

Criteria and Indicators of Forest Sustainability

USDA Forest Service
Northeastern Area
State and Private Forestry



Description:

The Northeastern Area (NA) and the Northeastern Area Association of State Foresters (NAASF) are working in partnership to assess and maintain forest sustainability in the Northeast and Midwest. NA and NAASF are compiling information to evaluate forest status and trends based on seven internationally recognized criteria of forest sustainability, which are: forest biodiversity; productive capacity; health; soil and water quality; global carbon cycling; social and economic benefits; and the legal, institutional, and economic framework. NA and NAASF have agreed to track changes and trends for 18 measurable base indicators associated with the seven criterion, and to make this information readily available to stakeholders. Collectively, the criteria and indicators support informed dialogue about the effectiveness of current conservation and management activities.

Key Issues:

- The USDA Forest Service and State forestry agencies play a central role in providing reliable information on forest sustainability, including forest health, the benefits of multiple forest values, and the effects of forest uses.
- Sustainability monitoring and assessment underpin effective strategic planning and performance accountability.
- The use of common criteria and indicators provides consistent information and techniques for sharing sustainability information at the State, regional, and national levels.

Accomplishments:

- NA is internationally recognized as a clearinghouse for information on the development and use of indicators of forest sustainability. A key component includes a Web site: (<http://www.na.fs.fed.us/sustainability>) that provides information on sustainability assessments, strategic and State forest resource planning, and ecological mapping.
- A Forest Sustainability Indicators Information System has been developed to provide data and other resources for the 18 NA/NAASF base indicators. When the system is available later this year, users will be able to track trends over time at State and regional levels, print reports, download data, and link to additional resources.
- The Northeastern Area has already used the indicators information system for strategic planning and corporate communications products; several States have used it for forest resource planning.

Future Direction:

NA and NAASF will continue to promote the use of the base indicators and maintain the Forest Sustainability Indicators Information System. A regional sustainability assessment report based on the criteria and indicators is also planned. Our hope is that the resources ordinarily used to assemble data can be devoted to discussion, decision-making, and actions that help to achieve forest sustainability.

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