



## The Forest Inventory and Analysis (FIA) Program

A Position Statement of the Society of American Foresters

*Originally adopted by the Council of the Society on December 10, 2000 and revised and renewed on May 26, 2006. It will expire May 26, 2011 unless, after subsequent review, it is decided otherwise by Council.*

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### **Position**

The Society of American Foresters (SAF) strongly supports full funding and full implementation of the Forest Inventory Analysis (FIA) Program as authorized in the 1998 Farm Bill.\* The FIA Program provides scientifically credible, forest inventory data across all ownerships. It is the only national inventory system that delivers current and consistent information about the status, condition, and trends of America's forestland. SAF strongly supports the realization of a national, annualized inventory system with 20% annual measurement consistently applied across all ownerships and reported for each state every 5 years. We therefore fully support attaining the goals and vision of the base federal program and continuous improvement in data collection. We also strongly believe the base program must be responsive to stakeholder needs and be implemented prior to adding new components to the Program. Because the FIA Program is a nationwide science-based inventory and reporting program, SAF recommends the continuation of its operation under the direction of the USDA Forest Service.

### **Issue**

“Forest inventory is the procedure for obtaining information on the quantity and quality of the forest resource and many of the characteristics of the land area on which trees are growing.” (Husch and Beers 2003). Regardless of the forest management objectives—whether, timber, wildlife, recreation, water, or non-wood values—the forest overstory must be quantified for informed decisionmaking. Forest cover is an important part of wildlife habitat, and the understory component can often be related to overstory characteristics (Avery and Burkhart 1994).

Considering the vast amount of data and complexity of analysis involved, computer science, remote sensing, and statistics are integral components of a forest inventory system. Therefore, an appropriate sampling technique must be designed and implemented to obtain the essential resource measurements within the confidence limits desired.

Because the basic objective of most forest inventories is to obtain an estimate of acceptable statistical precision and accuracy for the lowest possible expenditure, it is crucial that the planned design, data to be collected, and continuous inventory frequency

are not compromised. Unless financial and logistical support are, achieving the desired objective within acceptable confidence limits is questionable.

Considering these basic inventory principles, failure to appropriate necessary, authorized funding compromises not only confidence limits but also partnerships with FIA data users. Many partners are sharing budgeted funds and personnel to achieve their common inventory needs and thus have an expectation of timely and accurate delivery of promised outputs.

### **Background**

The National Forest Inventory and Analysis Program of the USDA Forest Service has been in continuous operation since 1930, based initially on authorities in the McSweeney-McNary Forest Research Act of 1928. The FIA Program conducts and continuously updates a comprehensive nationwide inventory and analysis of the status and trends of America's forest resources. Information collected and analyzed under this Program are the primary source of ecological data on the conservation and sustainable management of forests across all ownerships in the United States.

In 1998, Congress passed the Agriculture Research, Extension, and Education Reform Act. This legislation authorized significant changes in the FIA Program of the USDA Forest Service, including conversion to an annual (continuous) forest inventory program; development of a core set of procedures to be implemented in a consistent fashion across all US forest lands; continuously updated databases available on an annual basis; and production of complete state-level analyses at five-year intervals. The legislation authorized the Forest Service to develop a strategic plan, in consultation with program partners and customers, detailing how these changes would be implemented over five years. FIA has now completed its second Strategic Plan under the 1998 Act for 2007–11 with advice from various partners and data users across the nation.

FIA conducts the nation's continuous forest census, collecting, analyzing, and reporting information on the status and trends of America's forests. The quality of this information will not be attained, as Congress intended, without full funding. Information provided by FIA on how much forest exists, where it exists, who owns it, and how it is changing (growth, mortality, removal, and successional trends) have many uses for SAF members, partners, policy makers, and research analysts. Data collected and analyzed by FIA on insects, diseases, and other types of forest damage help characterize current health and potential future risks. Such information serves as the foundation for landscape-level policy decisions and economic and ecological management decisions, and offers substantial utility to land managers in devising better forest management plans and developing an understanding of future ecosystem changes.

Since its inception, FIA has existed as a partnership among USDA Forest Service branches: Research and Development, National Forest Systems, and State and Private Forestry. In addition, external partners have been developed to increase the efficiency and quality of the Program in order to achieve desired standards across all ownerships, including the 82% of plot locations on non-Forest Service ownerships.

The FIA Program has evolved into a world leader in the science of inventory, data collection, and efficient use of current, state-of-the-art technology. Natural resource professionals, congressional staff, and other policy makers across the country depend on the consistent and continuous data collection, analysis, and dissemination provided by the FIA program. This high quality information provides the basis for long-term strategic planning and forecasts of outputs from our nation's forest resources and insights on its sustainability. In particular, this data serves as the basis for the National Report on Sustainable Forests which outlines forest conditions and trends for national and international use.

### **Additional References**

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*\*Annually SAF advocates for full funding of the Forest Inventory and Analysis Program. This testimony and other information can be found at <http://www.safnet.org/policyandpress/positionstatements.cfm#budget>*

## **ABOUT THE SOCIETY**

The Society of American Foresters, with about 15,000 members, is the national organization that represents all segments of the forestry profession in the United States. It includes public and private practitioners, researchers, administrators, educators, and forestry students. The Society was established in 1900 by Gifford Pinchot and six other pioneer foresters.

The mission of the Society of American Foresters is to advance the science, education, technology, and practice of forestry; to enhance the competency of its members; to establish professional excellence; and to use the knowledge, skills, and conservation ethic of the profession to ensure the continued health and use of forest ecosystems and the present and future availability of forest resources to benefit society.

The Society is the accreditation authority for professional forestry education in the United States. The Society publishes the *Journal of Forestry*; the quarterlies, *Forest Science*, *Southern Journal of Applied Forestry*, *Northern Journal of Applied Forestry*, and *Western Journal of Applied Forestry*; *The Forestry Source*, and the annual *Proceedings* of the Society of American Foresters national convention.