

**American Forest & Paper Association
National Association of State Foresters
Society of American Foresters**

June 9, 2006

Chief Dale Bosworth
USDA Forest Service
Sidney R. Yates Federal Building
201 14th Street, SW
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Chief Bosworth,

The American Forest & Paper Association, the National Association of State Foresters, and the Society of American Foresters would like to commend you on your continued support for the Forest Inventory and Analysis program (FIA). However, we would also like to bring to your attention several ongoing concerns with the implementation of the program, in hopes of working with you and your staff to resolve these challenges. FIA is extremely important to our members as they strive to manage and conserve the nation's forestland base during a time when forests are under tremendous pressure from a variety of forces.

We strongly support full implementation of FIA and urge the Forest Service to achieve this goal quickly. The 1998 Farm Bill laid out plans to fully implement FIA by 2003. Unfortunately, this has yet to occur due to a number of setbacks, including funding limitations. We recognize that reaching this goal without adequate funding is impossible and we remain committed to working with you and Congress to see that the program receives the financial support it requires (see attached letter to Congress regarding FY 2007 appropriations). In the interim, we believe improvements can be made in the program within the Agency to help move towards this goal.

In preparing the following recommendations, we have reviewed previous FIA Blue Ribbon Panel Reports and the findings of the Southern Research Station FIA review team, and have listened to concerns raised by our members and the broader FIA user community. A number of recommendations identified in these reports and reviews have yet to be addressed. We have outlined several issues that we believe must be dealt with in order for the program to achieve its full potential.

1. **Implement and maintain an annual FIA program in 2007 within the constraints of FY 2007 available funding.** It has been eight years since Congress directed the Forest Service to transition FIA to an annual program, collecting and reporting information annually on all US forestlands. The Forest Service has done a good job of working with partners to develop two strategic plans. With our support, many other organizations, and Congress, the Forest Service has made a valiant effort to secure the funding needed to implement their strategic plan and the goals outlined in the 1998

Farm Bill. However, due to a variety of circumstances, adequate funding to implement these plans has not materialized and is unlikely to materialize soon. Meanwhile, portions of the country continue with no FIA coverage at all.

It is therefore time to implement a revised annual FIA program within the constraints of available funding. Our thought is that such a program should consist of an annual core FIA program implemented consistently across all forestlands of the coterminous US, along with appropriate (but likely different) programs implemented in Alaska and Pacific/Caribbean island territories. The “core” program should be defined by a set of procedures for data collection including a minimum agreed upon set of variables to be measured, a consistent and cost effective approach to phase one, a defined set of phase two and three plots to be measured annually, consistent and cost-effective data compilation, analysis, and quality control, and data reporting on an annual basis, in a manner consistent with the intent of the 1998 Farm Bill. Ultimately, we believe the goal should be FIA data collection on a five year cycle, with 20 percent of plots measured annually. This would require continued contributions from states and would necessitate significantly more federal funding. In the near future, the goal should be to implement the program in all states, without compromising progress in those states where the program is at an acceptable level of implementation. This would require keeping the program aligned closely with the core program, program efficiency gains, and additional funding.

We urge you to work closely with FIA partners and stakeholders and begin immediately working to implement the core program on all US forestlands in 2007, with the funding provided by Congress in 2007.

2. **Develop a strategy to increase accountability throughout the FIA program.** The Forest Service has made valuable strides in program implementation and delivery. However, without a clear strategy for accountability within the program, further progress in addressing stakeholder concerns will be limited. One major concern is timely data reporting. There is high demand for access to the FIA data, which requires annual collection and posting to the database within six months after collection. FIA is also expected to produce comprehensive state-level reports on a five year cycle, so that the public is informed of an impartial analysis of what the data represent. *We encourage the creation of performance measures that will track adherence to the program’s objectives and planned activities.* These performance measures should be developed with input from the user community. We also believe that there are opportunities to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of the FIA program through improvements in the organizational structure, which would enable greater accountability both internally and externally.
3. **Continue to build and maintain collaboration with regional and national partners.** The Forest Service has worked hard to connect with the program’s regional and national partners. We commend you on this effort and urge you to continue to engage users nationally. We do, however, believe that there is room for improving that engagement in some of the FIA regions. In particular, the user community has voiced concerns in some regions about database management and timely reporting

that have failed to be addressed. *We urge you to nationally direct FIA units to continuously engage with the user community and listen to their concerns and needs.*

We look forward to discussing these issues with you in person, on June 23, 2006, as scheduled.

Sincerely,

Patrick Rita
Vice President, Government Affairs
American Forest & Paper Association

James B. Hull
President
National Association of State Foresters

Marvin D. Brown
President
Society of American Foresters

Cc: Ann Bartuska, Deputy Chief, Research and Development, USDA Forest Service
James Hubbard, Deputy Chief, State and Private Forestry, USDA Forest Service