

ima

IMA Strategy Summary

inventory

monitoring

assessment



*making the connections that
show a bigger picture*

The IMA Strategy is a guide to better connect the disparate inventory, monitoring and assessment activities across the Forest Service. The result will be a more holistic approach to land management decision making and an increased ability for collaboration.

INTRODUCTION

The current mix of IMA activities across the Forest Service lacks a strategic and comprehensive approach that reflects the priority objectives of the agency. This inconsistency prevents the agency, partners, and stakeholders from effectively and consistently answering critical conservation questions at each hierarchical level (local, regional, and national). The IMA strategy presents goals and objectives to address this situation, and suggests strategic improvements that will lead to higher-quality more consistent information on resource conditions, trends, stressors, and their impacts on the sustainability of desirable resource conditions. These improvements will put the agency and our partners in better positions to make informed decisions for the stewardship of natural resources.

SCOPE AND PURPOSE

The IMA Strategy is championed by the three Deputy Areas – Research & Development, State and Private Forestry, and National Forest System – that address natural resources, infrastructure, and the associated socioeconomic systems and by Business Operations which supports tools and strategies for information collection. The strategy addresses gaps that prevent the agency from easily sharing information internally, externally, and across political boundaries in ways that facilitate answering important conservation questions. Collecting the right information through efficient and effective IMA programs is critical at a time when the agency needs to identify vulnerability of forests and rangelands to climate change, find the best approaches to create and manage landscapes that are resilient to environmental threats, establish broader-scale monitoring programs and conduct landscape scale assessments under the 2012 Planning Rule, improve environmental justice, enhance recreation opportunities, report how we are achieving desirable outcomes rather than simply enumerating outputs, and address other significant issues.

CURRENT CONDITIONS

In the past 20 years, the Forest Service has expended considerable effort on improving IMA processes to support decision-making and management of ecological, infrastructure, social, and economic systems at all levels of the agency. The lack of consistent spatial and temporal data and an uncoordinated approach to governance and decision making, continue to hinder the

agency's ability to make comprehensive decisions.

DESIRED CHARACTERISTICS

The Forest Service intends to build upon existing IMA programs to move from a collection of disjointed IMA activities to an integrated, efficient IMA system that would:

GOVERNANCE: Improve clarity and understanding of IMA priorities, policies, direction, decision-making processes, and roles and responsibilities;

DATA: Ensure consistent and comparable information for use at multiple scales, across multiple units and landownerships, and for multiple resource areas;

HOLISTIC APPROACH: Provide a perspective that extends beyond the boundaries of National Forest System lands to meet information needs shared with public and private partners; and

ASSESSMENT: Improve understanding of natural resource, infrastructure, social, and economic conditions at national, mid, and local levels and the management actions that contribute to those conditions' sustainability and benefits for the public.

VISION

“ Land managers have the natural resource information they need to collaboratively manage forests and rangelands. ”

STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT

The development of the IMA strategy was a collaborative effort across multiple partner agencies and deputy areas within the Forest Service. Content of the IMA Strategy is based on input from employees and partners from sensing interviews, meetings, and feedback sessions in 2011 and 2012.

Goals, Objectives, and Strategic Improvements

Goal 1: Support effective decision-making by providing relevant and credible information for forest and grassland ecosystems to provide a sustainable supply of services, products, and experiences that contribute to the quality of life for current and future generations.

Objective 1: Focus IMA efforts on priority management questions and related core information to meet the needs of the Forest Service mission by

- establishing a governance and decision-making structure to identify priority management questions and related core information; and
- increasing alignment of IMA activities with agency priorities.

Objective 2: Improve the integration and scalability of IMA information by

- developing and using a standards-based approach and organizing framework for management of IMA activities;
- enhancing coordination of IMA activities across resources and programs; and
- establishing policy and direction, standards and methods, processes and guidelines for IMA information.

Objective 3: Ensure information is based on relevant science by

- increasing communication between scientists and managers to ensure common awareness of current information needs and relevant science; and

- engaging scientists and managers in understanding the management problem, framing questions, and designing inventory, monitoring, assessment, and information delivery procedures.

Objective 4: Ensure quality and consistency of information to make effective land management decisions and policies by:

- consistently using statistically valid and efficient inventory and monitoring sampling designs;
- developing and using standards, protocols, and technology for data acquisition and analysis;
- developing and maintaining an information quality assurance and control program; and
- generating greater awareness of and use by managers of methodologies, tools, and applications that have undergone a thorough review process.

Objective 5: Ensure information is timely and accessible by

- increasing standardization in sharing information internally, with partners, and with the public;
- expanding use of websites to provide information, data, metadata, and tools in a timely manner;
- delivering technologies and research results in a timely fashion;
- improving linkage and functionality of protocol and tool enhancements with legacy or existing data and metadata to ensure its continued use; and
- increasing awareness and ability to share IMA data, metadata, tools, and models.

Goal 2: Ensure that all IMA activities are inclusive and comprehensive by working across organizational boundaries to determine common goals, avoid duplication, and build on common information needs.

Objective 1: Understand partner and stakeholder interests and address shared information needs by

- participating in IMA communities of practice to understand common interests and shared information needs;
- expanding the agency's participation with other land management partners in the coordination of joint IMA activities;
- generating greater agency capacity to develop and sustain partnerships for improved efficiency and effectiveness; and
- easily and more frequently sharing relevant information to address common interests.

Objective 2: Ensure IMA activities address issues across organizational and geographic boundaries by

- generating greater capacity to leverage existing partner information and address common information needs; and
- improving collaboration of IMA activities when information needs cross organizational boundaries.

Goal 3: Ensure the IMA system is responsive and adaptive to change.

Objective 1: Develop and maintain an IMA system that is dynamic, supports management, and is responsive to social, economic, and ecological change by

- increasing the ability of land and resource managers to recognize changes in conditions that warrant new management questions and core information needs
- increasing the ability to monitor implementation and effectiveness of land management strategies
- increasing the ability to provide information to meet evolving needs

Objective 2: Ensure the IMA system is responsive and adaptive to changing agency capacity by

- increasing focus on investments that address priority management questions and provide core information
- leveraging and sharing more resources with partners
- improving staffing and resources to meet Forest Service information needs and those commonly shared with partners
- improving corporate information technologies that meet current and evolving requirements for IMA activities

Strategic Implementation

The strategic improvements and actions identified in the strategy will be implemented in phases. The initial phase will address the high priority actions described below while continuing to work on important IMA activities already underway. Current ongoing work includes participating in specific IMA related activities with Federal and State partners, completing and releasing search and catalog tools for Forest Service protocols and datasets, establishing an IMA website, and developing IMA best practices for the agency.

High Priority Actions

1. Identify priority management questions and core information needed for all levels of the agency by establishing an organizing framework and identifying opportunities to share information among partners.
2. Clearly define and establish IMA governance roles and responsibilities at all levels of the agency.
3. Develop new and improve existing agency-wide performance and accountability elements for conducting and managing IMA activities. Indicators, measures, and reporting tools need to be established to evaluate the degree to which IMA implementation actions are completed, track the use of best management practices, establish IMA targets, and report IMA accomplishments.

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