of the solution to the Upper Mississippi River problems and opportunities. Participants spoke of a local to global perspective and the need for a forum for diverse groups, including those typically disenfranchised from policy discussions, namely woodland owners, communities and local government to express their concerns and ideas. A Leadership Roundtable might be nested from local communities where woodland owners, farmers, business, local government, community organizations, tribes and schools would be able to both receive information and share local and traditional knowledge. State roundtables would include representatives from local roundtables and communities of interest. Regional roundtables that included clusters of states or watersheds, such as the Upper Mississippi Forest Partnership might be effective. Those groups would then receive and contribute to the National Sustainable Forest Roundtable and ideally, an International Roundtable. Each Roundtable level would address items for which it has the decision space. Activities may range from an holistic Best Management Practices which translate indicators to implementation to helping make the connection between healthy forests and a viable forest products economy to an incentive system for ecological services of water and air quality.