

Introduction

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Wherever and whenever forests and humans have occupied the same space on Earth, it can be expected that Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFP)¹ have made important contributions to people's livelihoods. NTFP research and policy, however, have generally focused on the Third World. This special issue shifts attention to NTFP use, research, and policy concerns in the United States as a way of illustrating the important contribution of these products to post-industrial societies.

Although NTFPs are often overlooked by public and private forest land managers, the contributions in Section I illustrate that NTFP use and management in the Pacific Northwest and Upper Midwest has a very long history and continues to be widespread, complex and dynamic. Thadani begins the discussion and provides important comparative background in a paper on the development of NTFPs as management and conservation strategies in the Third World. Questions raised by his work include: What are the differences and similarities between NTFPs' importance to rural residents of the tropics and the United States? What social, economic, and ecological difficulties lurk in the promotion of NTFP commercialization as a sustainable development

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strategy? and How might lessons from the developing world inform research and management in post-industrial settings? Emery and O'Halek then set the stage for a discussion of present-day NTFP issues in the United States by describing the historical context of NTFP use and management in the Pacific Northwest and Upper Midwest. Among the questions they address are: What role have NTFPs played in different cultures within the United States, what products have been important regionally and nationally, and how has the economic importance of NTFPs varied by region and time period over the past several hundred years? Next, Turner and Cocksedge describe aboriginal (e.g., First Nations and Native American) uses of NTFPs on both sides of the western Canada-U.S. border. Their monograph suggests several questions: What are the distinctive interests of aboriginal peoples in NTFP use and management throughout North America? What is the relationship between subsistence and trade uses of NTFPs? What ecological and social factors influence the sustainability of harvesting? Alexander and McLain follow this analysis with a brief examination of economic trends in three major NTFP sub-sectors—medicinals, floral greens, and wild edibles. Their discussion addresses the questions: What species and products are harvested in the United States today? What is the economic scope of specific NTFP markets? How are NTFP markets and sources of supply in the United States tied into global economies? What are the consequences of increased demand for NTFP products and species for the sustainability of forested ecosystems? Freed concludes Section I with his case study of a county in the state of Washington, illustrating the role of NTFPs in local economies.

The production of a more comprehensive base of scientific knowledge for NTFPs is often identified as a critical component for sustainable management of NTFPs under conditions of industrial extraction. NTFP research in the United States is poorly funded, fragmented and limited in scope in comparison to research on timber, recreation, and wildlife. However, networks of scientific researchers interested in NTFPs are beginning to form in the United States and Canada. The densest node of scientific activity on NTFPs exists in the Pacific Northwest region, an area with a large supply of a variety of commercially valuable NTFPs and a highly contentious forest management context. In Section II, Vance, Pilz et al., and Alexander et al. provide an overview of this scientific activity in their discussions of different aspects of the USDA Forest Service Pacific Northwest Research Sta-

tion's NTFP research programs and projects. Their contributions focus on the following questions: What is the scope and content of on-going and proposed NTFP research programs? How do these programs address on-the-ground forest management concerns? Which scientific disciplines are incorporated into NTFP research? What attempts are scientists making to integrate NTFP research across disciplines and to link a variety of forest stakeholders into the development and implementation of NTFP research agendas?

The participation of NTFP resource users in policy making and implementation also is often cited as a necessary component of sustainable NTFP management. In Section III, Love and Jones, Emery, Hansis et al., and McLain and Jones address questions related to the existing and potential roles that NTFP harvesters and buyers play in managing NTFPs sustainably. Some of these questions include: Why have NTFPs become a policy and management issue at this moment in history? What types of knowledge do harvesters have of NTFPs and the environments in which they are located? What stewardship practices do harvesters engage in? How is the social composition of harvester populations changing as demand for products increases in certain parts of the United States? What are some of the key characteristics of NTFP tenure regimes, and what conflicts have arisen as the socio-ecological context within which these were developed has changed? To what extent are harvesters and buyers involved in forest management decisions? What factors limit their involvement? And what efforts are they making to expand their political influence?

McLain and Alexander end the issue with a summary of the lessons learned from the research described earlier, noting in particular the importance of encouraging collaborative and interdisciplinary types of research. They also point out the relevance of NTFP research in the United States to the work being done on similar issues in other parts of the world, and thus the importance of widening and strengthening the global scope of NTFP research networks.

This issue represents the joint efforts of more than a dozen researchers with training and experience in disciplines as diverse as anthropology, ecology, economics, forestry, geography, mycology, and policy science. We share a belief that NTFPs play important roles in ecological, economic, and cultural systems. We also have in common a dedication to the expansion and development of informal and formal research networks that facilitate the exchange of information about

NTFPs and encourage innovative thinking about the current and potential roles of NTFPs in socio-ecological systems.

With the exception of one contributor, whose research focuses on NTFP harvesters in Northern Michigan, the contributors to this issue work and live in the Pacific Northwest region of northern North America. As a result, many of the articles and case examples focus on research or issues relevant to that region. The dynamics of NTFP use and management may be quite different in other parts of the United States and Canada. We hope that this issue will encourage the development of comparative work on NTFPs within the United States and Canada, as well as between northern North America and other parts of the world. We believe this issue constitutes a useful addition to the fine body of existing work on NTFPs and hope that it will encourage both researchers and policy makers to think of NTFPs as a truly global issue.

NOTE

1. The terms "non-timber forest products" (NTFP), "non-wood forest products" (NWFP), and "special forest products" (SFP) are used interchangeably in this issue. Although the term "non-timber forest products" is gaining popularity, many people in the United States use the term "special forest products" when referring to forest products such as berries, fungi, leaves, boughs, roots, and bark.