

# STATEWIDE FOREST RESOURCE PLANNING:

## The Effectiveness of First-generation Programs



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Miscellaneous Publication 20-1987  
Minnesota Agricultural Experiment Station  
University of Minnesota



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*This publication was based on a 1986 evaluation by the authors, of statewide forest resource planning programs across the nation. The study was supported by State and Private Forestry, USDA-Forest Service, Washington, D.C., and by the College of Forestry and Agricultural Experiment Station, University of Minnesota, St. Paul, Minnesota. It examined the planning processes engaged in by the various states, noted their benefits to forestry and outlined potential improvements for future programs.*

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Over the past decade, 48 states have undertaken statewide forest resource planning. They've begun to systematically address forest and range resource management on nonfederal lands. Although experiences across the nation have differed dramatically, state forestry organizations and communities have benefitted from these first-generation planning programs.

### What is Statewide Forest Resource Planning?

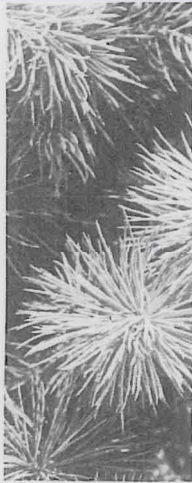
These planning programs were prompted by the Cooperative Forestry Assistance Act of 1978. It made federal financial and technical assistance available to carry the nation's forest planning structure to an additional level.

The Forest and Rangeland Renewable Resources Planning Act of 1974 required the USDA-Forest Service to assess forest and range resources on 1.7 billion acres of nonfederal lands (state-owned, forest industry, and nonindustrial private forest lands). Initial efforts focused only on a national level. To the disappointment of congressional leaders, no provisions were made for such planning at a lower level.<sup>1</sup>

The new program of statewide forest resource planning attempted to strengthen state forestry organizations, make them more efficient, and ensure that data from nonfederal forest and range lands were effectively included in state and federal natural resource planning programs.

Statewide forest resource planning is both comprehensive and strategic. It includes the forest-related activities of all federal, state, and private forestry organizations and individuals. It considers the management of multiple forest resources (recreation, timber,





water, range, fish and wildlife) on all forest land ownerships over the long term.

First-generation planning programs varied considerably from state to state. Some programs focused on statewide policy-level planning for the forestry community. Others emphasized program planning within the state forestry organization. The type of planning undertaken was largely determined by the character of each state's forest resources, by its social, political, and economic environment, and by the administrative structure of the state forestry organization.

### Who is Involved in Statewide Forest Resource Planning?

State foresters and state forestry organizations usually lead statewide forest resource planning. The state forestry organization is a major participant in every state, and has sole responsibility for first-generation planning in some. Other participants vary as the scope of the plan and process broadens. Their numbers expand to include nearly all members of a state forestry community: federal, state and local natural resource organizations; forest industries; environmental groups; and forest landowner associations.

The State and Private Forestry unit of the USDA-Forest Service has had a significant role in fostering statewide forest resource planning. They've provided substantial financial and technical assistance to many states. And, while federal financial support has decreased in recent years, State and Private Forestry continues to provide technical assistance and planning information.

### How Much is Being Invested in Statewide Forest Resource Planning?

Over the five year period 1981 through 1985, federal and state investments in statewide forest resource planning averaged more than \$2 million annually. Levels of investment varied significantly from state to state depending on the scope of planning activities and the stage of planning.

Both federal and state planning investments have been declining. This is due, in part, to the completion of first-generation

planning in many states. Nearly 75 percent of the plans were completed between 1983 and 1986.

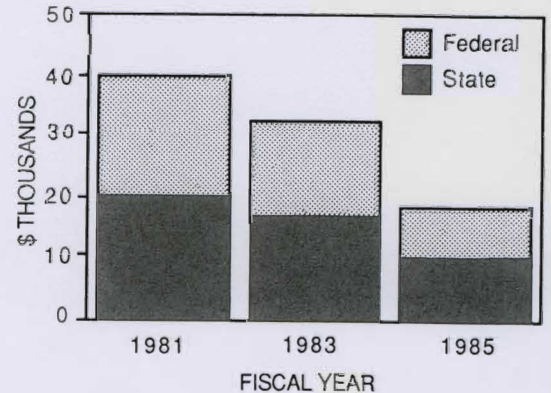


Figure 1. Median Budgets for Statewide Forest Resource Planning Programs: State and Federal Funding

The decline in federal financial assistance also represents a planned gradual federal withdrawal from a lead funding role in forest resource planning. State governments have the need to increase their investments in planning, if second-generation programs are to be funded at comparable levels.

Average budgets for state forestry organizations increased by more than 60 percent between 1981 and 1985. While shifts in statewide political and economic environments were generally responsible for budgetary changes, some portion of the forestry budget increase is attributable to statewide forest resource planning.

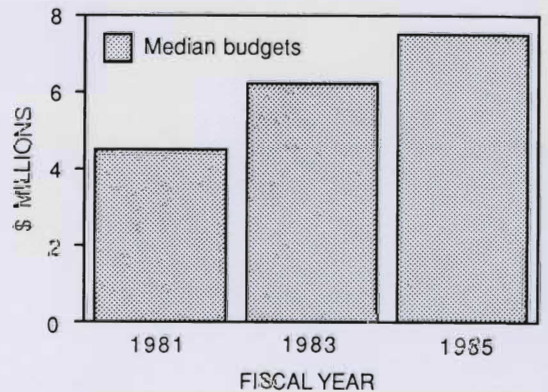


Figure 2. Median Budgets for State Forestry Organizations

First-generation planning programs were quite effective. They provided information to justify forestry program budgets, and increased legislative and policy-maker awareness of forestry programs. That increased awareness resulted in greater support for forestry program budgets.

## What Are the Benefits of Statewide Forest Resource Planning?

State forestry communities and organizations have benefitted from statewide forest resource planning. The benefits range from broad policy developments to specific program accomplishments. Many are intangible (clearer sense of long-term direction, improved decision-making processes, increased public awareness), but such benefits have made state forestry organizations more effective in an increasingly complex management environment.

The most frequently recognized planning benefit is a clearer sense of long-term direction in state forestry organizations. In several states, forest resource planning has provided information essential for directing policy and reallocating resources.

An example is found in Minnesota's experience. Their forest resource planning program was created, at least in part, to focus on long-range strategies. Other programs concentrated on more immediate activities.

Improved communication and coordination between federal, state and local natural resource organizations has been a key planning benefit. A good example was found in Oregon's Department of Forestry, where officials were disenchanted with program coordination between the state, the USDA-Forest Service and the federal Bureau of Land Management. Facilitated by the state's forest planning program, the directors of these organizations came together to review policies of all three agencies, and to open channels for future cooperation. Frequent information exchanges now occur between planning staffs, and the policies of all three organizations are presented side-by-side in one of Oregon's forest planning documents.

In some states, improvements in communication and coordination have included private organizations. New Hampshire now

has 32 public and private organizations represented on an expanded Forestry Communications Council. One specific Council function has been to facilitate the exchange of information within the state.

Statewide forest resource planning has been effective at increasing both public and policy-maker awareness of forestry issues and programs. Across the United States, many activities have been used to involve and inform the general public. These have included document reviews, public meetings, governors' conferences, and special forestry celebrations.

California's Forest and Range Resource Assessment Program was a good example. Its major objective was to put forestry issues on the agenda of state policy-makers, both elected and appointed. They chose appropriate and understandable information, and presented it in forms that would both attract and engage the attention of those individuals.

California's assessment program heightened policy-maker interest and prompted positive action on forestry issues. Demonstrating its success, the assessment program received more than \$250,000 from the state legislature for forestry issue research in each of the last three years.

Increased political support for forestry programs is a common planning benefit. However, the support has not always resulted in higher forestry budgets. Colorado forest industry representatives have noted growing political support. They've also noted cuts in the state forestry budget because of adverse conditions in the state's general economy.

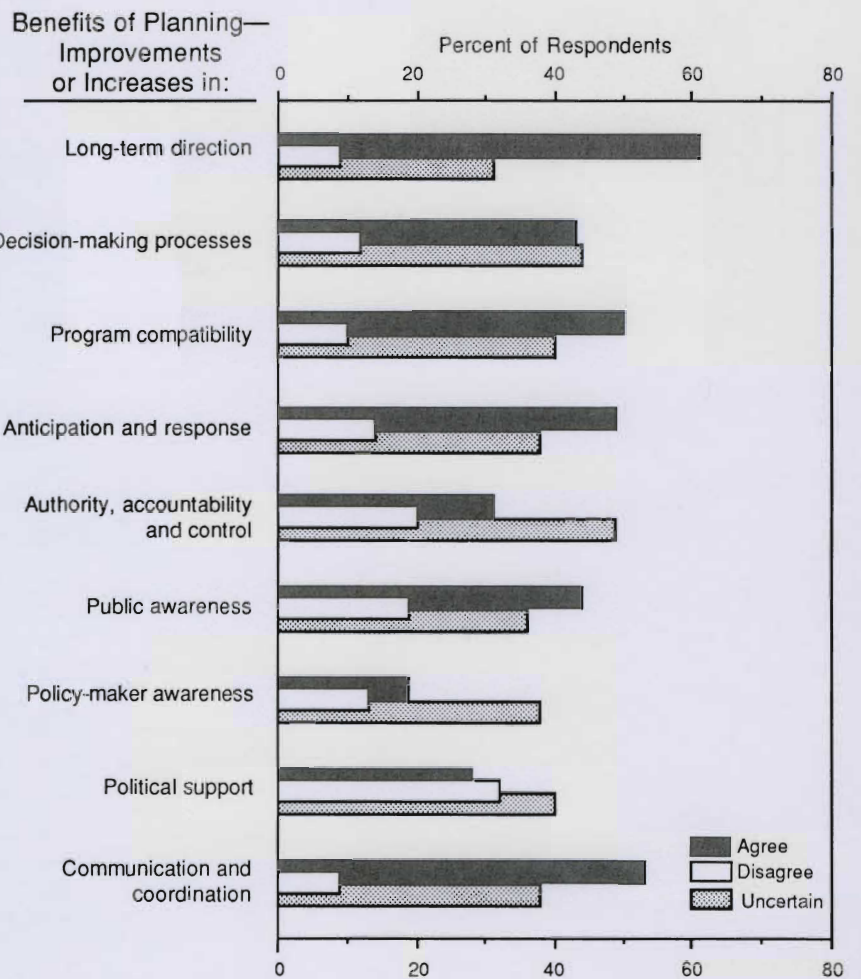
Basic changes in perception and attitude have resulted from statewide forest resource planning. In several states, planning has been credited with encouraging recognition of a wider range of forestry benefits beyond the simple value of timber. It has also promoted long term strategic thinking about problems and opportunities.

Statewide forest resource planning has also often been a catalyst for major forestry developments. Examples include the elevation of Virginia's Division of Forestry to an executive-level department, the establishment of a Forest Products Marketing Program





## Benefits and Accomplishments of Statewide Forest Resource Planning



*Perceptions of Actual Benefits*

In a nationwide mail survey, key constituents of statewide forest resource planning (state forest resource planners, state foresters, administrative officials overseeing state forestry organizations, state budget directors, legislators, forest industry representatives, environmental group representatives) were asked if nine potential benefits were in fact realized.<sup>2</sup> Many responses noted uncertainty, but most of the individuals considered to be "more familiar" with planning agreed that their state's forestry organization or forestry community had benefitted.

Planning benefits perceived were:

**Long-Term Direction:** clearer sense of long-term policy direction in the state forestry organization.

**Decision Making:** more efficient decision making processes within the state forestry organization.

**Program Compatibility:** increased sense of program compatibility in the state forestry organization.

**Anticipation/Response:** improved ability in the state forestry organization to respond to opportunities and problems.

**Authority/Control:** improved system of authority, accountability, and control in the state forestry organization.

**Public Awareness:** more effective means of raising the general public's awareness of forestry issues.

**Policy Maker Awareness:** more effective means of raising the awareness of policy makers with respect to forestry issues.

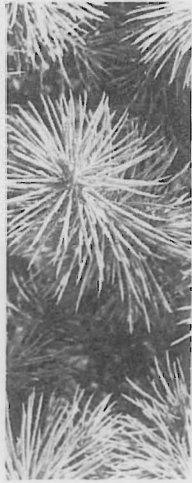
**Political Support:** increased political support for forestry programs, resulting in higher forestry budgets.

**Communication:** improved communication and coordination between federal, state and local natural resource organizations.

In addition to noting general planning benefits, those who responded attributed a wide range of specific program accomplishments to their statewide forest resource planning:

- Established additional tree nursery capacity and improved nursery management practices.
- Created two state forests where previously the state had no land base for forest operations.
- Developed an organized, monitored annual work planning process.
- Reformed state timber taxation policies.
- Restructured citizen advisory board.
- Developed a timberland productivity rating system.
- Prepared both wildlife and endangered species plans.
- Created joint training programs with regional planning agencies.
- Accelerated forest road maintenance and construction.
- Hired additional extension foresters and educational specialists.
- Improved coordination of volunteer fire departments.
- Produced series of articles publicizing "best management practices," for nonindustrial private forest land owners.





in Oregon's Department of Forestry, and the creation of an Office of Forest Products in Alaska's Department of Commerce and Economic Development.

Finally, planning has led a number of states to recognize the need to overcome single-state perspectives, share information, and coordinate activities directed at common concerns. It directly led to the creation of two regional forestry coalitions: the Lake States Forestry Alliance (Michigan, Minnesota and Wisconsin) and the Northeastern Forest Alliance (Maine, New Hampshire, New York and Vermont).

### What Might Be Done to Improve the Effectiveness of Statewide Forest Resource Planning?

Statewide forest resource planning can generally be made more effective. At least four essential elements can be recommended for adoption by states, in order to improve both the planning process and the results that develop out of that process.

- Develop a comprehensive, statewide forest resource plan first, providing general assessment information and direction; then prepare more detailed program plans and sub-state plans.
- Use a goal-oriented process rather than an issue-driven process.
- Broaden involvement to include all relevant interests outside of the state forestry organization. Also increase involvement of field people within the organization.
- Seek support from state policy-makers **at the outset of planning**. The creation of an advisory board consisting of leadership representatives may be useful for establishing direction and overseeing the planning effort.

Many first-generation planning programs missed an opportunity to generate additional support by failing both to encourage broad public involvement and to provide appropriate information to key policy-makers such as legislators and state budget directors. On the other hand, several programs were overwhelmed by the issues, goals and objectives gathered through broad public involvement. Public involvement is very important,

but planning programs must stay focused on goals and alternatives that enable them to move productively in developing their plans.

In terms of planning content, several areas should receive greater attention in future efforts.

- There should be increased coordination of statewide forest resource planning with regional and national planning, such as planning associated with the Forest and Rangeland Renewable Resources Planning Act.
- All land ownerships must be examined for their potential contributions to achieving statewide planning goals. For example, nonindustrial private forest lands, which have been largely overlooked in the past, may play an increasing role in meeting goals as demands on federal and state forest lands intensify.
- Social, economic and technological assessments are needed to identify both problems and opportunities for forestry with respect to broader social issues. This includes issues of economic development, public health and wellness, and environmental protection. Forestry can affect these issues through industry expansion, increased outdoor recreation, and improved forest management practices.
- Linkages between planning and state budgetary processes should be improved to ensure that appropriate and timely information reaches policy-makers.
- Implementation plans must be prepared at the outset of planning to gain commitment to the plan and to monitor accomplishments.

One of planning's major roles is to help state forestry organizations recognize and respond to emerging problems and opportunities. This role requires planners to keep abreast of significant developments in the dynamic social, economic and political environments of their state and in the nation. The current heightened interest in rural development, forest products marketing, forest health and urban forestry can be the challenge that planners need to assist their state forestry organizations in developing innovative responses. However, planners need better data sources and practical analytical



methods in order to effectively respond to these issues.

## What Does the Future Hold For Statewide Forest Resource Planning?

Strategic planning has often been treated as an expendable organizational activity, largely because benefits of planning have not often been clearly identified. Statewide forest resource planning has provided a number of significant benefits to state forestry organizations and forestry communities within states. And while difficult to quantify, such benefits demonstrate the success of past planning investments. The legitimacy of statewide forest resource planning will increase as these benefits are better recognized.

For the past nine years, statewide forest resource planning experiences across the nation have been richly diverse. Unlike the highly structured process used in USDA-Forest Service, National Forest planning, statewide forest resource planning approaches have varied. Each has been tailored by its state to suit its own unique planning situation. Much can be learned from the accumulated experience of the states. Future planners can and should benefit from this experience.

Statewide forest resource planning can have a bright future. Planning programs to date have achieved considerable success. Continued success will be determined largely by the ability of such programs to gain further support from state officials, legislatures, and state forestry organizations. Obtaining that support will require clear demonstration of how planning generates useful information, improves decision-making, and is useful to constituents both within and outside of state forestry organizations. As constituents come to recognize planning's value, statewide forest resource planning will become an integral and indispensable activity.

## Notes and References

1. Zumeta, D.C. 1986. *The State of the States. American Forests*. 92(10): 45-49.
2. Gray, G.J. and P.V. Ellefson. 1987. *Statewide Forest Resource Planning Programs: An Evaluation of Program Administration and Effectiveness. Station Bulletin 582-1987, Agricultural Experiment Station, University of Minnesota, St. Paul, MN.*





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