GLOBAL ENVIRONMENT OUTLOOK

GEO 6

UNEP

Regional Assessment for North America

Lands Situation

Key findings and policy messages

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Key findings

- USA lands situation
  - Since 2000, land has gone back to forests and rangelands as marginal croplands have been taken out of production
  - Farmland has been on a long-term decline since 1970. But between 2007 and 2012, farm area increased 4 million acres—the first increase since 1987
  - Urban expansion has slowed to a 6 percent increase since 2000; ***down*** from an 8 percent increase in the 1990s and 12-18 percent increases in the 1970s & 1980s.
- Canadian lands situation
  - Cropland area continues to grow about 1 percent annually, but in eastern Canada, abandoned cropland is reverting to forest.
  - 8 percent of Canada's most valuable agriculture land is not now farmed, because it's been developed as urban areas.
  - Half of Canada's urban areas have been developed on the best agriculture soils.

Key Policy Messages

- Recent cropland increases are a bright spot; good news for farmers'
  - Favorable markets—domestically and globally—have helped
  - So have new technologies for non-food agriculture products

- Conversion of good farmland & working farms to development is worrisome
  - Effective policies and tools are available at the local & provincial/state levels; local officials need to use them wisely.

- Challenges to forest management have emerged, resulting from multiple, complex, and interacting threats
  - Forest health is the issue
    - Changing rainfall patterns are increasing moisture stresses
    - Warmer winter temperatures aren't killing bugs like colder winters
    - Bug outbreaks are killing more trees over wider areas
    - Outcome is more trees are dying & dead trees fuel big wildfires
  - Restoring forest health and resiliency to weather & pests is a goal
    - More active forest management is needed
    - Social support for active forest management is missing

Key questions & New tools

- ***How can public foresters rebuild the public trust to manage forests to deal with declining forest health & create forests more resilient to changing climatic conditions and bugs?***

- New tools are emerging that may help restore public trust
  - Increased computing power & improved satellite/airborne sensors are making more & better data available faster
  - Next-generation geospatial tools and applications are making information more widely & publicly available.
  - Increased public access & transparency boosts public understanding; help them make up their own minds

- ***What else can be done to increase public trust in active forest management?***