

MANAGEMENT OF HARDWOOD FORESTS IN THE MID-ATLANTIC REGION:

PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE

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Abstract: Hardwood forests of the Mid-Atlantic region have a multitude of values. They provide timber for furniture, paper, and other products, habitats for wildlife, water for homes and industry, and opportunities for outdoor recreation activities of many types. They dominate much of our landscape, serve as reservoirs of biological diversity, alter climate, and affect our lives in many ways that we are only beginning to understand.

As we consider the management challenges that lie ahead, we need to maintain some perspective -- both on the forests themselves and on our efforts to manage them. Present forests are largely second-growth, having originated from the period of intensive forest exploitation at the turn of the last century. Many of the trends occurring in these forests today are still the result of natural development processes in these relatively young forests. Our efforts to manage eastern hardwoods are less than 50 years old, and there have been several major shifts in management direction in that short time span. Much of our forest land has yet to receive any planned management at all.

In recent years, research has been providing increasingly sophisticated information on forest management, and much of this knowledge is being applied on those lands that are under planned management. Traditional emphasis on management primarily for timber production has been gradually shifting toward increasing recognition of other forest uses and values. Unfortunately, public perceptions of forest management and public objectives for their forests have changed much more rapidly than either forest management or research.

There are many challenges for both management and research in the years ahead. We need to incorporate a much broader range of forest values into management planning, and to devise effective ways to integrate management for that full range of uses. We need to dramatically increase the proportion of forest land under planned management. And we need to find ways to ensure that the best and most up-to-date procedures are available to practitioners and that they are used effectively. Research will need to provide much information on many and varied topics. Rather than many individual research efforts aimed at special uses and current high-visibility topics, we need to plan a long-term research program that will systematically improve our basic understanding of forest growth and regeneration processes, so that we can apply that knowledge in a wide variety of ways to meet specific resource needs.

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