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SPOTLIGHT

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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.

IUFRO Spotlight also aims to present activities such as sessions at major IUFRO congresses or the work of IUFRO Task Forces with a focus on emerging key issues that are of great interest to policy makers and groups inside and outside the forest sector, and contribute to international processes and activities. The IUFRO Spotlight findings will be distributed in a periodic series of emails as well as blog postings.

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Transition in forest uses demands change in approaches

“The portfolio of goods and services from forests is now very different to that two decades ago; yet there is a disconnect between the institutional framework and these new forms of forest use, leading to efficiency, equity and legitimacy deficits,” said Dr. John Innes, Dean of the Faculty of Forestry at the University of British Columbia, Canada.

The changes – from forest planting and forest harvesting and operations, to forest use and forest products – occur at different levels. Today, forests produce a complex array of products from forest ecosystem services to timber and bio-products.



Wood chips being transported to a pulp mill. These chips represent the waste stream from a saw mill, but are becoming increasingly valuable as more and more uses for wood are developed. Photo by John Innes.

Market values are increasingly being attached to forest ecosystem services and this is changing the value systems associated with forestry.

Dr. Innes is coordinating a Task Force set up by IUFRO – *Resources for the Future: Transformation in Forest Use* – to better understand those changes.

“Globalization, population growth, resource scarcity and ecological degradation are all influencing forest use,” he said.

“For instance, a growing middle class requires more forest products accessible through global supply chains. At the same time, these supply chains are threatened by, and contribute to, resource scarcity and ecological degradation,” he said. “In another example, policy makers have identified forest products as important to climate change, so new products have been developed to meet the climate challenge.

“Both these examples have explicit implications for forests and are transforming forest use, yet the institutional response has been slow and inadequate in dealing with these drivers,” he said.

Dr. Innes further noted that humans now value, in monetary terms, the full breadth of forest ecosystem services including non-market values and that now we also view forests as feedstock for the bio-economy.

“These are distinct and relatively nascent changes in our relationship with forests,” he said. “For many Indigenous communities across the globe, the changing relationship with forests has been dramatic – particularly as they engage in the forest sector as market participants.

“Valuation of forest ecosystem services can run counter to holistic Indigenous values; but valuation also affords protection by adequately recognizing, quantifying and integrating these values into decisions, and policy makers can consider the full costs of their decision. These values in the past were typically ignored,” Dr. Innes added.

The Task Force will seek to generate insights about the pathways that can be adopted to encourage a sustainable transformation in forest resource use.

It will identify institutions, governance structures, policies and instruments that can help policy makers and stakeholders address problems and capitalize on opportunities brought about by rapid change and describe the potential benefits and implications from them in terms of equity, effectiveness and efficiency.

It will also develop recommendations for forest research institutions to build understanding for, and implementation of, those various tools to support successful transformation in forest use.

The Task Force also convened a roundtable of leading global experts from government, industry, academia, NGOs and Indigenous groups in Dehradun, India in April of this year to further discuss the sustainable transformation of forest use. A book elaborating on the outcomes of that roundtable is expected in the near future.

The Task Force on the transformation in forest use future is one of several established by IUFRO to advance knowledge under five research themes in accordance with the IUFRO 2015-19 Strategy. The five themes are: Forests, Soil and Water Interactions; Forests for People; Forests and Climate Change; Forests and Forest-based Products for a Greener Future; and Biodiversity, Ecosystem Services and Biological Invasions.

Task Force website: <http://www.iufro.org/science/task-forces/transformation-forest-use/>

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. To be considered, reports should be fresh, have policy implications and be applicable to more than one country. If you would like to have a publication highlighted by Spotlight, contact: Gerda Wolfrum, IUFRO Communications Coordinator, wolfrum(at)iufro.org

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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