



*IUFRO Spotlight* is an initiative of the International Union of Forest Research Organizations. Its aim is to introduce, in a timely fashion, significant findings in forest research from IUFRO officeholders and member organizations to a worldwide network of decision makers, policy makers and researchers.

*IUFRO Spotlight* issues up to October 2014 will primarily focus on the *IUFRO World Congress* that will take place on **5-11 October 2014 in Salt Lake City, Utah, USA**. The topics of individual Congress sessions will be highlighted in order to draw attention to the wide variety of themes that will be addressed at the Congress and their importance on a regional and global scale. [Link to: IUFRO 2014 World Congress Scientific Program](#)

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## American Indian forestry: blending science and tradition

For thousands of years, American Indians have been managing the forests in which they live.

Today, with trained professionals who are tribal members, their forests are managed with modern tools and methods; include manufacturing facilities and address global forest issues such as climate change, forest certification, carbon sequestration and a changing work force.

But the way in which American Indians manage their forests often differs from the philosophies and methods of non-native forest organizations that have been in North America for only a few hundred years.

And, those philosophical and operational differences – which will be elaborated on in less than two weeks at the IUFRO World Congress in Salt Lake City – leave American Indian forestry facing three major challenges, says Don Motanic, technical specialist with the U.S. Intertribal Timber Council.

One challenge to tribal forests is from fire or other forest health hazards that can spread from adjacent federal lands where forests are often allowed to age without being thinned or using prescribed burns, says Mr. Motanic.

Prescribed burns are relatively small-scale controlled burns, he explains, and are widely used on tribal lands as a management tool. The fire removes dead and dying trees as well as other combustible materials from the forest floor and, by reducing these potential fuels, limits the occurrence and scope of wildfire; diminishes the danger from insect and disease infestations; and opens up space to allow sunlight in to promote grass and shrubbery growth that increases biodiversity and provides browse, berries and other foods for deer, elk, bears and other wildlife.

A second challenge is funding. Tribes, he says, receive only 30% of the funding that goes to other federal forests.

The third challenge is the gap between a science-only forest management philosophy and the tribes' approach that uses scientific knowledge, but connects it to traditional knowledge, culture and values.

As an example of the different perspectives, Mr. Motanic notes that non-tribal forest organizations may name a forest for a single person. But many tribal people take their identity from the forest, from landforms, animals and other aspects of nature. They see themselves as part of a natural, holistic continuum.



*Prescribed fire used by the Tribes for centuries (Flathead Indian Reservation managed by the Confederated Tribes of the Salish and Kootenai Tribes).  
Photo by IFMAT-III*

They view nature, and their relationship with it, as an infinite event. So, naming a forest after one person is a reference to only one lifetime – a finite unit – and, from the American Indian perspective, doesn't make sense, he says.

Mr. Motanic says the IUFRO World Congress will give American Indians an opportunity to show the rest of the world what the tribes are doing in terms of forest management and, once those people are aware, the hope is they will want to learn more.

They will see, he says, that American Indian forest stewardship supports thriving, fully empowered communities that share success in exercising sovereign decision-making, creating sustainable economies for communities and implementing strategies that perpetuate forest health for future generations.



*Restored forest after timber harvest, thinning and fire (Flathead Indian Reservation managed by the Confederated Tribes of the Salish and Kootenai Tribes). Photo by IFMAT-III*

The world will learn that the tribes are sovereign nations dealing with the United States on a government-to-government basis, unique to each of the 565 tribes in the country. They will also learn that the values for each tribe may differ and in each case their forest management is guided by culture and tradition absorbed over thousands of years.

This Congress session, entitled „American Indian Forestry“ will also illustrate how the tribes have developed a balance among social, economic and environmental issues in terms of their forest management, Mr. Motanic says, and will show how a growing workforce of tribal technicians, professionals and researchers is guiding their forest management.

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