

## **Some Lessons That May Be Drawn From the Pinchot Institute Pilot Certification Tests**

To further explore whether certification could have a practical application to the National Forest System, it may be useful to ask whether the pilot tests revealed any interesting lessons or issues that could inform the discussion as it proceeds. The following are some initial suggestions:

### **Lessons Pertinent to Individual National Forests**

- Management issues, challenges, and certification assessment results will vary from unit to unit.
- The certification assessments were useful feedback mechanisms for National Forest personnel regarding their management of the forest, and by providing a more comprehensive and integrative review than normal internal audits, they complemented existing management systems. Normally, a certification assessment would also help determine whether a forest management unit is meeting its own management objectives, and would emphasize improving management practices over time.
- The assessments provided opportunities beyond existing legal and administrative requirements for interest groups and stakeholders to provide input regarding National Forest management.
- Outdated land and resource management plans may prevent some forests from meeting the requirements set forth in certification standards, which emphasizes a potentially broader need for updating National Forest management systems.
- The lack in some cases of integrated landscape planning involving adjacent lands and landowners raised the issue of the unique role of National Forests within the broader landscape, as well as nationwide, and how certification would take account of this role.

### **Lessons Pertinent to the National Forest System**

- Backlogs in road maintenance, delays in silvicultural treatments, and other problems in the implementation of approved forest plans were often cited as indicators of larger budgeting and staffing issues outside the control of individual National Forests (i.e., in the hands of Congress or the Administration).
- National Forest staff time required to participate in certification assessment and reporting procedures varied considerably from unit to unit but raised issues of ‘unsupported’ budgetary demands (i.e., not specifically covered by existing funding levels).
- The fact that ownership and control of sub-surface mineral rights may lie in the hands of external parties raised broader questions about how the Forest Service would deal with such issues if they impact forest management and the ability of a forest unit to meet certification standards.
- Inconsistencies between certification standards and existing National Forest System management, planning and policy commitments (e.g., Northwest Forest Plan, the definition of Native American organizations as sovereign entities, chemical use), raise broader questions about the relationship between private certification organizations and federal land management systems.
- Requirements in the SFI and FSC standards that the Forest Service make formal ‘commitments’ to the certification programs raise questions about how the agency could do this organizationally and legally.