

**Indicator 54. Extent to Which the Institutional Framework Supports the Conservation and Sustainable Management of Forests, Including the Capacity To Undertake and Implement Periodic Forest-Related Planning, Assessment, and Policy Review, Including Cross-Sectoral Planning Coordination**

**What Is the Indicator and Why Is It Important?**

The sustainability of forests is dependent on society's institutional ability to comprehensively evaluate trends and conditions in diverse sectors and to subsequently take responsive actions that will ensure the sustained use, management, and protection of forest resources and the communities that depend on them. Such actions are typically predicated on institutional conditions that foster well-focused and technically sound plans, assessments, and policy reviews that are sensitive to a range of forest values and that are coordinated with a variety of forest-related sectors.

**What Does the Indicator Show?**

Forest and forest-related public and private organizations in the United States have a long history of engaging in forest planning and assessment activities, as well as in undertaking periodic reviews of forest resource policies and programs. Organizational responsibility for planning is diverse, as is the nature of the planning activities carried out. Public agencies are especially active in planning and assessment efforts. These agencies at times create a fragmented planning environment wherein coordination is increasingly viewed as an important yet difficult task to meaningfully accomplish. Assessment activities are very often one-time agency efforts that respond to major issues involving controversy over proposed resource development or management. Some assessment activities, however, have become monitoring initiatives that are conducted on a continuous basis (air quality monitoring) or at periodic intervals (forest inventory and analysis). Whether the public and private institutional capacity for planning and assessment is actually being translated into meaningful plans and their subsequent implementation is largely unknown.

Federal institutional capacity for planning the use, management, and protection of forests has existed for many years, as has significant institutional capacity to undertake comprehensive examinations of present and prospective conditions that are likely to affect forest resources. Federal agencies respond to statutes (or administrative directives) that require direct and exclusive consideration of forests and to statutes that require development of broad multisector plans (air, water, wildlife) of which forests are but one part. Multisector type authority tends to fragment institutional capacity and the administration of forest activities.

State governments' institutional capacity to engage in some form of forest planning activities has existed since the early 1900s, although the character of these activities has changed dramatically over the years, as has the number and type of involved State government organizations. Over the last 20 years, nearly all States have prepared a statewide forest resource plan.

Private sector institutional capacity for land management planning is apparent in the development and implementation of management plans for private forests. In some cases, forest management certification programs require development of a management plan as a prerequisite for certification (e.g., certification of forest management practices by the Sustainable Forestry Initiative of the American Forest and Paper Association). In 1994, approximately 5 percent of nearly 10 million private landowners had a plan for managing their forest property, which combined, directed the use and management of forest on nearly 154 million acres of private forest.