



Indian Forest Management Assessment Team's (IFMAT IV) Recommendations for Action

IFMAT IV is the fourth independent, congressionally mandated assessment of Indian forests and forestry. The team was formed by the Intertribal Timber Council and includes experts on the full range of forest management activities. The Team recommends urgent action on several fronts to maintain and improve Indian forests and their role in achieving tribal goals and to become an ever more capable and resilient component of all American forests.

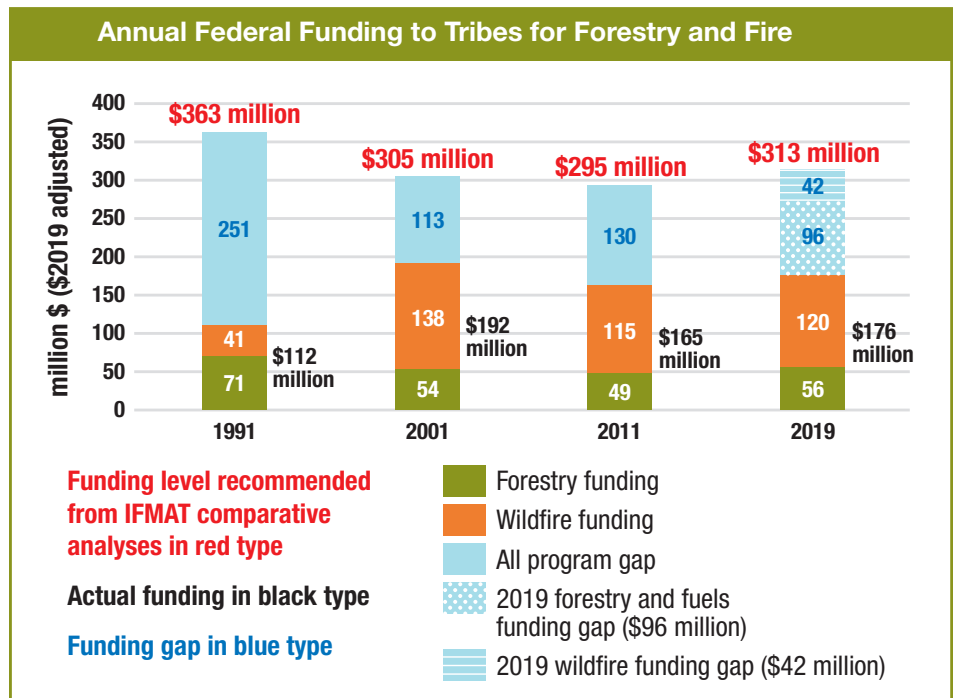
Potential of Indian Forestry

IFMAT IV again highlights the potential for well-managed Indian forests to serve as models for sustainability for all American forests. Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) when applied with modern science can result in integrated forest management of the best kind since it blends ancient, proved concepts and practices with current technology. Reservations, as noted in IFMAT I, are permanent homelands in which the tribal citizens need to live with the consequences of all their forest decisions. Native people want their forests to provide a multitude of values and services and thus have a compelling need to balance competing interests. They have a well-recognized commitment to protect and use their forests sustainably that is both their heritage and legacy.

Challenges

For the fourth time the IFMAT analysis finds Indian trust forest lands funded at about a third per acre of comparable federal forests. This gap has existed now for at least 30 years and probably longer and needs to be addressed with an urgency unseen heretofore. Self-governance is rising among tribes and is being applied through contracting, compacting and now the Indian Trust Asset Reform Act (ITARA) trial. However, the Bureau

of Indian Affairs, and the federal establishment generally, haven't kept up with the need to adequately service, financially and technically, self-governance tribes. Many additional problems are addressed in the IFMAT report, some of which are highlighted below. The modernization of rules and regulations, the huge need for road improvement and maintenance, the improvement of physical facilities for both tribes and BIA, and the improvement of fire management rules are only a few.



Annual federal budgeted funding level to tribes for forestry and fire adjusted to \$2019. IFMAT IV recommended funding level of \$313 million is based on a comparative analysis to the U.S. Forest Service and other federal programs. This amount does not include estimated federal contributions of \$11 million from other BIA programs or other federal sources such as NRCS. It also does not include needed funding to address the road maintenance backlog which was \$200 million in 1991 and has increased to \$1.33 billion in 2019. Subtotals may not add to total due to rounding.

Major Findings

1. There is a unique tribal vision of forest management including a focus on stewardship and non-timber forest products (NTFP) as self-governance (SG) increases, yet the Secretary's trust responsibility remains and is vaguely defined.
2. Limited funding to support tribal forest management, particularly professional staff capacity.
3. Challenges continue to exist for forest protection, forest health and planning.
4. Limited funding to support comparable salaries and benefits for tribal forest management.
5. Roads, facilities, and enforcement on tribal forests are in dire state.
6. Cross-cultural relationship building and landscape-scale management projects need to be funded and implemented.
7. There is a need for policy reform and increased education regarding available pathways to self-governance to fulfill the trust responsibility.
8. Many other challenges exist for tribal forests.

Major Recommendations

1. Achieve funding parity with comparable federal forests.
2. Define the governance structure of tribal forestry for the future.
3. Address immediate threats to tribal forests.

Supporting Recommendations

- Consider coordinated development of annual plans on each reservation for integrating all forest management activities and hazardous fuel reduction activities.
- Cooperative agency training for the managed fire program should be implemented like TNC Indigenous burning network. Cooperative burn plans need to be developed so multiple agencies can participate in prescribed burn projects.
- To increase efficiency, evaluate creating a forest protection unit that includes fire, insect, and disease management programs.
- Provide NTFP support for each region to provide technical assistance to tribes to fulfill their NTFP goals. This would support tribal hunting and gathering initiatives and promote health and wellbeing within tribal communities.
- The BIA should identify an independent audit process to evaluate fair market value for forest products.
- BIA/Tribes need to explore other revenue options such as carbon, biofuels, biomass use, water, wildlife, recreation, or other natural resource uses.
- Given the recent encouraged shift towards self-governance by many tribes, IFMAT IV recommends a review of the current applicability of NIFRMA. Recipients of the report would include ITC and Congress.
- BIA, in coordination with the ITC, should develop a table of authorities for self-governance tribes, compact, PL 93-638, direct services. This should include the allottees. Modification of CFRs should be based on the findings from this table.
- BIA forestry regulations and policy restricting delivered log sales need to be reviewed and reforms implemented to facilitate timely creation of forestry enterprises or

other acceptable processes for log sales. The BIA needs to improve communications to provide other current options for log sales.

- More systematic technical and academic access is needed to support tribal climate change planning.

Conclusions

Management of Indian forest lands presents many opportunities for examples of stewardship of the land and protection of natural resources in perpetuity. Many challenges exist, but more flexibility in management approaches is still possible on Indian forest lands compared to most federal forest lands. Therefore, Indian forests and forestry are a natural laboratory for continuous improvement in forest management goals and techniques. The holistic Indian view, as opposed to the segmented, zoned resource view now applied on federal forests presents a way to the future of all forest management. Immediate attention to the funding and other constraints on Indian forestry must be rapidly removed to augment this future.

Action Steps

- Increase baseline funding to parity and bring recurring allocations to the level indicated by inflation.
- Remedy the deficits in funding and on the ground in-forest density management, hazardous fuel reduction, forest protection from insects and disease and change the rules of fire attack with binding tribal input.
- Vastly increase funding for infrastructure including roads and other physical facilities.
- Ensure that tribes are able to adequately fund and recruit professional staff for forestry functions.

IFMAT Participants

Tribes, BIA, Core Team, Technical Specialists, Student Participants