

Indicator 53. Extent to Which the Institutional Framework Supports the Conservation and Sustainable Management of Forests, Including the Capacity To Provide for Public Involvement Activities and Public Education, Awareness, and Extension Programs, and Make Available Forest-Related Information

What Is the Indicator and Why Is It Important?

Well-informed and knowledgeable citizens and forest owners create a foundation of support for applying principles of sustainable forest management. To accomplish such a purpose requires institutional conditions (agencies, organizations) that are capable of promoting programs considered necessary to inform the public and private forest owners about forest resource sustainability.

What Does the Indicator Show?

Organizations responsible for communicating information about forest sustainability are many in number and diverse in mission and program responsibilities, although the intensity with which they engage in educational activities varies widely within and between public and private sectors. In recent years, the number of organizations so engaged has increased considerably. That increase has created opportunity to serve more and larger audiences, yet has posed challenges to program coordination and the presentation of integrated messages regarding forest sustainability. Extensive partnering occurs between public and private organizations that are responsible for educational initiatives. Implementation of education programs in manners that complement other types of programs (e.g., fiscal incentives) often leads to more efficient accomplishment of overall forest sustainability goals and objectives.

Federal Government agencies represent extensive institutional capacity to implement a wide range of educational programs focused on forest sustainability. This capacity is exercised via programs (very often involving partnerships) focusing on public education

generally (e.g., Natural Resources Conservation Education Program, Environmental Education Grants Program), one-on-one technical assistance initiatives (e.g., Forest Stewardship Program, Resource Preservation and Development Program), and extension service programs. Renewable resources extension staffing exceeded 700 extension staff years in 1999, with emphasis on production, environmental education, environmental quality, and utilization.

State government agencies also have substantial institutional capacity to implement educational programs. State education and technical assistance programs offered to private forest landowners for purposes of encouraging forest sustainability exist in virtually all States and focus on major forestry activities (e.g., protecting water quality, promoting reforestation, protecting from wildfires). In many cases, the programs are tightly partnered with Federal programs, an example being the extension service that engages the educational abilities of approximately six full-time equivalent staff years per State. In recent years, State governments have initiated a variety of K-12 environmental education programs, many of which have relevance to a better understanding of forest sustainability principles.

Private sector institutional capacity to undertake public educational efforts is diverse and extensive. More than 80 private national organizations claim responsibility for education initiatives involving forests. Privately sponsored forest certification programs have important implications for education on matters of forest sustainability. Nongovernmental organizations are increasingly making their presence known as leaders in the field of environmental education and are increasingly devoting attention to matters involving forest sustainability.