

THE FOREST GENETIC RESOURCES WORKING GROUP of the North American  
Forestry Commission (FAO)

Ron Schmidting

USDA Forest Service, SRS, Southern Institute of Forest Genetics, Saucier, MS 39574

[RSchmidting@fs.fed.us](mailto:RSchmidting@fs.fed.us)

The Forest Genetic Resources Working Group (FGRWG) is one of seven working groups established by the North American Forest Commission (NAFC). The NAFC is one of six Forest Commissions established by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). The FGRWG was established by the NAFC in 1961 as the Working Group on Forest Tree Improvement but went through several changes in names to eventually become the Forest Genetics Resources Working Group as the focus shifted to the long-term. The mission of the group is to encourage and promote conservation of all forest genetic resources. Genetic resources are threatened by many causes, most traceable to the demands of a burgeoning human population. Without careful conservation, losses of genetic resources could occur at a time when they are most needed. Protected areas are important, but transfer of forest genetic resources also may be necessary to counter environmental change and achieve sustainable development. However, support to conserve and manage these resources has been limited, except for a few important species. Forest genetic resources can be used in traditional breeding programs or in the new biotechnologies. The advent of molecular technology makes even non-commercial species valuable for their genetic resources (e.g., Pacific yew).

The membership of the FGRWG consists of three representatives from each of the member nations of the NAFC. Current delegates are:

Canada - Judy Loo, Jean Beaulieu, Barry Jaquish

México - Jesús Vargas H., Honorio Hernández M.

USA - F. Tom Ledig, J. Brad St. Clair, Ron Schmidting

Some of the accomplishments of the group:

1. Initiated the World Directory of Forest Geneticists and Tree Breeders (1965, revised in 1977 and 1998).
2. Supported the establishment of the first forest genetics research facility in México (Chapingo, 1985).
3. Launched and coordinated surveys of several Mexican *Picea* and *Pinus* species.
4. Provided training opportunities for nine Mexican scientists and students.
5. Conducted training courses in genetics in 1980, 1984, 1990, 1993, and 1995.
6. Organized an international workshop on North American Temperate Forest Genetics Resources, Berkeley, CA, June 1995.
7. Organized the first North American Forest Biology Workshop to be held in México, in Mérida, Yucatán, July 2000.

Presented at the 26<sup>th</sup> Southern Forest  
Tree Improvement Conference,  
Athens, GA, June 26-29, 2001.