

SUMMATION OF THE SYMPOSIUM ON ARKANSAS FORESTS

B.G. Blackmon¹

This brings us to the conclusion of a wonderful 2 days together—the culmination of the symposium on Arkansas Forests. We heard from a wide range of speakers who presented details of the forest survey and those who interpreted that information in light of the important resource issues in Arkansas and the region. My task here is to summarize and possibly interpret the information we've been given. And that is a difficult, if not impossible, assignment.

The presentations by John Kelly and Jim Rosson gave us a lot of details about the survey itself. We heard about a net increase in softwood volume, unlike the 1988 survey, that showed a decrease. The hardwood resource is also on the positive side statewide, with growth exceeding removals, yet less than in 1988. Perhaps this should be watched carefully in the upcoming annual measurements as demands (e.g., the new chip export market) on the hardwood resource intensify in the future.

Several times during the symposium there were questions about error and accuracy of the FIA data. The survey publishes sampling errors, but generally speakers presented mean data without error bars—understandable as that would have required speaker access to original data. Nevertheless, the scientific community should follow up on that issue and better define the statistical parameters on the data. We should know if there is reason to be concerned about error in sampling and/or analysis.

Vic Rudis shared some of the wealth of nontimber and spatial information in the survey. Most of us didn't know that data existed. Apparently they are in huge and intricate data sets, available on the Internet. I encourage the Forest Service to offer some training sessions for users who want to access this important information.

Rick Williams' presentation was encouraging. He told us that Arkansas has more forested acreage than 30 years ago. He pointed out that statewide, we are growing more softwoods and hardwoods than are being harvested. He also sent up a caution flag when he pointed out that in several counties in south Arkansas removal is exceeding growth, if only by a small amount—raising questions about sustainability in that region. Someone mentioned that many of the pine plantations in that area are just now beginning to “come on line” and produce the kind of volume growth that potentially could make up the deficit. Chris Barneycastle

reviewed the industry's Sustainable Forestry Initiative. That program is only about a year old and, in my opinion, has a great deal of potential for addressing the sustainability issue in south Arkansas.

Dick Kluender raised a rather significant flag when he said that if current trends continue we may be mining forests on nonindustrial private lands. His presentation included a lesson on fundamental economics and told us that demands on the resource will continue in a major way. Dr. Kluender mentioned some possible solutions, such as new technology (presumably including better utilization), increased productivity, and shorter rotations, but, unfortunately, offered little optimism that trends would reverse. Does this portend the need for at least some discussion of statewide forest practices legislation? Perhaps the topic should not be ignored.

On the other hand, Jim Foster raised the point that even if removals exceed growth, one should interpret the severity of the trend by relating the amount of removals to amount of standing crop. Food for thought. During the discussion period following Kluender's paper, recycling was mentioned, and I would like to take the liberty of jumping on my soapbox about that issue. According to Dr. Kluender, recycling will help the resource supply issue, but not a lot, and I believe that to be true. But there are other compelling reasons to support recycling. Recycling lengthens the life of landfills, reducing society's costs of waste disposal. Additionally, many areas of the “Natural State” are badly littered, and recycling offers us the opportunity to improve the quality of our landscape. So let's support recycling; it's good for us! In his presentation, Bryan Kellar cited litter as a problem in terms of tourism, and he is correct.

Philip Tappe pointed out that we don't know much about populations of many wildlife species, e.g., neotropical birds. Dr. Tappe mentioned that the survey was not designed to inventory wildlife. As mentioned above, some of these data may be available on the Internet, but generally the public is unaware of its availability.

The paper by Ed Miller and Hal Liechty gave us good news about the relationship between forest management and soil and water. They also made some helpful suggestions about how FIA might be altered to improve its utility—a message to which we hope the Forest Service will give some attention.

¹ Dean, School of Forest Resources, Director, Arkansas Forest Resources Center, and Assistant Director, Agricultural Experiment Station, University of Arkansas, Monticello, AR.

Citation for proceedings: Guldin, James M., comp. 2001. Proceedings of the symposium on Arkansas forests: a conference on the results of the recent forest survey of Arkansas; 1997 May 30–31; North Little Rock, AR. Gen. Tech. Rep. SRS-41. Asheville, NC: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, Southern Research Station. 125 p.

Jim Guldin reviewed the survey relative to public lands and gave us the top 10 things the FIA tells us about the public forest lands of the State. Among other things, he talked about the “sawtimberization” of public forests, a tendency for public lands to be overstocked relative to other ownerships, the negative growth/removal ratio in the planted pine component in the Ozark region, the inherently poor site quality on the national forest land base, and the big-tree character of public forests.

In her paper on socioeconomic assessment of private nonindustrial lands, Tamara Walkingstick helped us understand why private landowners hold their forest lands. These reasons included greenspace, preference for a rural style of life, and wildlife. It is interesting that income from timber was not in the top three reasons, even in the Coastal Plain region of the state. One of her messages was that we should listen to and honor the wishes of the landowner. With this I agree, except in cases where the landowner’s objectives violate principles of sustainability.

The long-awaited chip mill paper by John Gray and Jim Guldin reviewed the chip industry and its implications for sustainability. An attempt to answer eight important questions about that activity was made in their paper. Although most of the information was encouraging, some raised important questions. This is the first instance in the debate about chip mills where hard data supplemented

rhetoric in analyzing potential benefits and costs to the state. Reading this paper in its entirety is a must.

So, what does all this mean? Perhaps the question is “can we have a ‘working forest’ in the “Natural State?” Can we have profitability, preserve property rights, protect critical species and habitats, maintain scenic and pastoral vistas? The list could go on and on. “Can we have our cake and eat it too?” is what we are really asking.

Our forests and ecosystems are sustainable, and they can remain sustainable if all of us with varied interests, values, and paradigms are willing to work together and make it happen. But we have to make it happen, recognizing that compromise will most certainly be necessary.

We are the stewards of the land today. To be treated well by history, we must leave the land and its forests, water, and animals in as good or better shape than we found them. That’s what sustainability is all about. Generally I think we are practicing sustainability, but let’s make sure we are. Surely we would want no other alternative.

The planners of this symposium hope that this event has contributed in a positive way. We thank our speakers, our generous sponsors, and, finally, we thank you, our audience, for making this conference a success.