Challenges in Communicating Scientific Information About Global Climate Change, Forests, and Predictions for the Future to Nonscientific Audiences

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Climate change has rapidly become an issue of primary interest to policy makers, land managers, and the public worldwide. Since the early 1990s, information related to forest and climate change has been increasingly generated. Much of this information was and continues to be about effects on forest vegetation and carbon storage and release by trees. Emerging issues are climate effects on fire, water, and land use changes. Scientists are moving from the modeling and prediction of climate change to studies of adaptation and mitigation. As the content of their information is shifting, scientists also find that demand is increasing for their communication to nonscientific audiences. This demand often out strips the ability of scientists to communicate with the policymakers, land managers, and news reporters who want their most scientific insights and information. This presentation describes these and other challenges in assuring that scientific information related to climate change is communicated to non-scientific audiences through briefings, non-technical publications, the news media, and multimedia products. It also provides methods for addressing these challenges including use of language, visuals, and new techniques in electronic communications. Examples of these methods are presented.