

Report to the Secretary of Agriculture

Forestry Research Advisory Council¹

January 2008²

America's forests continue to have unrealized potential to help the U.S. become energy independent, fight climate change, maintain a strong U.S. economy, and provide great places for recreation. To tap this potential, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) needs an integrated portfolio of long- and short-term research that encompasses technology development, dissemination, and deployment. At its 2008 meeting, the Forestry Research Advisory Council (FRAC) reviewed recent USDA research efforts to explore this potential. Research activities and initiatives in biofuels/bioenergy, ecosystem services, climate change, and nanotechnology are making important progress toward effectively addressing our nation's needs from our forests. FRAC commends the USDA agencies for their work to strengthen research programs in these areas and recommends that increased effort be made to develop and vet integrated research portfolios and priorities with FRAC and other stakeholders. We recommend two next steps to continue making progress to address the nation's forest research needs:

National Research Initiative

FRAC recognizes that the National Research Initiative (NRI) has made significant contributions to the science of natural resource management. In the past year, between \$6 and \$16 million was awarded to fund grant proposals pertinent to forest and natural resource science. However, upon examining the awards list, FRAC notes a lack of a coherent, coordinated research strategy to address pressing issues. One issue of particular importance is the decline of sustainable forest productivity research capacity, given the likely increased demand for fiber and information on environmental impacts associated with the production of forest-based fuels and other bio-products. An integrated approach would be more effective in addressing this and other forest science issues. **We therefore recommend that the NRI form an Integrated Natural Resource Management Project for this purpose.** Stakeholders for this project can be drawn from a number of sources, such as the American Forest & Paper Association, National Association of University Forest Resource Programs, National Association of State Foresters, and state and regional organizations concerned with the potential economic opportunities and environmental impacts associated with increased fiber utilization for forest-based biofuels and other bio-based products. These stakeholder groups should be enlisted to identify a qualified pool of scientists to review requests for applications (RFAs) and make up proposal pre-screening and scientific review panels. FRAC looks forward to seeing progress in this important area.

Applied Research Partnerships

FRAC reviewed several research initiatives involving partnerships among federal, state, private and NGO scientists. Partnerships can result in more effective delivery, relevance, and timeliness of science findings, as well as increased application of research results to forest planning and management. Broad-based partnerships, when established at the earliest project planning stages, facilitate participation of forest managers and other stakeholders in the development and prioritization of research questions. Such an approach builds increased ownership of the research and results among all parties. **We recommend that USDA Forest Service R&D and Cooperative State Research Education and Extension Service (CSREES) undertake a study of how to increase the emphasis on partnership formation to influence the successful application of research results.** We believe that the effectiveness of the competitive grant component of federal research can be greatly enhanced by improving our understanding of successful models of stakeholder involvement in all stages of the scientific process.

FRAC applauds efforts by CSREES to enhance research deployment through directed efforts from existing Renewable Resource Extension Act (RREA) funds. FRAC believes that increased resources for RREA efforts should be explored to further enhance research deployment efforts and to further enhance opportunities for partnership between the USDA Forest Service and CSREES.

FRAC requests that USDA Forest Service R&D and CSREES jointly prepare a report for our 2009 meeting on progress made to address these recommendations.

¹ *The members of the Forestry Research Advisory Council (FRAC) are: Gregory Johnson (Chair), Weyerhaeuser Company; Masood Akhtar, CleanTech Partners; John Alexander, Partners in Flight Bird Conservation Initiative; Richard Brinker, Auburn University; William Crapser, Wyoming State Forestry Division; Bov Eav, USDA Forest Service Pacific Northwest Research Station; David Flaspohler, The Ornithological Council; Keith Gilliss, University of California, John Hagan, Manomet Center for Conservation Sciences; Scott Jones, Forest Landowners Association; Patricia Layton, Clemson University; Catherine Mater, Mater Engineering, Ltd.; Joseph McNeel, West Virginia University; Robert Taylor, Alabama A&M University; Eric Vance, National Council for Air and Stream Improvement; Theodore Wegner, USDA Forest Products Laboratory; and John Wiens, The Nature Conservancy*

² *The Forestry Research Advisory Council to the Secretary of Agriculture met in Berkeley, California November 15 - 16, 2007.*