REPORT ON THE STATUS OF INDIAN FOREST LANDS
FISCAL YEAR 2023

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
ALBUQUERQUE, NM

March 2024

Indian Forestry Status Report to Congress
Bureau of Indian Affairs, Office of Trust Services
Division of Forestry and Wildland Fire Management
Fiscal Year 2023

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 Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) Forestry Mission

The mission of the BIA, Office of Trust Services, Division of Forestry is to provide specialized budget and policy oversight and technical expertise in forest management to American Indian tribes and Alaska Natives. In cooperation with 314 tribes, over 19 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, forest monitoring and inventory, 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 United States Forest Service (USFS) and the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) 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 2023 Accomplishments

Accomplishments for fiscal year (FY) 2023 include the following.

- 274 million board feet of timber volume harvested generating $50 million in stumpage income
- 741 million board feet of timber volume available for harvest (allowable annual cut)
- 19,581 acres planted (Reforestation)
- 13,848 acres precommercial thinned (Timber Stand Improvement)

	FY2020	FY2021	FY2022	FY2023
Timber Harvested (thousand board feet)	392,860	395,426	313,268	274,446
Timber Available for Harvest (thousand board feet)	738,487	733,022	712,753	741,446
Stumpage Income Generated	$53,491,72	$79,857,236	$79,050,564	$50,026,630
Precommercial Thinning Acres	16,835	23,952	26,329	13,848
Reforestation Acres	14,608	13,425	23,627	19,581

The attached spreadsheets provide both national and regional detail on the FY 2023 data. In the spreadsheets, MBF stands for one thousand board feet.

Current Challenges

Base Forestry Program Funding. The management of trust forest lands is funded at $2.89 per acre (IFMAT IV Report, page 61). Forestry Program (TPA) funding has not kept up with inflation resulting in reduced capacity and resources to manage forests on trust land. In comparison, the National Forest Management Appropriation Budget for 2019 for USFS acres less Wilderness was $12.24/acre (IFMAT IV Report, page 63), and the BLM Western Oregon 2019 Budget excluding hazardous fuel reduction was $41.41/acre (IFMAT IV Report, page 64). Underfunding and understaffing are creating numerous challenges to sustainably managing trust forest lands for the benefit of Indian people. Thinning, reforestation, and timber harvest efforts would improve by adding additional field forestry staff, geospatial staff, contracting officers, and streamlining the contracting process.

Reforestation. The BIA is a contributor to the national revegetation and reforestation effort across the Department of the Interior and the Department of Agriculture. Investments in tribal greenhouses that grow conifer seedlings is needed to meet the reforestation goals identified in EO 14072. The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) Ecosystem Restoration (ER) Program provided $1.9 million to four tribal greenhouse update and expansion projects in FY 2022 and 2023, but more funding is needed to increase capacity and reduce the nearly 600,000 acres currently in need of reforestation. Personnel, collecting equipment, and modern storage facilities are also necessary for the development of tribal seed banks for the restoration of native and culturally significant plant species.

Timber Stand Improvement. Reducing the backlog of acres in need of timber stand improvement (TSI) treatments remains a challenge. Thinning acres decreased by 12,481 acres over the FY 2022 level while the total backlog of acres in need of treatment increased by 59,863 acres. TSI practices that improve the health, stocking, composition, and productivity of forest stands are essential for sustainable forest management and ensuring future revenue streams, employment opportunities, and resilient forest ecosystems for tribal communities.

Workforce. Current issues include natural turnover of the workforce from retirements, accelerated by other workforce challenges such as low rates of recruitment and retention of new hires, remote locations, difficult working conditions, and lack of budget support to repair or maintain facilities. Across the 12 BIA Regions, Forestry has many facilities in need of repair or replacement at an estimated cost of $40,000,000. Many BIA Forestry offices are currently located in decades-old facilities that minimally meet OSHA standards.

In FY 2023 only 40% of the allowable annual cut of 741,446 million board feet identified in forest management plans was prepared for sale and 37% of the allowable annual cut was harvested which resulted in $50 million in stumpage income generated for the tribes.

Workforce development and outreach are current priorities for the BIA. Workforce gaps and training needs in Forestry have been identified. 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 staff. Further expansion of the Timber Team is needed.

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. To assist tribal forest products production, BIA Forestry has funded 25 small infrastructure projects for 21 tribes totaling $4.7 million since 2018.

Infrastructure – Forest Roads. Over 46,900 miles of roads located on Indian trust forest lands were inventoried to assess road condition and maintenance needs. All twelve BIA Regions reported maintenance needs for roads that are necessary for the management and protection of Indian trust tribal forest lands. Approximately 3,000 miles of roads inventoried required no immediate maintenance but will require periodic maintenance over time. Of the remaining 43,000+ miles of roads requiring maintenance, the estimated cost for repair and maintenance is $1,326,292,504. This amount includes rock, grading, resurfacing, adding drainage features, cleaning/adding or replacing culverts, bridge needs or repair, cattleguard cleaning/adding or repair and road signs throughout the reservations.

Climate Related Impacts. The impacts of climate and other forest health factors, including 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 Light Detection and Ranging (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. Since 2020, BIA Forestry has funded five Lidar projects on five reservations at a total of $2.1 million. This includes the additional $1 million in FY 2023 Forestry Projects funds for Lidar. This effort can provide critical data to allow for planning to avoid future resource loss.

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-IV) was carried out from 2021 to 2023 and found "funding for BIA Forestry continues to be far below investments in the United States Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management funding for comparable lands," "limited staffing and issues

around workforce capacity are impacting tribal forest management," and "roads, facilities, and enforcement on tribal forests are in dire state."

The complete 2023 IFMAT Report can be found at:

Forestry Assessment : Forest Management : Issues : Issues & Projects : Intertribal Timber Council (itcnet.org)

Further Information

For questions related to this report, please contact Peter Wakeland, Chief Forester, Division of Forestry, BIA Office of Trust Services, at (541) 294-0431 or, peter.wakeland@bia.gov.

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FY 2023 INDIAN FORESTRY STATUS REPORT TO CONGRESS

REGION	Tribes/Management Units	Reforestation		Stand Improvement		Available Volume		Timber Volume		Timber Harvested	
		Planted Acres	Need Acres	Thinned Acres	Need Acres	Timberland (MBF)	Woodland (MBF)	Offered (MBF)	Sold (MBF)	Volume (MBF)	Value ($)
ALASKA	11	0	0	0	273	11,869	0	0	0	0	$ -
EASTERN	25	7	0	687	391	36,245	0	17,563	6,582	6,582	$ 286,621
EASTERN OKLAHOMA	14	27	55	360	465	2,944	4,596	16	16	16	$ 8,000
GREAT PLAINS	15	0	14,218	0	6,898	3,680	39,221	0	0	0	$ -
MIDWEST	41	589	62,898	1,691	30,354	172,832	0	90,985	72,389	72,048	$ 7,465,041
NAVAJO	1	0	0	0	0	15,900	65,405	44	44	44	$ 1,184
NORTHWEST	46	17,297	402,388	8,707	109,092	381,793	0	182,482	175,500	177,000	$ 37,829,421
PACIFIC	73	453	5,472	500	2,550	17,445	8,790	3,027	6,365	4,644	$ 1,293,140
ROCKY MOUNTAIN	7	1,100	33,882	460	53,170	14,700	16,900	704	391	1,576	$ 9,380
SOUTHERN PLAINS	22	0	0	0	9,228	600	0	0	0	664	$ 17,426
SOUTHWEST	24	0	2,763	593	355,195	32,917	47,360	2,543	69,551	4,220	$ 176,216
WESTERN	37	108	63,168	850	15,383	50,520	6,918	0	6,284	7,653	$ 2,940,201
TOTAL	**316**	**19,581**	**584,844**	**13,848**	**582,999**	**741,446**	**189,190**	**297,364**	**337,122**	**274,446**	**$ 50,026,630**