

# **SUSTAINABLE FORESTS**

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Edited by  
Jeffrey Sayer, Neil Byron and  
Gillian Petrokofsky

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# SUSTAINABLE FORESTS

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*Edited by*  
*Jeffrey Sayer, Neil Byron and*  
*Gillian Petrokofsky*

Volume IV

Forest Policy, Economics and Governance

Associate Editors Margaret Shannon, Bas Arts,  
Victor Teplyaev and Gillian Petrokofsky

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# INTRODUCTION

## Forest Policy, Economics and Governance

*Margaret Shannon, Bas Arts, Victor Teplyakov  
and Gillian Petrokofsky*

In the spring of 1989, a scientific committee planned the first conference on sustainability related to forests in the USA. During one session, Prof. Charles Wilkinson, Professor of Natural Resources Law at the University of Colorado, asked: "What are we trying to sustain? Forests? Forestry? Forest management?" This remains a fundamental question in forest policy, forest economics, forest law and legislation, and emerging institutions of governance – "*WHAT are we trying to sustain?*" The 1990 conference that followed in the USA chose "Sustainable Forestry" as its theme (Aplet et al., 1993).

Sustainable forestry is the founding principle of modern professional forestry, as first formulated by the Duke of Saxony, Hans Carl von Carlowitz, a mining supervisor in Freiberg, Germany, facing closure of the valuable silver mines due to the overharvesting of forests for mine timbers and charcoal. He traveled widely and his book *Sylvicultura Oeconomica, oder Haußwirthliche Nachricht und Naturmäßige Anweisung zur wilden Baum-Zucht (1713)* is considered the first compendium of knowledge in Europe about the sustainable use and management of forests. It is clear what is to be sustained in "sustainable forestry" – the long term productivity of the forest to continuously produce valuable trees for human use.

In 1992, the UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in Rio de Janeiro chose not to develop a Forest Convention on the question of what to sustain. From the forestry profession, the answer is "sustained yield forestry" or "sustainable forest management", while from the environmental, biodiversity, or community perspective, the answer is usually "sustainable forests". In 1992, in the face of this impasse at UNCED, the United States introduced the concept of "ecosystem management" as the policy of the US regarding the management of federal lands, a term quickly adopted globally (e.g. the IUCN Commission on Ecosystem Management<sup>1</sup>).



But what is *ecosystem management*? And does it overcome the “*Sustain What*” question?

For its proponents, ecosystem management focuses on what is left behind rather than what is taken out of the forest to ensure the continued health of the whole ecosystem by “blending the needs of people and environmental values . . . represent diverse, healthy, productive, and sustainable ecosystems” (Robertson 1992 as cited by Salwasser et al. in Aplet et al., 1993: 74). To its opponents, it “wastes” trees by leaving them to rot on the ground or die standing; it wrongly believes that nature can “manage” forests better than experts; and it undermines efforts to improve forests in order to protect biodiversity. Hence, the value and interest conflicts continue, whether we call it sustainable forest management or forest ecosystem management (Grumbine, 1994).

This is the fundamental debate within forest policy globally today – what to sustain and how to sustain it – and likely will continue to be so for some time. Every answer has a political advocate and opponent; economic beneficiary and loser; social benefits and costs; and supports the nation-state system or undermines it with demands for decentralization and devolution of control over forests on the one hand, and the rapid globalisation of markets and capital on the other.

This is why the contestation over the meaning and governing of “sustainable” when applied to forests is a defining topic of the twenty-first century. Arguments in the nineteenth century over the depletion of forests and natural resources led to new forms of administrative government that strengthened the nation-state system, as well as colonial, of control over forests (Scott, 1998). The twentieth century witnessed the creation of both international and global forest policy regimes (Rayner et al., 2010) that moved away from a nation-state model and towards a governance approach that included a wide variety of policy actors, including governments as well as civil society organisations. In addition, new efforts for localised community based initiatives for managing forests (Charnley and Poe, 2007) also emerged, especially in the face of external pressures leading to deforestation. This debate will shape the future of forests on Planet Earth. Sounds momentous? It is.

This overview chapter will provide some insights into how these contested ideas are shaping (or sometimes are shaped by) policy, economics, law and governance. The term Governance will be introduced because no state, no group of states, nor all states acting together can ensure all conditions necessary for the sustainability of the forests on Earth. Rather, interconnected networks of state and non-state, public and private, economic and non-economic, global and local, national and community organisations are continuously creating and recreating the capacity for sustainability of forests (Agrawal et al., 2008).

Sustainability is the fundamental concept that everything is interdependent with everything on Earth. So, what can forest policy, economics, law, and