

I. INTRODUCTION

Forest sustainability is a goal of many forestry organizations across the United States and throughout the world. Managing forests sustainably involves recognizing interconnections among ecological, social, and economic systems to preserve options for future generations while meeting the needs of the present. Sustainability, like many concepts, is difficult to define in concrete terms. Many organizations are turning to a *criteria and indicators* (C&I) approach to help describe forest sustainability. Under this approach, criteria define broad categories of sustainability and indicators are specific measurements of each category.

There are a host of efforts underway using C&I to describe forest sustainability. Notable among these is an effort commonly called the *Montreal Process*. This work is an outgrowth of the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. In 1995, the United States joined 11 other countries in signing a document establishing a set of 7 criteria and 67 indicators to track forest sustainability.

Both the Northeastern Area Association of State Foresters (NAASF) and the USDA Forest Service, Northeastern Area, State and Private Forestry (NA) (see Preface) endorsed the use of the Montreal Process C&I framework in efforts to achieve sustainability. They were concerned, however, about the potential for using the Montreal Process C&I at regional and State levels, particularly in regards to the applicability of the framework at these scales and the availability of data to support their use. At the request of NAASF, the Northeastern Forest Resource Planners Association (NFRPA) and NA formed a work group to address these issues in the 20 States of the Northeast and Midwest.

The NFRPA/NA C&I project work group developed this sourcebook, which outlines the basic use of criteria and indicators to assess forest sustainability by doing the following:

- Summarizes information on the development and use of forest sustainability C&I by organizations and agencies.
- Provides recommended resources for additional information on C&I.
- Presents a set of base indicators within the Montreal Process framework to assess the sustainability of forests across the region. These base indicators are recommended as a common set to be used by the Northeastern Area and as a starting point for the 20 State forestry agencies represented by NAASF.
- Describes a means to link State-sponsored and other C&I efforts to regional and national efforts.
- Presents lessons learned on the use, development, and implementation of criteria and indicators.

This sourcebook is meant to serve as a general source of information on criteria and indicators of forest sustainability. It is intended as a starting point for States and other organizations to help guide their efforts to use criteria and indicators for assessing forest sustainability.