

**An Assessment of Indian Forests  
and Forest Management  
in the United States**

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**INDIAN FOREST  
MANAGEMENT  
ASSESSMENT TEAM**

**“IFMAT III”**

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**IFMAT III Members**

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- **John Gordon – Co-chair**
- **John Sessions – Co-chair**
- **Mike Sterner – Coordinator**
- **John Bailey – Fire/Silviculture**
- **Vincent Corrao – Forest Operations**
- **Larry Mason – Education/Enterprise Management**
- **Mark Rasmussen – Forest Planning**
- **David Cleaves – Forest Policy/Climate Change**
- **Adrian Leighton – Education/ Silviculture**
- **Hal Salwasser – Fish/Wildlife/Administration**
- **Don Motanic – ITC support**
- **Graduate Students – Laurel James, Serra Hoagland, Breanna Gervais**

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**Origin**

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- **National Indian Forest Resources Management Act (NIFRMA)**
  - Public Law 101-630, Title 3, 1990, directs the Secretary to obtain an Independent Assessment of Indian Forests each 10 years
- **Secretary enters into contract with ITC**
- **ITC selects team of forest management specialists for the Independent Assessment**
- **Report to be delivered to ITC who transmits report to Congress, BIA, Tribes, and other parties.**

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### Initial Congressional Findings

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- Forest lands are among the most valuable assets of Indians
- United States has a trust responsibility toward Indian forest lands
- Existing federal laws do not sufficiently assure the adequate and necessary trust management of Indian forest lands
- The federal investment is significantly below the level of investment in, and management of forest lands by other agencies and owners.

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### Eight "Questions" or Elements of NIFRMA as they relate to IFMAT

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- A. In-depth analysis of management practices and level of **funding** compared to similar federal and private lands
- B. Survey of **condition** of Indian forest lands
- C. Evaluation of **staffing** patterns of BIA and tribes
- D. Evaluation of procedures employed in timber sale administration and **accountability** of proceeds
- E. An analysis of potential of reducing or eliminating **procedures**, rules and policies of the BIA consistent with federal trust responsibility

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### Eight Questions (con't)

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- F. Comprehensive review of adequacy of Indian forestland management **plans** to meet tribal needs and priorities
- G. Evaluation of the feasibility and desirability of establishing minimum standards against which the adequacy of the forestry programs of the BIA in fulfilling its **trust responsibility** can be measured
- H. A recommendation of any **reforms** and increased funding levels necessary to bring Indian forestland management programs to a state-of-the-art condition.

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**ITC Additional Issues**

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- Evaluate opportunities to develop more Indian professionals in natural resource management through enhanced educational opportunities
- Evaluate economic contribution of Indian forests to tribal and regional economies
- Evaluate opportunities of Indian forests to become “anchors” of forest infrastructure

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**Methods & Process: Information Gathering**

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- Visited 20 tribes during 2012 to develop a snapshot of current forest condition, BIA and tribal programs, and sample tribal input on the adequacy of the forestry program
- BIA Regional and Area Office meetings or conference calls: Albuquerque; Portland; Minneapolis; Phoenix; Sacramento
- Washington, DC meetings with BIA, BLM, USFS, NRCS. 11/27-29
- NIFC 1/13

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**Methods**

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- Reviewed BIA databases, Funding and Position analyses, Forest Plans, IRMPs
- Reviewed other federal and state databases (e.g., FIA, Landfire, forest health assessments)
- Tribal Colleges and education focus groups.
- Regular, on-going calls, email w/ BOFRP.
- Questionnaires (1. perceptions of forest resource (used in IFMAT-I & II; 2. workforce)

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**IFMAT II Primary Recommendations**

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3. Maintain BIA technical services capacity at least at the 1993 level. This also suggested a call for a Small Tribes Technical Service Center in the West.
4. Provide adequate funding to support the development of Integrated Resource Management plans (IRMPs).
5. Fund a "willing buyer/willing seller" program to enable tribes to consolidate tribal and allotment lands.
6. **Continue the 10-year cycle of Indian Forest Management Assessments, with improved, continuous and coordinated interim data collection techniques and to provide adequate funding for a consistent monitoring process.**

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**ITC Question 1: 3 most important trustee functions**

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- **Adequate** recurring and assured funding of essential trust management activities; an allocation scheme geared to tribal vision, priorities and plans.
- **State of the art** technical assistance in planning (IRMP, FMP), technology, and management that is available flexibly and responsive to tribal needs.
- **Effective** trust oversight including fiscal management and accounting, coordination among US agencies, and adequate review of plans by a system based on tribal vision, priorities and objectives.

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**ITC question 2. Public or Private Trustee?**

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- Transfer of forest assets to a fully private trustee (bank, law or consulting firm) seems to risk losing the flexibility and direct US government participation needed to meet tribal goals as tribal vision and objectives evolve
- Current public model suffers from making the BIA both the de-facto deliverer of the trust activities and the oversight to see if the activities are appropriate and well executed

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**ITC question 2. Public or Private Trustee?**

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- IFMAT I recommended an independent commission to periodically review performance against Tribal plans, accepted by the Secretary of the Interior, and with power to require corrections when departure from the plan, or plan obsolescence
- A variety of options exist to accomplish the role of the independent commission: A permanent IFMAT? Other independent government-sponsored oversight bodies (Nuclear Regulatory Commission).

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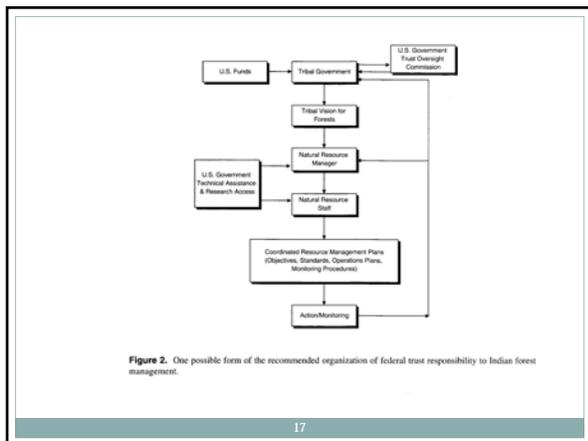


Figure 2. One possible form of the recommended organization of federal trust responsibility to Indian forest management.

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**Why this might be a good idea for forests, at least**

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- Provides truly independent oversight, helps the BIA not have to “pitch and umpire”
- Starts with agreement rather than an adversarial posture on both sides
- Is focused on Tribal goals and is specific to tribes and forests all of which are different
- Is capable of changing with changing times but insures basis stewardship of the land.

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**ITC question 2. What about Allottees?**

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- Allottees should be included in all phases of forest planning and operations and allotted forest lands should be repurchased by tribes on a willing seller/willing buyer basis.
- A strong case can be made that the allotment system was a consequence of a mistaken approach to the discharge of the trust responsibility, and therefore should be modernized as part of the trust responsibility.

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**ITC question 3: Top three recommendations for the Trust Commission to consider**

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- 1. Provide adequate recurring funding geared to tribal goals under an improved trust system.**
- 2. Improve technical assistance and cooperation, with greatly improved US interagency delivery.**
- 3. Implement the trust oversight recommendations of IFMAT I to make tribal goals, capacity and self-governance central.**

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