
Society of American Foresters— An Advocacy for Forest Inventory

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Abstract.—The Society of American Foresters (SAF) represents all segments of the forestry profession in the United States, including public and private practitioners, researchers, administrators, educators, and students. Its mission is to advance the science, education, technology, and practice of forestry. SAF's science and education program and its policy program have been long-term advocates for forest inventory with a specific focus on the U.S. Department of Agriculture Forest Service's Forest Inventory and Analysis program. This address, delivered at the 2005 FIA Science Symposium, presents and discusses aspects of SAF's advocacy.

It is a pleasure to join you in another exceptional Forest Inventory and Analysis (FIA) Science Symposium. I would like to extend a warm welcome to all, especially to our international colleagues; you are certainly a notable addition to this year's symposium. I am looking forward to your contributions, renewing past acquaintances, and putting faces with names that I only know through your work. At this time of year, there is no better place to be than on the Maine Coast—it is “The Place” for fall forestry meetings. Two weeks ago, the Sustainable Forestry Initiative Annual Conference was here. Next month, the Northeast Mensurationists will meet a few miles up the coast. And, I fondly recall attending the Society of American Foresters' (SAF's) National Convention here several Octobers ago. To commemorate the occasion, Bill Banzhaf and I planted a young oak tree in a park just down the hill to the west of us. I am looking forward to seeing if that tree is alive and well.

The FIA program traces its roots to the 1928 McSweeney-McNary Forest Research Act. Regarding the signing of that

bill, articles in the *Journal of Forestry* stated, “the passage of that bill marked 1928 as a red letter year in the history of forestry for this country”... by establishing ... a comprehensive inventory. . . for the renewable resources of the forest (Anon. 1928, Frayer and Furnival 1999). In the spirit of that lofty acclaim, I titled my comments for this symposium “The Society of American Foresters—An Advocacy for Forest Inventory.” It just seemed fitting when SAF's present FIA Position Statement proclaims that “the FIA program is the crucial source of information for assessing the sustainability of the Nation's forests.” On the chance that you are not acquainted with SAF, I will briefly introduce you. It represents all segments of the forestry profession in the United States, including public and private practitioners, researchers, administrators, educators, and students. Its mission is to advance the science, education, technology, and practice of forestry; to enhance the competency of its members; to establish professional excellence; and to ensure the continued health and use of forest ecosystems to benefit society.

SAF's science, education, and policy programs have been long-term advocates for forest inventory with a specific focus on the U.S. Department of Agriculture Forest Service's FIA program. SAF's membership and the organizations they represent unquestionably believe that a current and accurate forest ecosystem inventory is prerequisite to substantive discussions of sustainability, national forest policy, carbon sequestration, changes in growth and productivity, changes in land use and demographics, ecosystem health, and economic opportunities in the forest industries sector (Van Deusen *et al.* 1999).

I believe that when SAF established the Forest Science and Technology Board and Working Groups in 1971, it forged a substantial advocacy with the FIA program. The goal of this new science structure was to improve SAF's effectiveness in the development, dissemination, and uses of forest sciences.

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It was anticipated that Working Groups would partner with other organizations to form viable and active communities of scientific and professional interest. Starting in 1974, The Forest Inventory Working Group began an immensely successful periodic series of national and international inventory conferences in which the FIA program and other national and international partners had a very large presence. Their first conference, held in Fort Collins, CO, focused on inventory design and analysis. FIA employees—past, present, and some who would ultimately join FIA in leadership roles—were very much in evidence as speakers; George Furnival, Mel Metcalf, Ken Ware, Joe Barnard, and Ed Frayer just to name a few. You may also find it interesting that three other speakers at that conference are speakers at this symposium; while mingling with the group see if you can guess their identities.

The last in that series of forest inventory conferences was titled “Integrated Tools for Natural Resources Inventories in the 21st Century.” It was held in Boise, ID, during 1998. Many of you, I am sure, recall participating in that broadly focused inventory conference. The leading cosponsors included SAF, FIA, the International Union of Forest Research Organizations, and a host of other public and private organizations.

It is my opinion that from 1974 to 1998, SAF’s Forest Inventory Working Group exceeded all expectations in forming viable and active communities of scientific and professional interest in forest inventory. Lately, however, I have been disappointed that SAF’s advocacy of forest inventory conferences has not been as evident as it has been in the past—particularly when I consider the pace at which new scientific and technological methodology is being applied to natural resource inventories, and the increased importance that monitoring of ecosystems contributes to local, national, and international policies.

To the credit of the FIA program, however, it has continued development and dissemination of forest inventory science and technology. They were the major contributor to the three half-day FIA sessions at SAF’s 2003 National Convention in Buffalo, NY. The FIA Science Symposia that began in 1999 and is now beginning its seventh consecutive program spotlight evolving science and technology in the FIA program.

It has been observed by some that these programs are too FIA-centric. In looking at program content and structure for this and last year’s symposia, I do sense a widening of the spheres. Should these symposia be further broadened to fill the void created by the absence of “Boise-type” inventory conferences? The breath and participation in this conference portrays a strong positive indication to me. That begs another question—who should take the lead? I am reluctant to say, Ron, that you and Greg should get on with that task; never mind that it will drastically impact your primary FIA employment responsibilities. Or is there perhaps an opportunity to revitalize the joint the FIA/SAF Inventory Working Group joint conference sponsorships?

In the mission to advance the science, technology, and practice of forestry, SAF’s policy staff has been a vigorous advocate for the FIA program by building support and educating Congress and their staff on informational needs to assess the status, trends, and sustainability of this Nation’s greatest renewable natural resource—its forests. During the early 1990s SAF members were among high-level leaders representing environmental organizations, industry, professional societies, academia, and State and Federal agencies that met to express concerns that the FIA program was not receiving adequate funding to meet its mission of “maintaining a comprehensive inventory of the status and trends of the country’s diverse forest ecosystems, their use, and their health.” It was noted that creeping cycle lengths—some as long as 20 years—created uncertainty about our Nation’s forest resources.

That group formed the core of the First Blue Ribbon Panel on FIA. They made the following recommendations:

- Implement a uniform approach on all ownerships.
- Increase consistency and compatibility among FIA units.
- Enhance coordination between FIA and public agencies.
- Improve and expand information on ecosystems and noncommodity values.
- Produce the most current resource data possible.

In October 1992, a subset of the Blue Ribbon Panel met with USDA Forest Service Chief Dale Robertson to reach an agreement for implementing the Panel’s recommendations

in the short-term and within current budgets. Unfortunately, before achieving positive results, Chief Robertson was replaced by Jack Ward Thomas. Again, the Blue Ribbon panel members presented their case for increased funding to the new Chief. Concurrently, other Panel members conducted briefings for key congressional staff with the objective of conveying the national importance of FIA and the overwhelming constituent support for improving the program.

In the year following the release of the First Blue Ribbon Panel's report, the USDA Forest Service published "A Blueprint for Forest Inventory and Analysis Research and Vision for the Future." That report proposed research directions, guiding principles, and goals to advance the program. In spite of sustained efforts, FIA advocacy groups concluded that there had been inadequate progress fulfilling the First Blue Ribbon Panel's recommendations. To illustrate, in 1991 the Federal appropriation for the FIA field program was \$14.2 million; in 1997 that appropriation was \$14.9 million. In the same interval, the average inventory cycle length increased from 10 to more than 12 years.

In 1998, a second Blue Ribbon Panel representing an even broader constituency convened to assess the FIA programs' progress since 1992. There were some regional successes; however, the Panel concluded that the lack of major program improvement was leading to the loss of ecological and economic benefits to society by hindering our ability to monitor forest health and sustainability. FIA's usefulness was still being threatened due to increased cycle lengths and funding shortfalls. Briefly stated, the Panel made the following key recommendations:

- Elevate the priority of the program within the USDA.
- Initiate annual inventories across all regions and ownerships.
- Fulfill the mandate of reporting on all forest lands.
- Concentrate on core ecological and timber data.
- Develop a strategic plan to carry out the program's mission.

I view 1998 as a turning point for FIA. The Second Blue Ribbon Panel Report signaled an urgent sense of frustration. Panel

participants, such as the SAF, the American Forest and Paper Association, and the National Association of State Foresters kicked their advocacy and presence on Capitol Hill up a notch. Discussions with members of Congress regarding the future of FIA provided interesting responses. One member said, "It gives us an accurate picture of the extent and condition of our forests. We must continue to increase it's funding over the next few years to annualize inventories." Another responded, "I think the 'Foreign Intelligence Agency' is truly important; now more than ever." As you can well see, advocacy and education go hand in hand. "FIA" does not have the same connotation to all.

Overwhelming advocacy by the FIA user community, however, led Congress to include legislation in the 1998 Farm Bill, to implement an annual forest inventory and monitoring program that covers all forest lands in a consistent and timely fashion. The passage of that act demonstrated Congress' commitment to an improved FIA program. In response, the USDA Forest Service developed a strategic plan that strongly responded to Congress' intent, and to the recommendations of the Second Blue Ribbon Panel.

In April 1999, a crucial hearing was held in the U. S. House of Representatives' Agriculture Subcommittee on Forestry. The committee chair specified two prime objectives for the hearing:

- Establish FIA as a clear priority for the USDA Forest Service.
- Establish a structure and funding proposal for FIA that would fulfill the Farm Bill's mandate for a national annualized forest inventory.

The five panelists, all members of SAF, representing the State Foresters, industry, academia, and the USDA Forest Service provided strong and convincing testimony for both programmatic and financial support.

The entire December 1999 issue of SAF's flagship publication, *Journal of Forestry*, was devoted to "Forest Inventory and Analysis—Moving to an Annual National System." A "Perspective" in that issue by Bob Goodlatte, Chair of the House of Representatives' Hearing Committee, and Jim Garner, Virginia State Forester, explained that, "The improved FIA is

the cornerstone of ecologically and biologically sustainable forest practices in the 21st century. Congress has provided the framework. Willing partners are in place to help with the transition. The future is waiting.” (Goodlatte and Garner 1999.)

In February of 2000, the National Association of State Foresters and the USDA Forest Service entered into a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to fully implement the less costly alternative FIA program as proposed in the USDA Forest Service’s finalized Strategic Plan. This MOU was certainly a step in the right direction as it clearly documented State agency partners’ cooperation and commitment toward the realization of the mandate set forth by Congress in 1998.

In December 2000, SAF’s Council adopted a Position Statement on FIA. It stated unequivocally that broad consensus indicates that there has never been a greater need for timely, comprehensive, and reliable inventory data on the Nation’s public and private forests. Moreover, the lack of full funding for the program is the primary impediment to successful implementation. A reconvening of the Second Blue Ribbon Panel occurred in 2001 to assess progress and make recommendations for moving the program forward. That Panel commended the FIA program for their accomplishments in developing the strategic plan and the implementation of the annualized inventory in 27 states. It was, however, noted that significant lag time occurs between plot data collection and analysis and this postpones data availability to the public. In addition, some States are taking longer than 1 year to measure a panel; this delay could undermine the preeminent purpose of the annual system as envisioned in the 1998 Farm Bill. The Panel unanimously agreed that full funding support by Congress and the Administration is essential to achieving the goals of a national annualized forest inventory.

While there have been no further calls since 2001 to reconvene the Blue Ribbon Panel, constituents still consistently identify funding priorities as a concern. From the enactment of the 1998 Farm Bill through the most recent fiscal year, appropriated funding has increased from \$29.8 million in 1999 to \$60.9 million in 2005. While not at the envisioned “full funding level,” the FIA program has made substantial progress toward

the annualized national inventory. Beginning in 1998, FIA raised the program’s accountability with the publication of a “Fiscal Year Business Report” that clearly documents program changes, significant contributions, funding sources, expenditures, and long-term strategic directions. Those reports are clearly an asset in advocating program support.

When I reflect on the evolution of the FIA program over my professional career, I have to look no further than in my own backyard. Indiana’s first FIA inventory was completed in 1950. When I arrived in Indiana in 1964 we were anxiously awaiting the first remeasurement, which occurred in 1967. The second remeasurement interval was a bit longer, taking place in 1986. When the third remeasurement occurred in 1998, we were getting close to the national average cycle length. But I refer to the next remeasurement benchmark as a “Blue Ribbon Panel Year.” It was 2003 and we had just completed the fifth panel in our 20 percent annualized FIA inventory. And to top that off, this morning Chris Woodall gave me a copy of “Indiana’s Forests 1999–2003”, one of the first 5-year state reports from the new annualized FIA. This “issues-driven” approach defines a new paradigm for the future of FIA reporting. It can only add to the legacy of a program with the responsibility to census this Nation’s forests.

Earlier, I cited Goodlatte and Garner’s perspective for FIA: “The future is waiting.” I believe that we are getting close.

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