REPORT ON THE STATUS OF INDIAN FOREST LANDS
FISCAL YEAR 2020

AS REQUIRED BY SECTION 312 (C)
OF THE

NATIONAL INDIAN FOREST RESOURCES MANAGEMENT ACT
P.L. 101-630

SUBMITTED TO

COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

AND

COMMITTEE ON INDIAN AFFAIRS
UNITED STATES SENATE

SUBMITTED BY

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
BUREAU OF INDIAN AFFAIRS
OFFICE OF TRUST SERVICES
DIVISION OF FORESTRY AND WILDLAND FIRE MANAGEMENT

ALBUQUERQUE, NM

January 2022

Indian Forestry Status Report to Congress
Bureau of Indian Affairs, Office of Trust Services
Division of Forestry and Wildland Fire Management

Fiscal Year 2020

Purpose

Public Law 101-630, Title III, 104 Stat. 4532, entitled the *National Indian Forest Resources Management Act* (NIFRMA), requires the Secretary of the Interior to submit an annual Indian Forestry Status Report to Congress. Section 312 (c) of this Act reads as follows:

> *STATUS REPORT TO CONGRESS- The Secretary shall submit, within 1 year of the first full fiscal year after the date of enactment of this title and within 6 months of the end of each succeeding fiscal year, a report to Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs of the United States House of Representatives, the Select Committee on Indian Affairs of the United States Senate, and to the affected Indian tribes a report on the status of Indian forest lands with respect to standards, goals and objectives set forth in approved forest management plans for each Indian tribe with Indian forest lands. The report shall identify the amount of Indian forest land in need of forestation or other silviculture treatment and the quantity of timber available for sale, offered for sale, and sold for each Indian tribe.*

This Report is prepared and submitted by the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA); the primary Federal agency responsible for fiduciary trust oversight of forest management activities on Indian forest lands.

The BIA Forestry Mission

The mission of the BIA, Office of Trust Services, Division of Forestry and Wildland Fire Management is to provide specialized budget and policy oversight and technical expertise in forest and wildland fire management to American Indian tribes and Alaska Natives. In cooperation with 313 tribes, over 18 million acres of tribal and allotted trust forest lands are actively managed for a variety of purposes. Forests provide a key source of revenue and jobs for tribes and individual Indians and play an important role in sustaining tribal cultures and traditions. Management activities within forest lands are governed by forest management plans which outline ecologically and biologically sustainable forest management practices formulated to meet tribal goals and objectives. Forest management activities include timber sales, timber stand improvement (thinning and pruning), prescribed burning, and reforestation.

The BIA has a trust responsibility to help tribes manage forests to provide a sustained yield of forest products and to restore and maintain resilient and ecologically-functional lands. BIA's interdisciplinary approach to forest resource management includes partnerships with tribal forestry and fire programs, Federal, State, and local land management agencies, the Intertribal Timber Council, academia, and non-governmental agencies. Tribes actively work with cooperators such as the U.S. Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management through the Tribal Forest Protection Act and other authorities which create opportunities for larger, cross-jurisdictional treatments. The BIA supports tribal goals aimed at achieving a balance of the

protection of valued landscapes with the production of economic benefit through active forest management.

Fiscal Year 2020 Accomplishments

Accomplishments for fiscal year (FY) 2020 include the following.

- 14,608 acres planted (Reforestation)
- 16,835 acres thinned (Timber Stand Improvement)
- 738 million board feet of timber volume available for harvest (allowable annual cut)
- 393 million board feet of timber volume harvested generating $53 million in tribal income

	FY2017	FY2018	FY2019	FY2020
Timber Volume Harvested *(thousand board feet)*	384,246	388,002	342,197	392,860
Timber Volume Available for Harvest *(thousand board feet)*	740,000	750,000	748,000	738,487
Stumpage Income Generated *($ dollars)*	$54,526,516	$86,127,672	$49,994,527	$53,491,721
Thinning Acres	17,073	16,223	18,809	16,835
Reforestation Acres	11,306	13,773	19,240	14,608

The attached spreadsheet provides both national and regional detail on the FY 2020 data. In the spreadsheet, MBM stands for thousand feet board measure.

Current Challenges

Indian forestry experienced a new set of challenges in 2020. Many BIA and tribal forestry programs postponed forest management activities during the COVID-19 pandemic to protect the health and safety of tribal communities and employees. BIA and tribal foresters are dedicated to the mission of supporting tribal goals for maintaining the health and economic productivity of Indian forests while respecting tribal regulations and guidance throughout the pandemic. These foresters adapted quickly to new circumstances and challenges, and timber harvested increased over 50,000,000 board feet due to increased market demand for timber. Thinning acres and reforestation acres, however, fell below FY 2019 levels, due to pandemic-related staffing changes. Thinning and reforestation efforts could improve by adding contracting officers dedicated to forestry and streamlining the contracting process.

In addition to the pandemic, the current challenges to Indian forestry include: high rates of staff turnover; field locations that are distant from wood processing facilities; limited infrastructure, hampering transportation and communication; aging field offices and facilities, hindering recruitment and retention; and climate change factors that contribute to catastrophic wildland fires, insect infestations and disease outbreaks, invasive species, and weather extremes. Predominant issues include the following:

Workforce. These issues include natural turnover of the workforce from retirements of Baby Boomer generation workers, accelerated by other workforce challenges around training and continuing education due to budget limitations in recent years, and low rates of recruitment and retention of new hires due to remote locations, difficult working conditions, and aging facilities. The lack of trained tribal personnel in forestry has a direct adverse economic impact on the tribes. Despite a target specified by policy of preparing 100% of the annual allowable cut for harvest, because of these staffing challenges, in FY 2020 only 52% of the annual allowable cut was prepared.

Workforce development is a current priority for the BIA. We are working to identify workforce gaps and training needs in Forestry and Wildland Fire. Standardized position descriptions are being developed to fill vacancies through standard and mass recruitment efforts. BIA Forestry also established a Timber Team in FY 2020 that travels to field units to help complete forest management projects. This not only accomplishes important field work but also provides training and recruitment opportunities for BIA and tribal foresters.

Markets. The forest products industry has been in a state of rapid change since the mid-1990s. While some of this is due to the adoption of new technologies and changes in consumer demand such as the replacement of paper products by electronic equivalents, much of it is due to other market dynamics. Individual companies have merged, eliminated work divisions in favor of using contractors, and closed outdated facilities rather than modernizing them. Smaller companies, including some operated by tribes, struggle due to lack of capital needed to update outdated mills, or due to uncertain supply chains caused by changes in availability of timber from Federal lands, natural disruptions such as large wildland fires, and shifts in operating costs tied to energy prices. Tribal forest management is often geared toward a single market, and lack of secondary market outlets makes forest product sales vulnerable to the economic externalities that affect primary markets.

Emergency planning. The impacts of climate change and other forest health factors, including catastrophic wildland fires, insect infestations and disease outbreaks, invasive species, and weather extremes, disrupt or destroy forests, nearby communities, and forest-related economies. In many cases, local tribal governments remain unprepared for natural disasters including wildfires, floods, hurricanes, tornadoes, and other severe weather events. The BIA is currently using Lidar when possible, to gather landscape level data that can be used to determine forest health and show where forests are at higher risk for loss due to wildfire, insects, and disease, and does coordinate with other Federal land managers in determining the larger risks to tribal and Federal forests. This effort can provide critical data to allow for planning to avoid future resource loss. BIA's Tribal Resilience program supports initiatives from tribes to better prepare for natural disasters but grant funding for these projects is limited compared to the numerous and often immediate tribal vulnerabilities and threats to tribal forests are often not prioritized. The result is not all priority areas can be fully covered to bring about desired conditions that could fully protect communities and forests.

Despite these challenges, tribes are assuming greater leadership in Indian Forestry through self-determination and self-governance. BIA and tribal programs have the potential to provide models for sustainable forestry and resource management for the nation's forests.

The Indian Forest Management Assessment Team

During the development of the NIFRMA, Congress declared the United States has a trust responsibility toward Indian forest lands and that Federal investment in Indian forest management is significantly below the level of investment in United States Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, or private forest land management (25 USC § 3101). The NIFRMA requires the Secretary of the Interior to conduct an independent assessment of Indian Forestry every 10 years. This assessment is conducted through the Indian Forest Management Assessment Team (IFMAT) process following regulations prescribed in 25 CFR §163.80. The most recent IFMAT process (IFMAT-III) was carried out from 2011 to 2013 and found "the federal government continues to inadequately fulfill its trust obligations to Indian forestry" and that "funding and staffing levels are lower now than at the time of IFMAT-I and well below those of comparable public and private programs." The fourth iteration of the IFMAT process commenced in 2021, with the final report expected in 2023.

The complete 2013 IFMAT assessment can be found at:
http://www.itcnet.org/issues_projects/issues_2/forest_management/assessment.html

Further Information

For questions related to this report, please contact Peter Wakeland, Chief Forester, Division of Forestry and Wildland Fire Management, BIA Office of Trust Services, at (505) 563-5252 or, peter.wakeland@bia.gov.

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FY 2020 INDIAN FORESTRY STATUS REPORT TO CONGRESS												
		Reforestation		Stand Improvement		Available Volume (Allowable Annual Cut)		Timber Volume		Timber Harvested		
Region	Current Approved Forest Mangement Plans	Planted Acres	Need Acres	Thinned Acres	Need Acres	Timberland (MBM)	Woodland (Thousand Cords)	Offered (MBM)	Sold (MBM)	Volume (MBM)	Value ($)	
ALASKA REGION	11	0	0	19	5,076	10,571	0	9,571	10	10	$	1,000
EASTERN REGION	24	88	0	0	0	29,723	0	17,345	17,345	20,567	$	1,310,613
EASTERN OKLAHOMA REGION	14	0	200	25	5,000	2,268	0	0	22	111	$	23,000
GREAT PLAINS REGION	15	3	14,829	58	2,627	4,321	49	30	0	30	$	-
MIDWEST REGION	41	471	61,840	1,790	36,001	173,404	0	40,803	32,124	116,803	$	12,078,303
NAVAJO REGION	1	0	0	155	2,904	15,900	89	35,210	32,859	32,859	$	104,649
NORTHWEST REGION	48	13,659	358,516	10,001	254,911	375,146	0	283,156	248,200	199,722	$	31,369,740
PACIFIC REGION	70	83	708	498	2,996	14,693	51	1,054	1,054	5,450	$	1,742,351
ROCKY MOUNTAIN REGION	7	20	22,255	315	56,814	16,690	4	74	74	74	$	1,552
SOUTHERN PLAINS REGION	22	0	0	0	0	600	0	1	1	1	$	1,913
SOUTHWEST REGION	23	130	24,685	1,221	36,607	34,600	66	58	1,313	2,362	$	51,943
WESTERN REGION	37	154	65,017	2,753	86,182	60,571	66	320	14,269	14,871	$	6,806,657
NATIONAL TOTALS	313	14,608	548,050	16,835	489,118	738,487	325	387,622	347,271	392,860	$	53,491,721