

# Contribution of the US to the mid-term review of the Rovaniemi Action Plan for the Forest Sector in a Green Economy

Information submitted by the US on 26 January 2018

## Overview

While the United States fully supports the intent of the Rovaniemi Action Plan (RAP) and its constituent pillars, the US has not specifically incorporated the RAP into its policy decisions or management actions. While each of the RAP's five pillars is supported by various forest management activities occurring at the federal, state and local levels in the US, there is no coordinated effort to implement and track the progress of these actions at a national level. For example, the US has statistics on wages, injury rates and other measures related to "decent green jobs in the forest sector" (RAP Pillar C), and there are various initiatives to improve workers' skills, job satisfaction, etc., but these measures and initiatives are not reported in a consolidated fashion or linked to explicit goals, much less are they linked specifically to the RAP.

As a result, the US does not have any explicit accomplishments or other direct markers of progress towards the RAP. It does however engage in numerous activities that align with the RAP, and we have provided examples of these arranged by RAP Pillar below.

## Activities by RAP Pillars

### **A. Sustainable production and consumption of forest products**

The US applies numerous federal and state level laws, regulations and best management practices to ensure sustainable forest management practices, including those related to the harvest of wood products. Additionally, there is a well-established forest inventory program covering all forests in the United States, and the US engages in several broadscale monitoring and assessment reporting activities based on this inventory and other data sources, notably (1) the Renewable Resource Planning Act Assessment (RPA), and (2) Forest Sustainability Reporting using the Montreal Process Criteria and Indicators for SFM.

Given the federal structure of US governance with authority distributed between federal, state, and local jurisdictions, and given the fact that over half of the US forest land (and a significantly higher proportion of the production forest land) is held by private owners with a fair degree of autonomy in the management choices, US forest harvests are perhaps not subject to the centralized control prevalent in many European countries. At the same time, the more decentralized approach of the US has resulted in both the development of highly productive plantation forests in the US South and elsewhere, while allowing to maintain a vast estate of natural and semi-natural lands in the Federal holdings in the US' western states and in diverse ownerships throughout the country.

This is evidenced by the inventory, assessment and monitoring reporting, which clearly demonstrates stable to slightly increasing forest area at the national level and increasing stocking levels in all regions. At the national level, forest growth far exceeds harvest and consumption, and harvest regulation is not a

pressing issue. Rather, the US is challenged by various processes that impinge on forest area and health that are independent of wood products production activities. These include: (1) loss of forest land to development; (2) insects, diseases, fire, and related disturbance processes; and (3) a growing abundance of invasive species. As a result, the identification of this pillar as being specific to forest products consumption somewhat misses the mark for the US—challenges in terms of forest sustainability include wood products but extend to other areas and concerns in forest management. Note that these concerns may be also considered under pillar D (long-term provision of ecosystem services) but they extend to the entire range of values US citizens associate with their forests.

- **Case Study: Third party forest certification in the US.** Forest certification in the US is viewed primarily as a private sector initiative that may extend to state and local government forest holdings but is not applied to federal forest lands, which are subject to rigorous planning and public engagement requirements that may or may not be consistent with requirements stipulated by specific certification schemes. Moreover, the US Forest Service has been careful not to favor any specific certification scheme over any other and has limited its collaboration in specific certification efforts applied to non-federal lands to the provision of publicly available data and analysis associated with its extensive forest inventory and monitoring activities. A major concern is the cost burden of certification on small-scale forest land holders, and the US government has refrained from promoting certification at the federal level as it may disproportionately impact these small-holders. At the same time, certification is generally viewed as a positive development undertaken by the private sector and certification is proceeding under a number of US and international certification schemes (FSC, SFI, PEFC, American Tree Farm, and others). The most recent data for certification in the US is presented in Table 1. These data are consistent with those reported to FAO and represent our initial submission for SDG 15.2.1 subindicator 5.

Table 1. Area forest subject to certification in the US

Year	Certification Scheme			Total
	FSC	PEFC	Other	
	(1,000 ha)			
2000	0	0	7,434	7,434
2001	0	0	13,067	13,067
2002	3,510	0	18,700	22,210
2003	3,654	0	19,863	23,517
2004	5,475	0	21,027	26,502
2005	7,359	0	22,190	29,549
2006	9,694	0	23,353	33,047
2007	9,186	0	22,532	31,718
2008	9,755	9,978	23,879	43,612
2009	11,684	10,292	25,225	47,201
2010	13,105	10,349	26,572	50,026
2011	13,688	10,853	N/A?	N/A?
2012	14,180	10,732	N/A?	N/A?

Notes: FSC = Forest Stewardship Council; PEFC = Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification (an umbrella organization). PEFC includes major US certifiers Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI) and American Tree Farm (ATF) in their current membership, but the dates of inclusion are unknown. The current FAO FRA US Country Report notes that SFI is included in the “other” category and lists 0 as the entries for 2011 and 2012. PEFC entries may reflect inclusion of SFI and ATF, but the numbers presented here do not provide a clear indication of this. Moreover, these figures do not appear to be definitive and double counting is a possibility.

Source: FAO GFRA (2016) USA Country Report <http://www.fao.org/forest-resources-assessment/current-assessment/country-reports/en/>.

## B. A low carbon forest sector

The United States tracks forest carbon through the inventory, monitoring and assessment activities identified above for pillar A. In accordance with increasing forest stocks, net sequestration in US forests has been positive for many years and currently offsets a little over 10% of US total carbon emissions. The extent to which this is a result of policy and management actions, however, is unclear. Many of the processes that have allowed for stable forest area and increasing stocks (e.g., forest regeneration on abandoned agricultural lands offsetting losses elsewhere, or high productivity commercial forests allowing for reduced harvest on more marginal lands) is the result of processes outside the direct control of the US Forest Service or related government bodies. The same is true for disturbance processes that may result in increased carbon emissions from forests in the future, notably those associated with forest mortality and fire.

As for promoting the use of wood as a renewable, low carbon raw material, the US is engaged in various activities such as the promotion of wood construction and second generation biofuels from wood

biomass. It should also be noted that the US is a major supplier of wood pellets to the EU market. However, the various initiatives and activities that comprise this work are generally not centrally coordinated.

- **Case Study: Forest Carbon reporting in the US.** The US tracks forest carbon through its Forest Carbon Accounting Framework (FCAF). This new framework relies on the US Forest Service's extensive forest inventory and related information, and it directly addresses questions regarding disturbance and land use effects. These changes improve the consistency of historical estimates and respond to the latest international scientific guidelines for carbon accounting and projections (UNFCCC 2013). Major findings from the framework for the 1990-2015 period are as follows (US Forest Service 2016):
  - Net forest sequestration ranged from 112 to 133 Tg per year between 1990 and 2015 and averaged 122 Tg per year.
  - Forest area increase accounted for about 41 per cent of the total forest carbon stock change.
  - Forests in the Eastern United States accounted for more than 60 per cent of U.S. forest carbon stocks and 80 per cent of net forest carbon sequestration.

### **C. Decent green jobs in the forest sector**

The US does not have a focused effort on promoting “decent green jobs” in the forest sector. The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), a federal agency, tracks injury and absentee rates for all industries, and numerous laws and regulations govern worker compensation, safety and related factors. The forest sector, however, is not specifically delineated in any of these activities. In general, fatality and absentee rates in the forest sector have been falling.

At the same time, the US Forest Service and other government entities at the federal, state and local level have emphasized the role forest can play in invigorating forest-dependent communities. This has been a long-standing goal and has generally not been associated with the concept of “green jobs.”

### **D. Long term provision of forest ecosystem services**

Where in Europe the concept of the green economy is being promoted, US forest management has increasingly focused on the concept of ecosystem service provision. Often this concept is used to encompass commodity production in combination with other forest goods and services, as reflected in the sustainable “multiple use” management approaches prevalent in the last century. The depth and breadth of forest products and services that are deemed important and in need of sustaining has changed.

Once again, however, there is no explicit national policy focused on the provision of ecosystem services per se. The closest analogue would be the US Forest Service's mission statement, which identifies the agencies mission as “to sustain the health, diversity, and productivity of the Nation's forests and grasslands to meet the needs of present and future generations.” Numerous subsidiary policy and management initiatives include the concept of ecosystem services, however, and the term is broadly used and understood. More to the point, specific management activities are often designed to enhance specific

ecosystem services. Forest conservation in municipal watersheds to promote clean water provision or the management and use of public forest lands for recreation purposes are long-standing examples of this. More recently, a broader range of ecosystem services has been increasingly considered, including biodiversity conservation and the beneficial role of forests in urban areas.

## **E. Policy Development and Monitoring of the Forest Sector in Relation to a Green Economy**

The US engages in ongoing forest policy development activities at all levels of government. Although “Green economy” is not an officially recognized concept, many of these activities are directed at explicitly or implicitly fostering various ecosystem services or other values associated with forests, and they could generally fit under the Green Economy heading. Likewise, the US Forest Service maintains a robust forest monitoring system anchored by its Forest Inventory and Analysis program (FIA) and further enhanced by periodic assessments. At the national level these include: the Renewable Resource Planning Act Assessment (US Forest Service 2016, which is published on a ten year cycle with interim updates every five years, and the National Report on Sustainable Forests (US Forest Service 2011), which uses the Montreal Process Criteria and Indicators as its reporting framework and is published on a variable schedule. These national assessments are accompanied by various regional assessments provided by US Forest Service Research and development, state and local governments, and civil society. Here again, however, “Green Economy” is not an organizing concept and is not referenced in monitoring and assessment documents, documents which nonetheless treat the broad range of values and goals the US public holds for its forests.

### **References:**

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