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NORTH AMERICAN FOREST COMMISSION

TWENTY-SEVENTH SESSION

Madison, Wisconsin, USA, 11 - 13 June 2014

THE UN DEVELOPMENT AGENDA BEYOND 2015: SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

Background

1. At the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) in 2012, member States launched a process to develop a set of sustainable development goals (SDGs), which should be action-oriented, limited in number, aspirational and easy to communicate. The goals should address in a balanced way all three dimensions of sustainable development (economic, social, environmental) and be coherent with and integrated into the UN development agenda beyond 2015. To this end, member States resolved to establish an inclusive and transparent intergovernmental process on sustainable development goals that is open to all stakeholders and to constitute an Open Working Group (OWG) to submit a proposal for SDGs to the 68th Session of the General Assembly in 2014. Forests are one of the key topics contained in the Rio+20 outcome “The future we want” and the OWG will discuss forests in February 2014. For this purpose, a Forest Issues Brief will be prepared by the Interagency Technical Support Team for Forests coordinated by the Secretariat of the United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF), with inputs from the Collaborative Partnership on Forests. The Forest Issues Brief and the discussion by the OWG present the main opportunity to highlight and raise the profile of forests in the SDGs.

2. In the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), forests featured only under MDG 7 as one of the indicators for reversing the loss of environmental resources, focusing only on the negative consequences of losing forests. It was noted at various fora that the MDGs did not recognize the multi-functionality of forests and their full contributions to all three dimensions of sustainable development. They did not take into account the important contributions forests make to food security, poverty reduction, low carbon economies, human health and a healthy environment (e.g. climate change mitigation, regulation of water flows, soil stabilization and improvement biodiversity), thus contributing also to MDG 1, 3 and 6. Raising the profile of forests in the SDGs would be crucial to achieve better recognition of the importance of forests to human well being and sustainable development.

3. Apart from highlighting the contributions of forests to the three dimensions of sustainable development, the Forest Issue Brief will provide an overview of the options related to forests and the

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development of the SDGs. It will also include recommendations on the way forward towards a forest-related SDG, a framework for setting targets and the development of indicators.

4. A number of options are available for the inclusion of forests in the SDGs. Two options will be discussed in the Forest Issues Brief that have the highest potential to capture the full contributions of forests to sustainable development:

- 1) An SDG specifically on forests. This would ensure that the full range of contributions of forests to sustainable development is recognized. Targets would be consistent with the Global Objectives on Forests negotiated by UNFF and agreed by the UN General Assembly. The seven thematic elements of sustainable forest management (SFM), that cover the three dimensions of sustainable development, have been adopted by UNFF and criteria and indicators have been developed and mechanisms put in place to assess progress towards SFM. These mechanisms could serve as a basis for developing and measuring indicators for an SDG on forests. This option would allow for forests being represented in a truly holistic manner on the highest level of developmental policies.
- 2) An SDG on natural resources where forests would be considered jointly with energy, biodiversity, land, water, agriculture, mountains and other renewable resources. This approach would ensure a cross-sectoral approach linking forests to the sectors that have a significant influence on its contributions to sustainable development. It would also reduce the number of SDGs as several key issues would be captured under one SDG. However, it would imply setting sector specific targets, i.e. there would be a target on forests, one on energy, etc. Capturing the full contributions of forests through one target would be difficult to achieve. An open question is whether forests could be the a common element holding various natural resources together or whether this is more realistic to think about a goal dealing with natural resources and where forests are properly represented.

Points for consideration

The Commission may wish to consider:

- Encouraging countries in the region to actively engage in the discussions on a forest-related SDG (including the development of targets and indicators) through the members of the Open Working Group¹ to ensure that the full contributions of forests to the three dimensions of sustainable development are fully captured in the SDGs;
- Encouraging countries in the region to analyze the different approaches to a forest-related SDG and to clearly articulate their preferences;
- Requesting FAO to support the development of a forest-related SDG, by providing technical inputs to the Forest Issues Brief and the discussion of forests by the Open Working Group.

¹ North American Group: Canada, Mexico, United States of America