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Engagement of Stakeholders at the Local Level is Critical for Success

Report from the IUFRO Extension & Knowledge Exchange Working Party conference on 25-30 September 30, 2016, in Kenora, Ontario, Canada, <https://www.cif-ifc.org/2016/04/2016-iufro-extension-and-knowledge-exchange-conference-kenora-ontario/>

By Janean Creighton and John Pineau, Coordinator and Deputy Coordinator for the IUFRO Extension & Knowledge Exchange Working Party 9.01.03, <http://www.iufro.org/science/divisions/division-9/90000/90100/90103/>

In a world of ever diminishing resources, the need for innovative and creative approaches to research and educational program delivery is of utmost importance. Therefore the conference focused on ways to engage stakeholders and communities through encouraging their participation in program development and delivery as a means for filling this need.

As a result, the conference presentations covered a wide range of approaches to engagement and dissemination, and participants represented a variety of disciplines including agroforestry, community development, forest products, biofuels, prescribed fire, and social science.

The conference theme of “Increasing capacity for program delivery through knowledge exchange networks and peer-to-peer learning” was chosen specifically to allow for cross-discipline interactions and networking.

The conference was generously hosted by FPinnovations, Canada (<https://fpinnovations.ca/Pages/index.aspx>) and the Canadian Institute of Forestry (<https://www.cif-ifc.org/>). A total of 25 participants from Canada, United States, Ireland, Sweden, Bangladesh and New Zealand discussed the following key issues:

- Engaging stakeholders at the local level will increase success for adoption of new technologies.
- It is important to identify local “champions” that can assist extension in the promotion of programs.
- Collaborations can and do help solve problems and find solutions.
- Urban forestry will become increasingly important as populations continue to increase.
- Successful collaborations take time to develop.

Participants spent a day at the International Institute for Sustainable Development Experimental Lakes Area (IISD-ELA). IISD-ELA is an area of 58 lakes reserved for conducting long-term ecological research. Examples include an experiment in which scientists reduced water flowing into a lake to mimic drier conditions expected in the Canadian Boreal shield due to climate change; an ongoing experiment involved adding small amounts of mercury to a lake and its watershed to mimic atmospheric mercury deposition from coal-fired power plants; the longest-running experiment at the ELA involving adding phosphorus and nitrogen to a lake since 1968 to study nutrient contributions to algal blooms.

Conclusions

The major theme across presentations was that engagement of stakeholders at the local level is critical for success. Finding a local “champion” or utilizing peer-to-peer learning can be very effective in increasing capacity of local extensionists.



IUFRO Extension & Knowledge Exchange 2016 conference participants (Photo by Jennifer Evans Fawcett)

Outlook to future activities

The Extension & Knowledge Exchange working group is committed to the continuation of annual meetings. We prefer to keep these meetings relatively small (30 to 40 participants) as it allows for good discussions and interactions among participants.

In 2017, members are encouraged to participate in the 125th IUFRO Anniversary Conference in Freiberg, Germany. The EKE working party will be represented during the conference at the All-Division 9 meeting during our research group session #137: “How can we contribute to better information and more efficient communication among different fields of science?”

Discussion during our business meeting included identifying opportunities for additional projects outside of our annual conferences, including:

- A cross-boundary summit between the United States and Canada on forest health.
- How the Extension & Knowledge exchange working group might engage with other divisions in outreach efforts and strategies.
- Re-kindling our relationship with FAO.
- We will continue to explore these throughout the next year.

Special Issue of the Forestry Chronicle

The Forestry Chronicle is publishing 6 papers presented at this meeting in a special theme issue highlighting the IUFRO Extension & Knowledge Exchange meeting in Kenora, and addressing the theme: of “Increasing capacity for program delivery through knowledge exchange networks and peer-to-peer learning”. All participants were invited to submit papers for peer review with possible publication in the journal. Six papers were selected for inclusion in the issue, expected in December 2016.