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NORTH AMERICAN FOREST COMMISSION

THIRTY-FIRST SESSION

17-19 November 2021¹

FRA 2020 EXPERIENCE, REGIONAL KEY FINDINGS AND THE WAY FORWARD

Executive Summary

The FAO Global Forest Resources Assessment (FRA) has since decades contributed to the compilation, analysis and reporting on the world's forest resources at national, regional and global levels. FRA supports the work and monitoring of many international processes and goals, including the Sustainable Development Goals.

According to the results of the most recent assessment, FRA 2020, the forest area in the North American Forest Commission (NAFC) region remained relatively stable, with a slight increase of 1.1 million hectares over the period 1990-2020. The forest area under management plans also increased and now accounts for close to 430 million hectares or almost 60 percent of the region's forest area.

Parallel to the country reporting process, FAO initiated a global Remote Sensing Survey, the results of which will be published in late 2021. All countries of the NAFC region participated actively in this process. Also, the next assessment, FRA 2025 is under preparation, with the further development of the FRA platform supporting user-friendly digital data entry, as well as the elaboration of improved guidance and tools for more consistent reporting on forest characteristics, including on primary forest. The scope and the reporting content will be discussed in the FRA 2025 Expert Consultation in mid-2022.

Suggested action by the Commission

The Commission may wish to invite Membersto:

¹ Rescheduled from 13-15 September 2021

Documents can be consulted at www.fao.org

- Continue their active participation in the FRA process through in-kind contributions to the work on improved reporting on primary forests and other forest characteristics;
- Collaborate with FAO and partner institutions to further improve the FRA process and its data collection, analysis and dissemination processes;
- Participate actively, including through the NAFC Working Group on the Forest Inventory, Monitoring and Assessment, in the preparation of the next reporting cycle, FRA 2025.

The Commission may wish to request FAO to:

- Continue improving the FRA platform to support easy and transparent reporting on forest resources, their management and uses;
- Continue the work on improved reporting on primary forests and report the first results of the work in the 26th Session of the Committee on Forestry (COFO);
- Complete the FRA Remote Sensing Survey and continue capacity development on remote sensing;
- Support policy analyses and outlooks on sustainable management of forests, trees and rangelands in the region.

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I. BACKGROUND

1. The FAO Global Forest Resources Assessment (FRA) is the most comprehensive and authoritative assessment of global forest resources, their management and uses. Over the past decades, FRA has contributed to the compilation, analysis and reporting of official, consistent and reliable information on the world's forest resources to inform society of their status and trends at national, regional and global levels. In addition to its regular functions, FRA collects data for and reports on two of the indicators of the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 15 – Life on Land. FRA data also support the work of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), the Rio Conventions (Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) and contribute to monitoring progress towards the Global Forest Goals (GFG) of the United Nations Strategic Plan for Forests, 2017-2030 (UNSPF).

2. FRA is a country-led process, which is based on official statistical data reported to FAO by Members. The work of FRA is guided by the FAO's governing and statutory bodies and by a dedicated Advisory Group and it receives technical guidance and support from international specialists through expert consultations organized by FAO at regular intervals.

II. FRA 2020 COUNTRY REPORTING PROCESS

3. The FRA 2020 process started in 2016 with the request to nominate national correspondents for the process. An expert consultation organized in Joensuu, Finland in June 2017 provided initial guidance on the scope and content of the assessment. The country reporting was launched at a global meeting in March 2018 in Toluca, Mexico. The meeting was organized with the support of the National Forestry Commission of Mexico (CONAFOR) and it brought together more than 160 participants from over 90 countries.
4. Following the global launch, nine regional and sub-regional workshops were organized during the period of April–December 2018 in order to further support countries in compiling and finalizing the FRA 2020 country reports.
5. FRA 2020 data collection and review processes were carried out in close collaboration with the national correspondents, partners of the Collaborative Forest Resources Questionnaire (CFRQ)² and a number of international experts. More than 700 people were directly involved in the process.

III. FRA 2020 KEY FINDINGS WITH AN INSIGHT INTO THE NAFC REGION

6. The FRA 2020 products include Key Findings, also available as an interactive Digital Report, a comprehensive Main Report, as well as country reports and an open-access FRA database including all the data and metadata reported by the countries. The digital report on the key findings, the FRA Main Report and the FRA database are available in all six official UN languages. All FRA products are available at <http://www.fao.org/forest-resources-assessment/en/>. The open-access platform can be accessed directly at <https://fra-data.fao.org>
7. The FRA 2020 Key Findings for the globe and North American Forest Commission region were as follows:

Forest area: The world has a total forest area of 4.06 billion hectares, which is 31 percent of the total land area. Canada, Mexico and United States of America together have a forest area of 722 million hectares equivalent to 18 percent of the global forest area. The forest cover in the NAFC region is almost 36 percent, with two countries (Canada and the United States of America) being among the top ten countries with the largest forest area globally.

Forest area changes: The global forest area continues to decrease, and the world has lost 178 million hectares of forest since 1990, an area about the size of Libya. The rate of net forest loss decreased substantially over the period 1990–2020 due to a reduction in deforestation in some countries, plus increases in forest area in others through afforestation and the natural expansion of forests. In the NAFC region, the forest area remained relatively stable with a slight increase of 1.1 million hectares over the same period.

Deforestation: FRA 2020 also reveals that since 1990 an estimated 420 million ha of forest has been lost worldwide through deforestation (conversion of forest to other land uses), but

² In addition to FAO, the CFRQ partners include International Tropical Timber Organization, FOREST EUROPE, the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, the Observatory of Central African Forests and the countries of the Montréal Process.

the rate of forest loss has declined substantially. In the most recent five-year period (2015–2020), the annual rate of deforestation was estimated at 10 million ha, down from 12 million ha in 2010–2015. In the NAFC region 14.7 million hectares have been lost to deforestation since 1990.

Primary forests: The world still has at least 1.11 billion ha of primary forest – that is, forests composed of native species, in which there are no clearly visible indications of human activities and the ecological processes have not been significantly disturbed. The NAFC region hosts 28 percent, or 312 million hectares, of these primary forests.

Forest area under management plans and protected areas³: In addition to the reduced rate of net forest loss and deforestation, FRA 2020 reported also other positive findings. The area of forest in protected areas has increased by 191 million ha since 1990, and has now reached an estimated 726 million ha (18 percent of the total forest area of reporting countries). In addition, the area of forest under management plans is increasing in all regions – globally, it has increased by 233 million ha since 2000, reaching 2.05 billion hectares (54 percent of the total forest area of the reporting countries) in 2020. In the NAFC region, the forest area in protected areas increased by 32 million hectares over the period and now accounts for close to 70 million hectares. The forest area under management plans also increased and now accounts for close to 430 million hectares - or almost 60 percent of the region's forest area.

IV. FRA REMOTE SENSING SURVEY

8. Parallel to the country reporting process, FAO initiated a global Remote Sensing Survey with two main objectives: 1) to improve the capacity of countries to use the latest remote sensing data and products to monitor their forest; and 2) to derive independent regional and global estimates of forest area and forest area change.

9. Between late 2018 and mid-2021, FAO organized altogether 35 FRA Remote Sensing Survey workshops and trained 901 national experts from 130 countries on remote sensing and the use of the FRA remote sensing survey methodology. Participants analysed more than 400 000 sample sites for land use and land use changes. Almost half the participants (427 people) have been trained in virtual workshops using e-learning material and other digital tools since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic.

10. All countries of the NAFC region participated actively in this process. The first results of the remote sensing survey will be published in late 2021.

V. THE WAY FORWARD

11. The new user-friendly digital data entry, review, analysis and dissemination platform provides an excellent basis for the next assessment, FRA 2025. As the platform already hosts all data and metadata reported by the countries to FRA 2020, its use in the next reporting cycle will significantly reduce the reporting burden and time needed for the data entry and

³ Mexico did not report forest area under management plans and protected areas for the year 2020, data reported for the year 2015 were used instead.

review. Hence, the use of the platform will release resources for improving further the reported data and metadata.

12. The platform functionalities will be further developed based on the inputs provided by the FRA national correspondents, collaborators and other users. The foreseen enhancements include functionalities for easier and more consistent reporting, as well as improved sharing of geospatial data and products. In addition, the system will be adjusted to meet the needs of a flexible reporting process that will allow more frequent voluntary updates of key indicator values, in line with the request of the 25th Session of COFO. A user survey has been launched on the FRA platform in order to collect valuable user feedback during the period July-August 2021 (<https://fra-data.fao.org>).

13. Based on a request at the same session of COFO, FAO has initiated the development of improved guidance and tools for more consistent reporting on forest characteristics. The work on improved reporting on primary forests was initiated successfully in the boreal biome and it now continues in the tropical domain. The NAFC countries have participated actively in this process. Canada hosted and facilitated the workshops for boreal forest countries, while Mexico did the same for the Latin American tropical and subtropical region.

14. Further streamlining and harmonization of FRA with other forest resource-related data collection and reporting processes will be sought through strengthened collaboration with the CFRQ, the Collaborative Partnership on Forests, the Rio Conventions and parties involved in the 2030 Agenda-related data collection and reporting processes.

15. Finally, the scope of the next FRA will be carefully reviewed to further reduce potential duplication and enhance synergies with other data collection processes. The scope and the reporting content will be discussed in the FRA 2025 Expert Consultation in mid-2022.