

# Committee on Resources

---

## Witness Testimony

---

Testimony on  
the Effects of International Forestry Agreements  
on Forest Service Decision Making  
MIKE DOMBECK  
Chief  
Forest Service  
United States Department of Agriculture Before the  
House of Representatives  
Subcommittee on Forests and Forest Health  
September 11, 1997

MADAM CHAIRMAN AND MEMBERS OF THE SUBCOMMITTEE:

I am pleased to appear before the Subcommittee today to discuss the effect of international forestry agreements on Forest Service decision making. I am accompanied by Valdis Mezainis, Director, Office of International Programs.

As requested in your invitation, I will discuss the international agreements and programs relating to forestry; how foreign interests influence national forest policies in the United States; how the Forest Service expenditures for international forestry programs are used to serve U.S. interests; and the benefits realized by the United States as a result of these policies and programs.

### Background

Resource conditions in other parts of the world affect the economic and environmental health of the United States. Introductions of exotic insects, diseases, and plants can impact local forests and rangelands in the U.S. Worldwide loss or modification of wildlife habitat may directly affect migratory species.

The United States is the world's largest trader of forest products, with an annual value of exports and imports of about \$50 billion. By encouraging improved forest management practices in other countries, the Forest Service can promote trade for the United States in the forest product sector.

### Authorization

The International Forestry Cooperation Act of 1990, as amended (16 U.S.C. 4501-4505) provides the authority to work with other countries in all aspects of forestry. The Act authorizes the Secretary of Agriculture to cooperate with other countries to promote sustainable development and global environmental stability. This includes: sharing technical, managerial, extension, and administrative skills; providing, education and training opportunities to promote the transfer and use of scientific information and technologies; engaging in scientific exchange and cooperative research with foreign governmental, educational, technical and research institutions; and cooperating with domestic and international organizations for their international progress for the management and protection of forests, rangeland,

wildlife and fisheries, and related natural resource activities.

### Forest Service Strategic Direction for international Forestry

The Forest Service consulted with members of Congress, industry, state foresters, and public interest groups and in 1995 began implementing the resulting plan for international cooperation. I am pleased to provide the Subcommittee with copies of this plan, in which the Forest Service has two goals: 1. Advance sustainable forest management in the United States; 2. Promote sustainable forest management in other countries that also benefits the United States. These two goals are also consistent with Forest Service direction outlined in the strategic plan for the Government Performance and Results Act.

### International programs of the Forest Service

Forest Service international programs fall into four areas:

- Policy development whereby the Forest Service provides scientific and professional advice to the U.S. State Department with respect to international policies on forests and natural resources.
- Training, education and skill enhancement of Forest Service employees and international cooperators.
- Cooperative research and scientific exchange in order to develop and adopt new knowledge and technologies.
- Technical assistance and cooperation with other countries which provide mutual benefits to the United States.

### International agreements related to forests

Generally, loss of forest lands is increasing in developing countries, especially in the tropics, and in countries of the former Soviet Union. Forest land areas are stable or increasing in area in most developed countries. By itself, however, the trend in the net amount of forest land is only one element to consider. Also important is the management and conservation of forest land to provide crucial resources such as clean water, productive soils, and species diversity.

Most countries realize that the world as a whole would benefit from raised standards for forest management and conservation. A slowing of the loss of forest lands worldwide, coupled with improved management practices, would benefit the United States and the rest of the world, both environmentally and economically. It is in the best interests of the United States to promote sustainable forest management in all countries. The U.S. favors voluntary approaches based on incentives, whereas some other countries advocate legally binding forest agreements.

The United States has participated in the development of several non-legally binding "agreements on the recommendations which are relevant to forests, but which impose no restriction on the management of U.S. forests. These are: the "Forest Principles", the "Santiago Declaration", and the Report of the International Intergovernmental Panel on Forests. The U.S. is also a party to the International Tropical Timber Agreement which is a formal agreement but again imposes no restrictions on its members. I will briefly describe each.

The "Forest Principles" is a non-legally binding set of broad principles concerning the management, conservation and sustainable development of all types of forests. The statement of "Forest Principles" was unanimously adopted by heads of state at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development

(LTNCED) "Earth Summit" in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. The "Forest Practices" emphasizes the importance of forests both to economic development and the environment, and recognizes the responsibility of each country to sustainably manage its own forest resources. The "Forest Principles" encourage countries to do the kinds of things that are already standard practice in the United States, such as assessing forest resources and planting trees in areas that have been harvested. Existing U.S. legislation on the management of national forests, as well as the state forest practice laws in individual states, are much more detailed than the "Forest Principles."

The "Santiago Declaration" concerns criteria and indicators for sustainable forest management. Following the Earth Summit, it became clear that there was a lack of consensus among countries on how to define and measure the extent to which a country was managing its forest resources in a sustainable manner. The United States participated in a series of meetings among key countries with temperate and boreal forests that is known as the "Montreal Process" which culminated in endorsement on 7 criteria and 67 indicators for sustainable forest management in Santiago, Chile in 1995. The 12 countries, which cover 90% of the world's boreal and temperate forests, agreed attempt to assess their forest resources using these criteria and indicators. Throughout the process, representatives of private industry, state foresters, and environmental organizations participated in the development of U.S. positions and served on U.S. delegations. The criteria and indicators for sustainable forest management impose no requirements on the U.S. but provide a very useful framework for describing and assessing sustainable forest management.

The Forest Service is committed to sustainable forest management. With the encouragement of the National Association of State Foresters, we are developing measures that will integrate the seven Montreal Process criteria into current Forest Service strategic planning, information management, and inventory and monitoring activities. Following the Earth Summit, a number of countries continued to advocate further discussions on more specific actions than were reflected in the "Forest Principles." As a result, the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development in 1995 convened an Intergovernmental Panel on Forests (IPF) which reached consensus in 1997 on over 100 "proposals for action" for countries and international organizations to promote sustainable forest management. The proposals for action are not legally binding and do not impose actions or restrictions in any country. Over the next two years, a new International Intergovernmental Forum on Forests will continue the dialogue on technical and policy issues in forest management. The Panel's actions do not impose new requirements for management of forests in the U.S. Of considerable interest to the Forest Service is the recognized need for much improved forest resource assessments at the national and global levels and expanded research in important issues of long term forest health.

The International Tropical Timber Agreement is a formal commodity agreement among the countries which produce or consume internationally traded timber. The U.S. is a party to the agreement as a consumer country and the U.S. Trade Representative is the lead U.S. agency. The purpose of the agreement is to ensure sustainable trade in tropical timber. This agreement does not affect the management of U.S. forest. The Forest Service provides technical expertise, as requested, to a variety of activities under this agreement.

### U.S. benefits from Forest Service International Forestry Programs

In FY 1997, Congress authorized the Forest Service to expend up to \$3 million on international cooperation. This is about one-tenth of one percent of the Forest Service budget. In addition, the Forest Service provides professional forestry expertise to U.S. AID and the U.S. Peace Corps on a reimbursable basis which will amount to about \$3 million in 1997 U.S. delegations. The criteria and indicators for sustainable forest management impose no requirements on the U.S. but provide a very useful framework for describing and

assessing sustainable forest management.

There are many examples of the benefits of our international programs to the United States. I would like to mention just a few:

- Asian Gypsy Moth: Forest Service researchers are working w/th Russia and several other countries to detect and suppress the Asian Gypsy Moth to halt its entry into the United States on ships or other transport. A study in 1992 estimated that these efforts prevented the potential loss of \$3.5 billion to U.S. timber lands. This preventive measure have been far more effective than relying on detection prior to unloading shipments once they arrive in U.S. ports.
- Eastern Hemlock: In cooperation with scientists in China, the Forests Service has found two natural predators to control the Woolly Adelgid, which endangers eastern Hemlocks in ten U.S. states, and which cannot be controlled by pesticides. Biological controls are the best possible approach to dealing with this pest; the Chinese have the best source of information and possible controls in the world. Clearly, the U.S. benefits from this relationship.
- International Policies: The Forest Service provides professional, scientific analysis of policy alternatives in a variety of forms involving discussions with other countries with respect to trade and the environment. Forest Service involvement has helped to prevent the U.S. from entering into agreements which would be costly or impossible to implement at home. Forest Service expertise also helps resolve trade disputes. For example, resolution of standards issues involving plywood in Canada led to a 50% reduction of tariffs on U.S. plywood and a steady increase in exports to Canada.
- Trade: As the world's largest trader in forest products, the U.S. depends on the long-term viability of forests at home and in other countries. U.S. competitiveness suffers when the prices of other producer countries do not reflect the full cost of regeneration and environmental protection. In addition to ecological benefits, improved management of forests in other countries helps to prevent underpriced timber from being "dumped" on the world market adversely affecting the U.S. forest product industry. The Forest Service facilitates extension of U.S. forest management expertise to other countries so as to encourage sustainable forest management.
- Fire Control: Large scale fires are routinely extinguished in the U.S., but they often burn out of control in countries such as Russia, Mexico, Brazil and Indonesia. The Forest Service provides these countries with training in fire prevention and management, and collaborative research helps to better understand and control fires in the U.S. as well as to mitigate their atmospheric effects.
- Exports of U.S. environmental technology: Overseas markets offer excellent opportunities to promote the export of U.S. environmental technology and equipment. Countries want to purchase geographical information systems (GIS), remote sensing equipment, forest management computer programs and other technologies.

## Conclusion

In summary, the goal of the modest international Program of the Forest Service is to benefit the United States, through promoting the conservation and sustainable management of forests both at home and abroad. This concludes my statement. I would be happy to answer your question.

# # #