

REACHING USERS AT LOCAL SCALES: INSIGHTS INTO THE VALUE OF FOREST INVENTORY INFORMATION FOR EDUCATION AND OUTREACH AND THE POTENTIAL FOR AN EFFECTIVE PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN FIA, COOPERATIVE EXTENSION, AND STATE AND NATIONAL CONSERVATION EDUCATION PARTNERS

Rachel Riemann¹

Abstract—Forest information is desired for broader applications than we typically serve. Among those underserved users are the education and outreach communities. These groups are actively trying to engage and teach both youth and adults in areas such as GIS/spatial analysis, natural resource education, general math/science, invasive species, climate change, water quality, and forest management, via a variety of venues including classroom instruction, Master Forester workshops, Woods walks, specific issue-based workshops, and citizen science training sessions. The advent of modeled geospatial datasets of forest characteristics makes FIA data accessible to these users in a way that it wasn't before. And for most of these users, there usually isn't another source of current information about our forestlands, and certainly not one of similar quality and consistency. Reaching these users would increase awareness of forests in general, and of the USFS and FIA as a good source of information about those forests, amongst a large new eager, and often young, user group, and would improve the effectiveness of their work. We (FIA) cannot effectively reach all these users ourselves (individual schools, local forest landowner groups, conservation educators, Master Foresters and Gardeners). Fortunately several potential partners exist who serve those users – Cooperative Extension, and specific user-group partners such as State Conservation Education Departments and National Project Learning Tree – partners who could provide the essential bridging role necessary for FIA to reach them. A good webpage with readily accessible and downloadable geospatial datasets will definitely take us part of the way, but combining that critical online accessibility with direct outreach to these more local partners (e.g. Cooperative Extension) and/or specific user-group partners (State Conservation Education, National Project Learning Tree) will increase the effectiveness and use of both. In this paper we will describe our experience accessing these communities in New York, and share some recommendations for reaching these communities in other areas.

¹ Research Forester/Geographer, Northern Research Station, Troy, NY, 518-285-5607, rriemann@fs.fed.us