

Science–Policy Dialogues catalyze the integration of science and policy in the Canadian Forest Service

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Abstract: Confronted with many new and complex issues, the forest sector is experiencing an increased demand for scientific input to policy development and implementation. Inherent differences in the types and scales of activities carried out by the science and the policy communities, creates many challenges for working together. To bridge the gap between science and policy, Natural Resources Canada’s Canadian Forest Service (CFS) developed the Science–Policy Dialogues (SP Dialogues) in 2004. The goal of the SP Dialogues is to promote communication as a first step toward the integration of science and policy. Fostering and enhancing communication between the two groups allows for the development of a common understanding of issues and cooperative approaches to their resolution.

SP Dialogues have been successful in bringing scientists and policy analysts, within and outside governments, to share points of view, identify common elements and approaches for addressing priorities on complex issues with strong interplay between science and policy. The following issues have been central themes for SP Dialogues: challenges associated with implementation of the Species at Risk Act; synergies between strategies for conservation of forest genetic resources and climate change adaptation options; international negotiation positions (e.g. genetically modified trees, implementation of ecosystem approaches); and, national research agendas (e.g. climate change, biodiversity, boreal forest). The SP Dialogues have taken various formats based on the triggers that have initiated them or the goals that they were trying to achieve. The focus of all Dialogues, however, was open exchange.

Participant feedback identified the following as particularly successful elements of the Dialogues: a common platform for framing the Dialogue; shared experiences and opinions among groups with diverse interests and backgrounds; fostered learning; and, encouragement and tools to develop innovative approaches to complex emerging issues. The SP Dialogues initiative, as a tool for strengthening interactions between the science and policy communities, has further taken root within the organization with the initiation of *SP Notes*. This web-based publication series designed to broaden the perspectives of stakeholders and the public on key policy questions, calls for holistic issues analyses and requires a science-policy dialogue throughout the development of the note.