

Forest Research for the 21st Century: Defining Strategic Directions and Rebuilding Capacity

Donald H. DeHayes

President, National Association of University Forest Resources Programs, and
Dean, The Rubenstein School of Environment and Natural Resources
The University of Vermont

Welcome and Overview

On behalf of the National Association of University Forest Resources Programs, the organizer and host of this summit, I welcome each of you and thank you for agreeing to participate in this critically important event, which we hope will help redefine the future of forest-based research. I want to begin by acknowledging with gratitude two sponsors of this summit --- USDA CSREES and, in particular Dr. Dan Kugler, and the USFS Research and Development, especially Dr. Ann Bartuska. Dan and Ann have supported NAUFRP's contention that it is time to boldly reconsider our research and education enterprises and directions, and they stepped up to provide resources to help make this summit happen. Thank you.

I am very pleased that you are all here. I expect that as you look around the room, you will find many unfamiliar faces. Our goal was to assemble the thinkers and doers in our field and we attempted to reach out broadly so that we did not simply reassemble the same groups that participate in all other natural resources discussion forums. Each of you were invited to this summit because you were recommended to us:

- as individuals that know and care about natural resources education and research,
- as individuals that are not likely satisfied with the *status quo*,
- as individuals with new ideas and a willingness to share those ideas about how we can imagine, design, and implement a new, exciting, relevant, and sustainable future for natural resources research and education.

As a group, we are an eclectic assembly of individuals that cut across sectors --- academic, agency, non-profit, and industry --- and across disciplines --- including the biophysical sciences ranging from the molecular to the watershed to the landscape levels and the social sciences, including social, political, and economic dimensions. We have also included 10 Ph.D. students from various fields and universities, who represent the near-term future of our scholarly enterprise. They are participating both as supporters of and contributors to this summit. I am very pleased that several of our academic and agency colleagues from Canada are able to participate as well.

We think – we hope – that we have assembled the right array of players to define new strategic directions for natural resources research and to grapple with challenging issues related to educating the next generation of researchers in our fields.

There are many people that worked hard to make this summit a reality. I want to acknowledge members of the planning committee for their time, energy, ideas, and persistence. For each planning committee member, work on this summit was simply one more overload on already incredibly busy schedules. I thank each of you for your efforts and commitment to the importance of this summit. In particular, I want to gratefully and publicly acknowledge the dedicated work of Terri Bates, Nancy Walters, and Tracy Calizon, who consistently worried about and took care of the details so critical to a successful and stimulating summit.

So, Why Are We Here and How Did This All Come About?

The impetus for this summit began in NAUFRP several years ago, while we were conducting an analysis of workforce needs in natural resources agencies and has been increasingly stimulated by subsequent observations and information that surfaced as part of many NAUFRP initiatives. Some of these analyses and observations are as follows:

- We quickly learned that agencies, non-profits, and industry were defining attributes needed for the workforce of the future, while universities were producing graduates with a different set of skills. **It became clear we need improved dialogue.**
- As our own analysis expanded, we began to hear and use different kinds of descriptors to explain our field and expertise. Instead of conventional areas of expertise, such as forest economics, ecology, or hydrology, new concepts such as watershed science and planning, landscape analysis, risk management, decision science, ecosystem services, bioremediation, sustainable forestry, and more, began to emerge. We began to ask --- what are these new fields and how do they fit together? **We need clarity about who we are, where we are going, and what we needed to do to get there.**
- Several reports, including the NSF 10 year environmental outlook and the 2002 National Research Council Report, spoke in a compelling way about declining research capacity in our field and a new emphasis on “integrated” approaches and ecological and social sustainability. **It became clear we need to expand our research horizons and place our work into a larger context.**
- Undergraduate enrollment data and trend analyses, compiled and disseminated regionally and nationally by Terry Sharik at Utah State University, described significantly declining undergraduate enrollments in natural resources and environmental fields at many universities. Some began to use the word “crisis” as a descriptor for our declining research capacity and enrollment. **We could not ignore the question of why there is declining interest in our field and whether we are viewed as relevant?**
- Continuous land use changes, urbanization and the rapidly expanding global economy coupled with growing challenges in the forest products industries are

highlights of a changing landscape for forests and the research and education programs that support forests management and sustainability. **We need to understand our place and role in this rapidly changing landscape.**

- And, of course, federal funding in support of our research, education, and outreach programs has declined in real dollars, while fixed costs and research needs have risen substantially. Last year's presidential recommendation to eliminate the McIntire-Stennis Cooperative Forestry Research Program called broader attention to this funding challenge. While this was viewed as a formula funds vs, competitive funds issue by some, it also represents a significant disinvestment in and a statement of the lack of importance in forestry research. **It has become clear that we not only need greater investment in our field, but we need to recast the importance of our work and perhaps rethink how we allocate and spend the funds that already exist.**

With this bit of context and history, NAUFRP decided, about 20 months ago, that it was time for us to step forward, recognize that the *status quo* is not advancing our field, our programs, the nation, or the global condition of forests. We knew that we needed to lead an effort to articulate a clear and compelling new agenda for natural resources research that truly matters; *a bold agenda built around new ideas, real societal needs, new approaches, and the potential for high impact --- an agenda built around new knowledge and science, not simply a rehash of the important issues of the day, that would advance the health and sustainability of forests and engage and enrich humanity.*

NAUFRP has set a course that involves three important and distinct initiatives. First, we will release, in just a few months, a new vision for the nation's forests. This vision, entitled ***Forests for a Richer Future***, is built upon a foundation of *promoting shared values, applying the "best" science, and advancing a new stewardship ethic to create lasting forests.*

Second, in partnership with our colleagues in USDA CSREES, we will be developing and distributing a new strategic plan for the McIntire-Stennis Cooperative Forestry Research Program. That plan will be built around ideas that emerge from this summit as well as other conversations with the academic leadership of the forestry and natural resources schools throughout the country.

Finally, we committed to organizing and conducting this summit, to pull together our partners and stakeholders to collectively redefine our future. The summit entitled:

***FOREST RESEARCH FOR THE 21ST CENTURY:
DEFINING STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS AND REBUILDING CAPACITY***

represents a national effort to define the future of forest research. Specific goals for the summit are to:

1. define new forest-based knowledge and science needed to advance the health of forests and the competitive position of the nation;
2. define the new knowledge, skills, and qualities needed in the next generation of natural resource research scientists to address emerging new issues and to rebuild and sustain excellent forest research capacity;
3. recommend an effective and progressive funding allocation model to ensure support for high priority research, and the development of the needed intellectual capacity and infrastructure.

We knew that we could and should not do this alone. We wanted to work with and engage our partners in the many agencies, non-profits, and industry to incorporate their ideas, needs, and advice. Our decision 20 months ago has led us to the National Conservation Training Center here in Shepherdstown, West Virginia today.

In considering whether or how NAUFRP might lead this summit, many of us were strongly influenced by the thoughtful words of our keynote speaker, Mr. Ray Anderson, President and CEO of Interface Corporation,. When grappling with the future of his company and the challenges of transforming his business into a sustainable one 15 years ago, Mr. Anderson's plea for leadership and action was thoughtful, compelling, and certainly relevant to all of us today. He said:

“Unless Somebody Leads, Nobody Will --- Why Not Us?”

My friends this is where we are today. Our collective ideas, energy, wisdom, and leadership is needed to advance, perhaps even redefine, our field. We represent our best hope for a productive and sustainable future. Thank you in advance for your participation, hard work, and commitment.