

NCSSF-NFF Applications Workshop

Summary

Boulder, CO June 3 – 4, 2004

Introduction

The National Commission on Science for Sustainable Forestry (NCSSF) and the National Forest Foundation (NFF) convened the first Sustainable Forestry Tools and Applications Workshop June 2 - 3, 2004 in Boulder, Colorado. The meeting, which brought together forest professionals from around the country, was designed to provide forestry practitioners, managers and policymakers with hands-on demonstrations of the newest tools for application to their information needs.

The developers of tools and information assisted workshop attendees in exploring how to apply their scientific products in: 1) selecting specific indicators of sustainability and biodiversity, 2) dealing with non-timber forest products (NTFP) issues, 3) determining what practices are already in use around the nation and the lessons being learned, and, 4) using available decision support systems.

The workshop resulted from recommendations from two NCSSF-NFF sponsored workshops held in 2003, to determine the needs of forest information users. A concern voiced at those workshops was the need for better communication between scientists conducting forestry research and the people tasked with applying the results (see the complete results from the user needs workshops at www.ncssf.org).

The Boulder “Applications Workshop” served to address this pressing need by presenting new tools from the NCSSF program for managing forests for biodiversity. Four new tools developed during the first year of the NCSSF program were presented to a group of 27 forestry professionals who are in a position to apply what they have learned and to increase awareness of the tools in their field. The participants consisted of forestry practitioners, managers and policymakers representing all regions of the United States.

During a series of small group breakout sessions users were able to interact directly with the scientists who had developed the tools presented. The scientists began with brief overviews of their tools and relevant findings. The participants were then given the opportunity to use the tools themselves. This direct interaction between scientists and users allowed the scientists to find ways to more clearly present their results and to refine their tools to make them more user-friendly. Likewise, users were able to learn about the new tools and their utility. At the close of the workshop, a plenary session was held in which the participants offered feedback to the scientists on their work, and to NCSSF and NFF on how future workshops might be improved.

The NFF established the partnership with NCSSF in order to enhance the connection between scientists and the users of scientific information. NCSSF conducts a program to build a better scientific underpinning for assessing and improving sustainable forest management practices. The program produces information and tools that are both of the

high technical quality and relevancy to the urgent needs of forestry practitioners, managers and policymakers. The NCSSF program includes: a) syntheses and surveys, b) research and assessments, c) tool development, and d) communication and outreach activities.

Summary of Tools Presented

The four tools presented at the workshop represent products developed in the first of a five year cycle of research funded by NCSSF. The following are brief summaries of their purpose and results:

1. Selection of Biodiversity Indicators to Apply to Sustainable Forestry

John Hagan and Andy Whitman, Manomet Center for Conservation Sciences

This project provides a database of known indicators and a framework for selecting indicators of biological diversity in forest management so indicators can better serve stakeholders and decision-makers. This resource addresses a major problem that has arisen in forest management; indicators of biological diversity, while popular in sustainable forestry management, have not been effectively applied because there has been no standard framework for selecting or evaluating data using indicators.

2. Assessment of Knowledge about Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFP) Management Impacts on Biodiversity

Katie Lynch, Institute for Culture and Ecology

The project created online databases of non-timber forest product (NTFP) species and literature. In assessing the relationship between forest management, NTFPs and biodiversity, the project revealed that there is a need to integrate NTFPs into forest management and that NTFPs should no longer be considered a “special use” of forests, but should rather be given the same attention as other forestry activities. These results take the first steps towards providing decision-makers with the information needed to strengthen and expand capacity for studying NTFPs.

3. Survey of Lessons Learned about Managing Forests for Biodiversity and Sustainability Based on Practical Experiences

Steven R. Radosevich, Oregon State University and Laurie Schoonhoven, Penn State

This project surveyed forestry professionals about biodiversity and sustainable forestry practices now in use and how well they are working. The survey results are presented in an online database. The project also includes a computer model to graphically illustrate

how forests would change over the next 50 years in the Willamette Valley of Oregon under different certification and management practices.

4. Evaluation of Available Decision Support Systems

Sean Gordon and Norman Johnson, Oregon State University

This project compared and evaluated 30 decision support systems (DSS) and produced a database of DSS to aid forest managers in choosing a model best suited for their needs. Through their analysis, the authors determined that nearly all DSS fail to capture the full breadth of issues facing today's forest managers, not addressing basic issues like forest structure and biodiversity in the same model. The database and website resulting from this project are designed to address this problem by providing forest managers with capacity matrices for the DSS in the database so they can effectively choose a model that meets their specific needs or multiple DSS that span a larger breadth of issues than a single DSS would be capable of alone.

Workshop Results

Workshop participants were divided into three groups based on geography (west coast, inter-mountain west, east). This was done so any regional difference in usefulness of the tools presented could be identified. The three groups had roughly equal numbers of practitioners, managers and policymakers. The indicators project was presented to the plenary while the other tools were presented in a smaller format to the three groups.

During the workshop, participants were asked to keep track of any comments or reactions they had to the tools being presented and the closing plenary session enabled participants to share their suggestions with the entire group. The NCSSF and NFF staff collected the comments on both the specific tools presented and the workshop as a whole in order to determine what was successful or unsuccessful in providing the participants with tools that are applicable to their work on sustainable forestry.

General Findings

- Participants regarded the workshop as an important first step in closing the communication gap between scientists and users. NCSSF and NFF were strongly encouraged to hold more workshops in the future. Users also encouraged the use of their comments from this workshop to improve the effectiveness of future workshops.
- While NCSSF has worked to make its findings accessible to users, more work needs to be done. Participants strongly encouraged NCSSF and NFF to engage translators, such as extension agents, to help make project results more widely known and user-friendly to non-scientists.

- In order to make it easier for people to attend or to target specific audiences, participants suggested the workshop sponsors “piggyback” future workshops with other forestry conferences so people do not have to travel just for our meeting.
- The format of the workshop was very conducive for learning; participants welcomed the chance to interact with people from all backgrounds within the forestry profession. By including a mix of practitioners, managers and policymakers in each of the small groups, participants felt their experience was enriched by exposure to diverse perspectives. Including all stakeholders in the workshop also helps to establish trust between users and scientists; more of this needs to be done.

Project Specific Findings

- The Indicators project was considered a useful opportunity to engage multiple stakeholders and was well liked by most of the participants. Some felt it was the most valuable tool presented for addressing their current needs. However, there were participants who found the process presented cumbersome and the idea that there is no core set of indicators disconcerting.
- The Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFPs) project was generally liked by all and it was the favorite of the practitioners. Managers liked the project but were also worried about bias in the presentation toward the harvester’s point of view and insensitivity to other forest users such as ranchers. NTFPs were identified by many participants as an area where additional knowledge was needed and the tools provided at the workshop were found to be very user-friendly. Some participants would like to see the development of an NTFP monitoring plan.
- The Lessons Learned about Managing for Biodiversity project was of general interest but many potential users found it hard to translate into practical applications. Participants liked the goal of identifying what other forest managers, across ownership types, are doing about biodiversity when managing for sustainability. However, most of the participants found the project results confusing and the tool not user-friendly. The simulation of policy impacts in Oregon was of most interest to participants from the Pacific Northwest.
- The Decision Support Systems (DSS) tool was judged to be most valuable to managers and policymakers but the practitioners struggled to find a way to apply it to their work. The project was well presented but needs more context and background explanations for users not familiar with DDS. The tool was generally viewed as user friendly and understandable.

Participants were concerned about whether or not the tools presented such as DSS and Indicators, will be updated as new indicators and systems are developed. Both user participants and tool developers found the workshop valuable for their respective work.