

IUFRO Spotlight is an initiative of the International Union of Forest Research Organizations. Its aim is to introduce, in a timely fashion, significant findings in forest research from IUFRO officeholders and member organizations to a worldwide network of decision makers, policy makers and researchers.

IUFRO will encapsulate, and distribute in plain language, brief, topical and policy-relevant highlights of those findings, along with information on where/how to access the full documents. The **IUFRO Spotlight** findings will be distributed in a periodic series of emails as well as blog postings.

Putting Experts to the Test

By: Jurij Beguš, Coordinator, IUFRO 9.01.03, Extension and Knowledge Exchange (Slovenia Forest Service, Department for Forestry Technique)

Expert knowledge – advice and-or recommendations from those who have spent much time researching and learning about a given subject area – is often used by resource managers who do not themselves have the time or resources to collect all the data necessary to make a sound decision.

That expert knowledge, which can be used in highly diverse situations in various ecosystems and geographical areas, can assist with forest management, eco-regionalization, species conservation or environmental impact assessment.

But some skepticism also surrounds the use of expert knowledge. Simply saying: "This is based on expert opinion," doesn't really cut it.

That's because that knowledge can be collected, analyzed and used inconsistently. At times there is no documentation to say who provided the knowledge, what specific knowledge was provided or how it was evaluated and applied.

That makes it difficult to verify the accuracy of the information or to replicate the process. Because of that, it also leaves hanging in the air the question of just how credible and useful the expert opinion actually is.

But now, a writing team led by Dr. Ajith Perera of the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources' Ontario Forest Research Institute, has published a book that shows scientists and forest decision-makers alike that, when proper methods of collecting and applying expert knowledge are used, it can be a very valuable resource.

The book – *Expert Knowledge and Its Application in Landscape Ecology* – takes scientifically rigorous methods of collecting and using expert knowledge that have been developed in other disciplines and then adapts those for use in resource management and ecology.

The book introduces the concept of expert knowledge and describes its applicability, advantages and challenges. It includes definitions, methods and many case studies from across North America and Australia. It provides insight into what expert knowledge is, who can be considered experts and methods and applications of expert knowledge for a variety of conservation and management-related issues.

Some of the examples of how and where expert knowledge can be used in forest management and policy development include:

- Developing interim recommendations for best forest practices;
- Informing and calibrating decision support systems; and
- Interpreting maps and other data sources.

The book was produced partly because there is a need to structure the collection, analysis and use of expert knowledge so that it more closely adheres to the scientific method as practiced in empirical research. But it also helps meet a need to capture and archive expertise and knowledge that is rapidly dwindling in many forest management agencies where field experts retire and, for a variety of reasons, are not replaced.

Currently, expert knowledge is widely used in many countries. But, with this publication as a guide, expert knowledge can be even better used – in all countries.

For more information about *Expert Knowledge and Its Application in Landscape Ecology*, please go to: <http://www.springer.com/life+sciences/ecology/book/978-1-4614-1033-1>

The findings reported in **IUFRO Spotlight** are submitted by IUFRO officeholders and member organizations. IUFRO is pleased to highlight and circulate these findings to a broad audience but, in doing so, acts only as a conduit. The quality and accuracy of the reports are the responsibility of the member organization and the authors.

Suggestions for reports and findings that could be promoted through IUFRO Spotlight are encouraged. Please send them to: Gerda Wolfrum, wolfrum(at)iufro.org. To be considered, reports should be fresh, have policy implications and be applicable to more than one country.

The International Union of Forest Research Organizations (IUFRO) is the only worldwide organization devoted to forest research and related sciences. Its members are research institutions, universities, and individual scientists as well as decision-making authorities and other stakeholders with a focus on forests and trees. Visit: <http://www.iufro.org/>

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"Expert knowledge elicitation workshop in Ontario, Canada: Expert foresters are providing details of boreal forest succession pathways, based on their professional experience, to parameterize a forest landscape dynamics simulation model".
Photo credit - Ajith Perera.