



Forest Management Planning

(IFA Forestry Policy Statement No. 2.6)

The Issue

Foresters prepare management plans to guide forest management activities taking into account the range of forest uses and values. Forest management occurs at several levels, from State-wide, regional to operational, depending on the relevant laws and land tenure. In recent years there has been an increasing demand for effective stakeholder participation in developing these plans for public forests as well as for effective planning processes for forest management certification schemes.

Background

In Australia, management plans are required under State and Territory legislation for public forests and increasingly plans are prepared for all forest lands involved in forest certification schemes. Generally forest management plans are prepared at either the strategic or operational level. Strategic plans may cover a State, region or property and establish broad strategies for forest management. Operational plans are more detailed plans for smaller areas to guide particular forest operations such as forest harvesting.

The earliest forest management plans in Australia, written in the 1920s, focused on long-term timber production on public land. They were often detailed, highly prescriptive documents with limited external input. Since that time management plans have undergone considerable development and are now based on data from extensive environmental and resource surveys and inventories. These provide for the balanced use and care of forests in order to meet a wide range of conservation, resource use, social and cultural requirements.

In addition to meeting the statutory requirements, forest management plans in the 21st century take account of national, state and local government policies, as well as Regional Forest Agreements (RFAs), Codes of Forest Practice and the requirements of certification schemes. On private land, forest management plans need to take account of regional natural resource management, catchment management and vegetation plans as well as statutory planning and approval processes. Because of the variability of situations, it is important that planning processes are flexible and reflect the management intent, area and type of forest and ownership.

Throughout the world and around Australia, there is a recognition that sustainable forest management requires meaningful and effective participation of stakeholders who have an interest in the management of the forest or who will be affected by decisions about its management. Increasingly the preparation of forest management plans is not the sole responsibility of foresters. On public land botanists, zoologists, ecologists soil conservationists and other specialists contribute to the development of the plans and a number of agencies may be involved in the approval of the plan. As more and more production forestry occurs in private plantations and forests, forest managers need to consult with stakeholders such as local government, catchment authorities and local communities when developing forest management plans.

Generally strategic forest management plans:

- describe the forest area under management; including the resources, uses and values;
- identify the applicable legal requirements and other external planning requirements relevant to the area;
- identify the management objectives of the area;

- describe the management strategies, zoning and/or prescriptions that will be implemented to achieve the objectives and to protect values;
- provide opportunities for public comment and participation in the planning process;
- provide for an appropriate level of monitoring of implementation of the plan and for a substantive review after five to ten years.

Generally operational forest management plans:

- describe the area including the topographical features and boundaries of the area where the operation will be conducted;
- describe the forest operation to be conducted and any prescriptions that apply to ensure that desired outcomes are achieved;
- indicate sites of significance or areas to be excluded from the forest operation.

Policy

The Institute of Foresters of Australia (IFA) advocates the development and implementation of strategic and operational management plans on all forest land tenures to guide sustainable forest management and provide for the diverse range of uses and values.

The IFA recognises:

- that forests have multiple and diverse uses and values that need to be sustainably managed;
- the value of appropriate stakeholder input in the development of strategic forest management plans for forests on all tenures.

The IFA considers that:

- strategic forest management plans should be integrated and holistic taking into account the risks and threats to the range of environmental, cultural, social and economic forest values at a landscape level as well as the management strategies on any adjoining forested land;
- operational plans should facilitate efficient management of forest operations and the protection of important values.

The IFA supports:

- forest planning processes that are appropriate to the scale, ownership and type of forest and its management intent;
- monitoring and review of strategic management plans every five to ten years as well as periodic auditing of the implementation of operational plans;
- the use of appropriate criteria and indicators as a framework for monitoring sustainable forest management.

Further Information

Spencer, R. D., Bugg, A. L. and Frakes, I.A. (2003) Evaluating tradeoffs in regional forest planning. *Australian Forestry* 66 (2) pp 120-128

Chikumbo, O., Spencer, R.D., Turner, B. J. and Davey, S. M (2001) Planning and monitoring of forest sustainability: an Australian perspective. *Australian Forestry* 64 (1) pp 1-7

(Policy approved 16 November 2005)

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