

CSREES Portfolio Review Expert Panel Report Summary

Portfolio 5.1 Forests and Rangelands CY 1999 – 2003

SUMMARY

External Review Completed: February 2005

Portfolio Description

This portfolio is a mix of research, education and extension programs aligned with seven problem areas intended to provide science-based knowledge and education to improve the management of forest and rangelands. Programs in this portfolio increase the nation's capacity to address critical environmental priorities and to improve the sustainability and manageability of forests, rangelands, watersheds, and other renewable natural resources including fish and wildlife. This leads to a better understanding of global climate change and its impact on the diversity of plant and animal life. The Knowledge Areas addressed are as follows:

- KA 121 - Management of Range Resources
- KA 122 - Management and Control of Forest and Range Fires
- KA 123 - Management and Sustainability of Forest Resources
- KA 124 - Urban Forestry
- KA 125 - Agroforestry
- KA 135 - Aquatic and Terrestrial Wildlife
- KA 136 - Conservation of Biological Diversity

Summary of Recommendations

In 2005 a panel comprised of independent experts from the field was convened to assess and score the current state of the Forest and Rangelands Portfolio. A discussion of specific comments and recommendations related to each of the dimensions of the three Office of Management and Budget (OMB) research and development (R&D) criteria used (relevance, quality, and performance) is provided below.

Relevance

The panel believes that breadth and complexity of natural resource issues in the United States exceeds the current capacity of the CSREES and Land-Grant University partnership and that there is good documentation of integration between extension and research. However, they note that integration of the Higher Education Program with research and/or extension is missing from the document. Additionally, the panel found that resource allocation has been inconsistent among Problem Areas and that there is a lack of attention directed to under-served and urban populations.

Quality

The volume of findings and number of students graduated in natural resource fields is impressive given the resources available. CSREES involvement of stakeholders in program planning and implementation is excellent. Success stories in many of the problem areas suggested alignment with the current state of science based knowledge and the number of refereed publications documented in the portfolio indicated good science methodology. However, it is recognized that it is more difficult to document appropriate methodology in extension program development and

delivery. The panel recommends continued utilization of volunteer programs, on-line formats and interactive teaching methods, as appropriate, for target audiences.

Performance

The number of refereed publications per scientist year and per project indicates high levels of productivity. Approximately 15 to 20% of research programs receive a no-cost extension and the panel regards this as a reasonable proportion. However, there is variation in comprehensiveness of the portfolio for particular Problem Areas and in particular time frames. Funding in some problem areas is inconsistent, and leadership, management and guidance are variable in certain problem areas. There is insufficient national synthesis of results from like-projects relating to major issues. In the spirit of partnerships, there could be improved documentation of outcomes and impacts at both the federal and the Land-Grant University level.

General Comments

The panel found that the people of CSREES NRE make a significant difference and add considerable value to the work of both the agency and the partnership. The evidence presented in this portfolio reflects hard work and indicates high levels of productivity. There is evidence of increasing emphasis on integration and that CSREES staffs are becoming more creative and determined about planning and reporting as forms of accountability.

Comments on Future Directions presented by CSREES

The panel recommends continued effort in partnerships with 1890 and 1994 institutions. Many opportunities exist for programming on critical issues, expanding urban track issues and the issue of wildland-urban interface. National needs can often be met by working in international collaborations and contexts.

The panel suggests that the partnership continue to expand interactions with stakeholders to include "emerging stakeholders." It is as important for planning processes to identify new stakeholders and partners as it is for the process to identify emerging issues and priorities. Further, players throughout the partnership should examine all federal reports across states within program areas in order to document the synergistic effect of integrated funding on levels of research, education and extension productivity.

Data issues

There is a need to standardize and expand the documentation and evaluation metrics across program areas and increase the archiving and accessibility of research project data (in the CRIS and other systems). This is necessary in order to permit meta-analysis of the data.

Evaluation issues

The panel recommends training on the logic model for agency employees and external and internal partners. Instead of just evaluating past performance, the panel also suggests developing strategic plans for each problem area and increasing stakeholder contributions by including panel members and other stakeholders in the development and review of CSREES strategic plans at the portfolio level.

Finally, the panel suggests increasing the documentation of outcomes. Formative evaluations to document program implementation successes and challenges should be performed.

Portfolio Score

Portfolio 5.1 received a total score of 77 from the panel. This score places the portfolio in the category 'moderately effective in supporting CSREES objectives.'