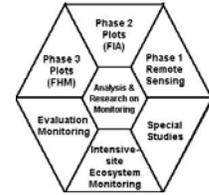




# Forest Inventory and Analysis Blue Ribbon Panels



FIA

Fact Sheet Series

FHM

Forests are immensely important natural resources, yet the nation's primary information on these resources is falling behind. Intense and widespread interest in data about US forests led in 1992 to the convening of the First Blue Ribbon Panel on Forest Inventory and Analysis (FIA). The Second Blue Ribbon Panel convened in 1997 to expand on progress of the First Blue Ribbon Panel's recommendations.

The First Blue Ribbon Panel included high-level leaders from the full forestry community, including Federal and State agencies, industry, environmental organizations, academia, and other user groups. Their mission was to develop a national vision and strategy, as well as goals and objectives, for meeting the present and future needs for forest inventory information.

**First Blue Ribbon Panel.** The First Blue Ribbon Panel focused on FIA inventory methods and policy. Efforts addressed:

- User group needs;
- Improving public and user group service;
- Improving the database for scientific and practical usage; and
- Generating Congressional and Administration funding support for FIA programs.

The First Blue Ribbon Panel then developed a report with eight recommendations for action and met with USDA Forest Service and Congressional leadership to urge implementation of the recommendations.

## Key Findings from the First Blue Ribbon Panel

- 1) Improve and expand information on ecosystems and noncommodity values.
- 2) Recognize and identify ownership, regulatory, and social impacts on forest productivity.
- 3) Produce the most current resource data possible.
- 4) Implement a uniform approach on all ownerships.
- 5) Increase consistency and compatibility among FIA units.
- 6) Enhance coordination between FIA and public agencies.
- 7) Improve service to user groups.
- 8) Expand clientele.

For more information and detail on the First Blue Ribbon Panel, please read "*Report of the Blue Ribbon Panel on Forest Inventory and Analysis.*" This document can be found at the National FIA home page:

<http://www.fia.fs.fed.us>

## Second Blue Ribbon Panel.

Increasing concern about limited progress on those recommendations led to convening the Second Blue Ribbon Panel in 1997. This Panel, like the first, was representative of the full forestry community. The objective was to assess the progress on First Blue Ribbon Panel recommendations and to chart a course for further action.

The participants in the Second Blue Ribbon Panel were divided into three technical workgroups, with each workgroup containing members from the full spectrum of stakeholders. The workgroups were charged with evaluating progress made by FIA toward fulfilling the

recommendations contained in the First Blue Ribbon Panel report and identifying emerging issues, which affect the direction of FIA.

## Key Findings from the Second Blue Ribbon Panel

- 1) Elevate priority of program.
- 2) Initiate annual inventory and supporting analysis.
- 3) Fulfill mandate of reporting on all forest lands.
- 4) Concentrate on core ecological and timber data.
- 5) Develop strategic plan.

In addition to the key findings, members of the three workgroups identified nine major cross-cutting themes that were evaluations of the FIA program:

• **Structure (control, authority, accountability)** - It was the strong consensus among the major data users that the current FIA organizational structure has not accomplished the results sought by the First Blue Ribbon Panel. It was the emphatic opinion of the FIA clients that to "elevate the priority of the program" requires increased central policy and budget authority over FIA units and commensurate accountability.

• **Funding** - Given the magnitude of interest in understanding the nation's forest resource base from an economic, ecological, and sustainable basis, it is critical that the FIA program receive increased appropriations to carry out its mission.

• **Merging FIA and FHM** - Merging the programs will provide a more comprehensive picture of forest conditions. A subsampling approach would also be an effective and efficient method for responding to international reporting requirements to provide criteria and indicators related to sustainable forestry.

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- Data management and analysis - FIA data should be analyzed more thoroughly by the USDA Forest Service to provide interpretation in addition to reporting and also seek partnerships with universities to provide additional analytical expertise.

- State reports - State level reporting should continue under an annual system although hardcopy reporting need not be done annually and data analysis capability should be made available on the Internet.

- Core program and schedule - A base program must be guaranteed for all States with a core set of variables collected in a statistically sound manner.

- Coordination and cooperation - One of the most important ingredients in the success of FIA is the supportive role of State level expertise and resources. Partnerships and cooperation between States and FIA can include many elements. There is the opportunity to build stronger partnerships with universities, non-governmental organizations, and the forest industry.

- Remote sensing technologies - A vision for the development and application of new technologies should be prepared. New technology should be incorporated into FIA when it can improve the process.

- Relationship to sustainable forestry criteria and indicators - FIA can support a wide new clientele as it provides needed information for sustainable forestry criteria and indicators, for example: *Report of the United States on the Criteria and Indicators for Sustainable Management of Temperate and Boreal Forests (USDA Forest Service First Approximation Report for Sustainable Forest Management, June 1997).*

- Monitoring progress - The FIA program should actively participate with and encourage development of advisory groups that possess scientific

and technical expertise that would be useful to FIA in providing feedback.

For more information and detail on the Second Blue Ribbon Panel, please read "Forest Inventory and Analysis Program - The Report of the Second Blue Ribbon Panel." This document can be found at the National FIA home page:

[fs.fed.us/wo/library.htm](http://fs.fed.us/wo/library.htm)

#### **Summary from the Evaluation of the Progress on the First Blue Ribbon Panel Recommendations.**

The comments submitted by panelists depicted an increasingly valuable program at considerable risk. The FIA program is in a state of crisis, its usefulness threatened by the increasing cycle length, its credibility endangered by failure to develop an accountable, responsive organization, and its viability crippled by a lack of funding. Progress on the original recommendations is mixed and shortcomings are of increasing concern. While panelists noted some regional success stories, the lack of major improvement in FIA is leading to the loss of important ecological and economic benefits to society by hindering our ability to monitor forest health and sustainability. These recommendations further carry a sense of urgency commensurate with the vocal and widespread interest and concern among government, industry, and citizen interests dependent upon FIA information.

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