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A STRATEGY FOR NONTIMBER FOREST PRODUCTS RESEARCH AND TECHNOLOGY TRANSFER FOR SOUTHERN UNITED STATES

James L. Chamberlain[1]

In mid-2001, the Southern Research Station (SRS) and the Southern Regional Office (R8) of the U.S. Forest Service worked through a 3-day facilitated discussion to develop a strategy to guide research and technology transfer on nontimber forest products (NTFPs). In all, more than 14 specialists took part in developing the strategy, representing the Forest Service Washington and Region 8 Offices, the National Forests, Research, and State & Private Forestry. Technical disciplines represented during the process included ecology, botany, social science, inventory and monitoring, and marketing and management. The guide establishes strategic goals and recommended actions to advance the knowledge concerning the management of forest resources for NTFPs. It is intended to help direct research efforts of the Southern Research Station concerning the ecological, economic, and social sustainability of market and nonmarket NTFPs, as well as the inventory and monitoring of these products on public and private forestlands. A corresponding purpose is to guide technology transfer efforts in Region 8, state and private forestry, as well as the national forest system with SRS scientists.

The southern region team (SRS and R8) acknowledges several factors as inspiration for developing the regional strategy. First and foremost, the recently published "National Strategy for Special Forest Products," issued by the Washington Office (USDA Forest Service 2001), established an action plan to guide the agency in managing the resources on national forest lands from which special forest products (SFPs) originate, and to assist state and private forest managers with the same. The national strategy also recognized the social, economic, and ecological importance of the resources that produce SFPs and the need for leadership and collaboration in integrating SFPs into forest management. In addition, the regional team recognized that a lack of information concerning the ecological, economic and social aspects of NTFPs that could be provided through research impedes efforts to improve management. Major issues concerning sustainability and management include harvesting practices and levels as well as silvicultural standards, guidelines and prescriptions. Further, the regional efforts were inspired by growing concerns for the social factors, especially long-term collection rights, a way of life for many rural folks, and family incomes and traditions. The need to ensure the availability of nontimber forest resources for recreational collection also inspired the regional team to craft a strategy.

Although many definitions are used for products that originate from the forests that are not timber-based, but are of biological origin, the regional strategy embraces the use of the term special forest products (SFPs) to provide consistency. These products can be organized into four major product categories: culinary, wood-based crafts, floral and decoratives, and medicinal and dietary supplements. Perhaps the most important of the Southeast's culinary forest products are ramps (*Allium tricoccum*), which is widely eaten as a spring tonic, and often the mainstay of festivals and fundraisers. Some of the more important wood-based SFPs include sassafras (*Sassafras albidum*) stems for walking sticks, willow (*Salix* spp.) stems for furniture, and cypress (*Taxodium distichum*, *T. ascendens*) knees used for carvings. Floral products include crooked wood (*Lyonia* spp.) gathered from the forests of Florida and used in dried flower arrangements, grapevine (*Vitis* spp.) and smokevine (*Aristolochia macrophylla*) used to make wreaths and baskets, and galax (*Galax urceolata*), gathered for the national and international floral industries. The southern forests are the source of more than 50 plant species collected for their medicinal values.

The regional strategy recognizes that increasing levels of collection of SFPs have triggered concerns about the long-term social, ecological, and economic sustainability

[1] Nontimber Forest Products Technologist, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, Southern Research Station, 1650 Ramble Road, Blacksburg, VA 24060.

of the resources from which these products originate. There is too little information to accurately assess the current situation and to make informed decisions concerning management of nontimber forest resources. The strategy defines four strategic goals and associated actions within the framework of ecosystem management to address the ecological, economic and social aspects affecting SFPs. The goals and selected actions include:

1. Provide knowledge and information to maintain viable populations of SFPs
   a. Develop the best inventory methods for species or groups of species
   b. Assess ecological impacts of SFP harvesting on the SFP and associated species
   c. Determine sustainable harvest practices and levels for selected SFPs
2. Provide knowledge and information to ensure the economic sustainability of SFP markets
   a. Determine the value and volume of the major commercial SFPs
   b. Define the scope and scale of established and emerging markets
   c. Determine the economic impacts to local people and communities
3. Produce and provide information on the different aspects of human interaction with SFPs and incorporate an understanding of the human dimension into policy, planning and management decisions
   a. Identify SFP collectors, the SFPs they collect, and their functional and livelihood uses of these products
   b. Examine compliance with existing SFP regulations, and implications for management strategies and law enforcement
   c. Establish a process of collaborative planning with collectors, and other agencies and interested publics
4. Promote public understanding of SFP uses, users, conservation, and future potential
   a. Determine methods to create public understanding of SFPs throughout the south
   b. Develop education and outreach programs that target harvesters, land managers, school groups and others

Achieving these goals depends on developing a proactive technology transfer program that supports and complements the efforts of State and Private Cooperative Forestry, the National Forest System, and other public and private partners. Technology transfer actions include communicating research results in formats that can be easily used with a wide range of constituents. Developing an interactive web-based communications system that provides timely and practical materials is essential. Further, an integrated technology transfer program is needed that addresses the needs of all clients and partners, including non-English speaking publics. Through a concerted and directed effort, the SRS and Southern Regional Office can advance the knowledge base through research and improve management of southern forests for nontimber forest products.

LITERATURE CITED

USDA Forest Service. 2001. National strategy for special forest products. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service. 8 p.