Forest Inventory & Analysis
Program History

FIA Fact Sheet Series

Legislative and Administrative Actions. As with all Federal agencies, it requires an act of Congress to provide general guidance and direction to the various programs. The legislative actions for Forest Inventory and Analysis (FIA) have been extensive and have changed through time although the core component of FIA has not changed.

Legislative Actions on Inventory and Monitoring:

* *The Organic Administrative Act of 1897* – Although the founding legislation for the National Forests , this law also included provisions for the inventory and monitoring of these lands.

* *McSweeney-McNary Forest Research Act of 1928 (P.L. 70-466)* – This law directed the Secretary of Agriculture to make:

> *"… a comprehensive survey of the present and prospective requirements for timber and other forest products of the United States…".*

This law and the preceding law were the founding legislation of inventory and monitoring activities with the USDA Forest Service.

** The Forest and Rangeland Renewable Resources Planning Act (RPA) of 1974 (P.L. 93-378) –* This act amended the earlier research legislation and directed the Secretary of Agriculture to:

> *"…to make and keep current a comprehensive inventory and analysis of the present and prospective conditions of and requirements of the forest and range lands of the United States …"*

This act also included specific language to include National Forest Systems in the inventory and monitoring effort and also added non-timber attributes.

** The National Forest Management Act of 1976* (PL 94-588) directed the USDA Forest Service to:

> *"insure research on and (based upon continuous monitoring and assessment in the field) evaluation of the effects of each management system..."*

** The Forest and Rangeland Renewable Resources Research Act of 1978 (P.L. 95-307)* – The act replaced earlier research legislation but repeated the language to conduct broad-scale resource inventories.

** The Forest Ecosystems and Atmospheric Pollution Research Act of 1988 (P*.L. 100-521) – This act although not directed at natural resource inventory included a section that directed the Secretary of Agriculture to:

> *"…increase the frequency of forest inventories in matters that relate to atmospheric pollution and conduct such surveys as are necessary to monitor long-term trends in the health and productivity of domestic forest ecosystems."*

This is also the enabling legislation for the Forest Health Monitoring (FHM) Program.

** Agriculture Research, Extension, and Education Reform Act of 1998 (16 USC 1642(e))* – This legislation mandated an annual measurement of 20% of all plots on all forest land ever year, with a nationally consistent, core set of measurements and analytical products, and production of State reports every 5 years. In addition, the integration of the FIA and FHM plots was required into a single program.

* *2014 Farm Bill* (PL 113-79) – 11 elements were suggested for consideration:

- Complete transition to annual inventory and include interior Alaska;
- Implement an annual inventory of urban trees;
- Report information about renewable biomass and carbon stocks by ownership type at varying spatial scales;
- Engage State foresters and other users to demonstrate the need for core data;
- Improve the timeliness of the annual timber product output program;
- Foster greater cooperation with partners;
- Improve information management through the use of non-Federal resources;
- Integrate new technologies through collaborations with other Federal agencies;
- Understand and report on changes in land cover and use;
- Promote sustainable forest stewardship through increased understanding of forest owners;
- Improve the statistical precision of estimates at the sub-State level.

FIA History. In response to the McSweeney-McNary Act, the USDA Forest Service organized regional Forest Survey Projects starting in 1930 in the western US. Surveys were conducted on a state-by-state basis and by the 1960's inventories were completed for the lower 48 states. More heavily forested states had been re-inventoried at least once by this dated.

It was during these initial years that procedures were developed that related to the data collection, summarization, and reporting on timber resources were prepared. By the late- to mid-1960's and into the 1970's, customers were requesting more non-timber information and at a more frequent interval.

There has always been a strong demand for timely, consistent, and reliable forest inventory and monitoring information of the type provided by the USDA Forest Services FIA and FHM programs. Recently the demand has been growing. Customers want more recent information, covering a broader scope of forest attributes, with more analysis and reporting and easier access to program databases. Many of these demands were expressed in the Agriculture Research, Extension, and Education Reform Act of 1998 (16 USC 1642(e)).

In response, the USDA Forest Service significantly enhanced the FIA program by changing from a periodic survey to an annual survey, by increasing our capacity to analyze and publish data, and by merging the FIA and FHM plots into a single three-tiered (or phases) FIA system. Phase 1 is the traditional aerial photography and/or remote sensing activity used to characterize the acreage of forest and non-forest land in the US. Phase 2 is the traditional FIA ground plots that focus on forest and tree information as it relates to timber but not exclusively.

Phase 3 is the ground plots from the FHM program and are a subset of the phase 2 plots. It is on phase 3 plots that information relating to forests from a broader perspective is collected.

The FIA program is now responding to the 2014 Farm Bill by evaluating organizational structure, implementation tactics, and associated costs of the recommended elements. Based on funding levels from the Federal government and partners, the FIA program is working to towards all of the listed elements.

As information needs have changed so have the types of information needed to answer the questions of the many and varied data users. It is the response to these needs that the FIA program is continually changing without losing the integral component of its history. Through the switching from periodic to annual inventories to an integrated plot system including FIA and FHM measurements, that the USDA Forest Service will be able to continually meet the demands for more, better, and faster information about the forests of the US.

For more information about the FIA Program:

- Visit our national FIA website: www.fia.fs.fed.us