

**CONTINENTAL DIALOGUE ON NON-NATIVE FOREST INSECTS AND DISEASES
JUNE 2006 PLANNING MEETING**

Meeting Summary

I. Overview

On June 20-22, 2006 a diverse group of representatives from state, federal and municipal agencies, private business and industry, academia, and non-governmental organizations gathered for the June Planning Meeting of the Continental Dialogue on Non-Native Forest Insects and Diseases at the Bolger Center in Potomac, Maryland.

This initial meeting was convened to explore opportunities for collaboratively addressing the threat of non-native insects and diseases to the forests of the United States and the rest of the North American continent. The meeting was sponsored by a steering committee convened by The Nature Conservancy and comprised of a cross-section of stakeholders with an interest in protecting forests from the threat of non-native insects and diseases.* (A list of steering committee members and a list of meeting participants are attached.)

Specific objectives for the meeting included (1) sharing information on the status of the threat of non-native forest insects and diseases, the challenges to reducing those threats, and potential strategies for overcoming those challenges; (2) seeking input and, if possible, agreement on a common vision and goals for potential collaborative action; (3) exploring specific strategies by which a common vision and goals could be implemented; and (4) charting next steps toward potential collaborative action.

Presentations and panel discussions provided a structure for sharing information on a variety of subjects including:

- The concerns and perspectives of the diverse constituencies represented
- The increasing threat to forests from invasive insects and diseases
- Public comprehension of forest invasive species issues and effective strategies for communicating the threat to the public, including results of a national survey and implications for follow-up
- Key pathways for introduction of invasive forest insects and diseases, specifically solid wood packaging and live plant imports
- The benefits and challenges of voluntary certification programs in other policy arenas

Each presentation was followed by an opportunity for plenary discussion.

The group also spent time in small breakout sessions getting to know each other in greater depth and exploring the dimensions of potential collaborative action. In particular, the small groups engaged in the following discussions:

* The issues discussed at the June Planning Meeting can be named in many ways: non-native forest insects and diseases, invasive forest species, invasive forest pests and pathogens, etc. This report uses the following terms interchangeably: non-native and invasive, insects and pests, diseases and pathogens.

- Exploring a vision and goals for a potential collaborative approach, including (1) identifying key challenges (2) considering how potential collaborative action might help overcome those challenges, and (3) assessing a draft vision and goals
- Exploring potential collaborative strategies, including strategies for (1) improving public understanding (2) developing certification programs or other voluntary incentive-based programs, and (3) improving public policy and increasing available resources.

Each breakout session lasted for an entire afternoon and was followed the next morning by an opportunity for the full group to discuss the work of the breakout groups.

Finally, the group had an opportunity for plenary discussion of next steps to move the collaborative effort forward, including a discussion of the potential objectives for a second meeting of the Dialogue and a discussion of the potential process for information exchange, discussion and preparation leading up to a second meeting.

The plenary and breakout sessions produced a diversity of perspectives, creative and pragmatic insights, and thoughtful ideas and suggestions. This report represents highlights of the key issues, concerns and ideas offered. Because it is a summary and not a transcript, it does not include every idea raised, nor will it attribute particular ideas or comments to individuals. Additional materials, including handouts and copies of many of the PowerPoint presentations used in the informational sessions, are available upon request from RESOLVE.

II. Developing a Vision and Goals for Collaborative Action

On the afternoon of the first day, meeting participants divided into three smaller breakout groups to discuss the development of a vision and goals for a potential collaborative approach. Points of discussion included (1) identifying key challenges to addressing the threat of invasive forest insects and diseases, (2) considering how potential collaborative action might help overcome those challenges, and (3) discussing and building on a draft set of visions and goals in light of ideas developed in the first part of the discussion.

Challenges to Effective Action on Non-Native Forest Insects and Diseases

Participants identified a wide variety of significant challenges. These can be broadly categorized as challenges that were technical and operational; trade-related, political and legal obstacles; challenges related to the need for additional resources; and challenges associated with the public's understanding of the issues. Some of the more consistently identified challenges included:

Preventing Introductions and the Complexities of Trade. Many participants commented that the increasing volume of international trade has created many more opportunities and pathways for invasive species to reach the United States. Furthermore, participants suggested that regulations have not been updated to take into account the challenges presented by such an increase in trade. Participants also pointed out that those most concerned with the effects of invasive forest species have limited ability to influence world trade practices or directly address practices at U.S. ports or prior to shipping overseas. Within the existing framework of trade and prevention policy, participants also noted the technical challenges of identifying what species might be a potential risk and finding methodologies to effectively block the pathways of entry.

Funding, Politics and Public Awareness. Participants noted the challenge of ensuring adequate resources to support prevention and inspections, for early detection and rapid response, and for control measures. Participants also identified the link between public awareness and funding, observing that issues with greater public and political attention are those that receive more funds. At this time, a key challenge will be to overcome the current lack of understanding and appreciation of the threat of invasive forest species among voters and the public in general. While forest fires in the West garner much attention, participants noted that the lack of awareness and political will to address the biological threat of invasive forest pests and pathogens may be a more significant problem. Many participants agreed that effectively communicating the issue and its importance to voters (and in turn to policy makers) will be essential to maintain or increase resources for existing programs and to develop the resources to support new approaches.

Engaging Resource Owners. Some participants observed that although forest owners have a huge stake in the issue, they have not engaged in any comprehensive way as yet. Participants suggested several reasons for this. Forest owners are a very diverse lot, including many small independent landowners as well as large industrial owners. Participants also observed a trend toward more investor ownership of forests by entities with limited understanding of forest management or the threat of non-native pests. Furthermore, some noted that trends in forest ownership are cyclical, with changes taking place about every seven years on average. This makes it difficult to maintain contact and relationships with individual owners.

Improving Coordination Among Partners. Another key challenge noted by participants throughout the meeting was the need to improve understanding and coordination among the many entities that have a responsibility or role in combating the threat of invasive forest insects and diseases including state, federal and municipal agencies as well as universities, the private sector and interested NGOs. Additionally, some participants suggested that it will be challenging, but very beneficial, to coordinate with the public and involve them as partners in detection and management.

Potential Collaborative Action to Overcome Challenges

After discussing the challenges related to forest insects and diseases, participants spent time brainstorming and discussing collaborative efforts that could help address these challenges. Some participants noted the inherent value of collaboration itself in terms of building understanding among diverse parties with very different perspectives and interests related to forests and invasive species. They noted also the value of pooling resources, information, and political clout to accomplish whatever goals upon which the group may decide. More specific categories of collaborative action and ideas generated by the group are outlined below.

Public Awareness, Education, and Outreach. One potential collaborative activity consistently emphasized by the participants was to improve the public's understanding of the threat of non-native species, including the difficulty of blocking pathways and preventing introductions, the importance of early detection and response, and the serious economic, environmental, and aesthetic consequences of significant forest invasions. There was some discussion of whether such an effort should focus on the public generally or, alternatively, target specific stakeholders, decision-makers or geographic regions likely to have a particular interest in the issue. Participants had numerous ideas about how a broad-based collaborative effort could help elevate public understanding and support for appropriate measures. Participant suggestions included, for example, developing broadly applicable, flexible and consistent materials and messages for use by multiple constituencies. (Although

discussion at this point in the agenda was generally limited to identifying general areas where collaboration could be effective, there was additional, detailed discussion of public awareness strategies in the second breakout session focused on collaborative strategies and objectives.)

Developing Voluntary Incentives or Certification Programs. Participants also thought that a collaborative approach could help create or expand incentive programs to promote voluntary private action to address the threat of invasive forest pests. For example, a collaborative effort could help define effective and efficient management practices to reduce the threat and create incentives for their use by nurseries, importers, exporters, solid wood packaging producers and users, and large scale retail and home improvement companies, among others.

Improving Technical Tools. Some participants noted the opportunity for regulatory officials to work more closely with universities (including extension services), industries, trade associations and others to develop tools or programs similar to the National Pest Diagnostic Network or the Extension Disaster Education Network for use in the context of forest insects and diseases.

Coordinating Responses and Taking Quick Action on Current Issues. Some participants were enthusiastic about capturing the momentum behind this initial gathering to take collaborative action on immediate or short-term issues. In particular, participants noted the opportunity to weigh in as a group on making appropriate improvements in the upcoming Farm Bill to emphasize prevention in the Plant Protection Act and develop more secure sources of funding.

Cautions and Pitfalls. Some participants also noted some of the potential problems with collaboration (or poorly done collaboration) that the group should make an effort to avoid. Examples included the challenges of making timely decisions and moving forward efficiently, of getting things done once a decision is made and a goal set, of establishing effective communication systems among the group, and of convincingly demonstrating economic incentive(s) for participation to potential private partners.

Vision and Goals

To complete their discussion of a vision and goals for collaborative action, participants examined a draft set of visions and goals developed by the steering committee prior to the meeting. Participants were encouraged to consider the steering committee's effort as the draft work of another breakout group, to assess it against their own thinking, and to make recommendations for how to improve or modify the draft and create an appropriate vision and goals for the group. While many participants expressed general agreement with the content of the vision and goals, there were a number of suggestions for recasting or restructuring the document.

Restructuring. Some participants suggested that the vision should be restated in a more positive or inspiring tone – describing the desired future condition in terms of what the group wants included instead of what it wants eliminated or eradicated. It was suggested that the introductory “background” section of the current document could serve as the basis for a redrafted vision. Other participants suggested re-organizing the vision and goals around more familiar paradigms for describing the invasives problem and responses. For example, one small group suggested that the Arrive/Survive/Thrive approach for assessing the risk from a potential invader would be a useful structure to organize the vision and goals. Another group suggested using a framework based on the Prevention/Early Detection and Rapid Response/Control/Recovery approach to describing the

invasive species issue and a Pre-Border/At-Border/Post-Border perspective as well. Still other participants suggested the vision and goals adopt a more specific focus on pathways throughout the document.

New or Different Content. Many participants suggested strongly that elevated public awareness of the issues should be an element of the vision itself because it is essential to the long-term success of any strategy. Other participants suggested that performance measures should be incorporated into all the goals of the group. A number of participants also suggested that this group's goals should be focused primarily (if not exclusively) on prevention (of both the introduction and establishment of invasive forest species).

Some participants also suggested including a more specific focus on establishing accountability for introductions or invasions. At the same time, participants recognized that even with the use of best practices, there will inevitably be occasional introductions. Participants also acknowledged the desire to work with industry in addressing the threat of invasive forest insects and diseases and the need, therefore, to clearly describe what is meant by the concept of accountability and to ensure that affected parties have broad opportunities for input.

Other specific suggestions for changes to the vision and goals included:

- Providing a rationale for specific target dates included in the vision and goals statement
- Clearly distinguishing between “introduction” and “establishment” and otherwise being clear and consistent in the choice of terminology
- Ensuring that the scope of the vision and goals includes species not already identified in existing lists of regulated species or that are otherwise unknown at this time

(Proposed redrafts of sections of the vision and goals offered by some of the breakout groups are captured in the flipchart notes.)

III. Developing Strategies and Objectives

On the afternoon of the second day, meeting participants again divided into three smaller breakout groups to brainstorm and discuss potential strategies and objectives for collaborative action. Points of discussion included (1) changes needed in public understanding of the issues and public opinion or communication strategies that might be most effective, (2) the benefits and challenges of voluntary incentive programs, including certification programs, and what programs might make sense to address forest invasive pathways, and (3) other collaborative strategies or objectives that might help reduce the threat of non-native insects and diseases.

Improving Public Understanding and Communication Strategies

Consistent Messaging. Many participants suggested that it was important for this group to develop a clear, simple, and consistent set of messages including, perhaps, a recognizable logo or mascot that would be readily identifiable as a reminder of the key issues. Smokey the Bear was a frequently cited example of such a message-bearing mascot or logo. Participants suggested developing a consistent set of materials or tools (including printed materials, web-based materials or other media) that could be shared with others and that were readily adaptable to particular users or situations but which also conveyed a consistent and clear message. These materials, it was suggested, should be designed not just to convey information but also to lead to action. Some participants suggested that this group

(or a task force led by a subgroup of members) was well suited to define a comprehensive national approach to education and outreach.

Target Audiences. Many participants observed that, ultimately, the key target audience was policy makers who would be making decisions on the resources, tools, and approaches to be taken nationally or at the state level to address invasive forest pests and pathogens. Consequently, the voting public can be defined as a key audience. Getting more specific, some participants mentioned the need to include youth (in K-12 schools) among the key target audiences. Participants suggested that this was both essential for long-term success and effective in the shorter term as a means of reaching the parents of those youth.

Participants also suggested that a key audience for targeted messaging would be those entities or individuals that constitute the “front line” defense against non-native forest insects and diseases – those in a position to be early detectors. For example, this group might include the urban pest control industry, professional foresters, or forest users such as hunters or the Boy/Girl Scouts of America. Other important niche audiences mentioned were arborists, utility field personnel, state foresters, nurserymen, master gardeners, the Farm Bureau and Grange, urban park managers and users, and others. Even the average traveling public was identified as an important audience to help address both intra-national and international movement of invasive species.

Using this Group’s Network. Participants noted the importance of making full use of the extensive network of contacts and constituents that was represented by the participants themselves. For example, participants stressed the efficiencies of using the university extension network to get the message out to key audiences in the field and in key locations. Equally important, some participants suggested, was taking advantage of the industry trade association membership to reach a broad cross-section of industry participants in, for example, the nursery industry or the wood products industry. In addition, some participants noted that, while it is important to do this type of horizontal networking, there is also an opportunity to network vertically and take the message to the suppliers and customers of the industries represented at the meeting as well as the member businesses themselves.

Scale. Participants discussed what should be the appropriate scale for a public outreach effort. For example, some participants suggested starting by tackling one or two big themes versus a more comprehensive approach. Participants also recognized the need to start smaller and build larger – to start with a local issue with immediate potential for impact to target audiences and “connect the dots” to larger issues.

Message Content. Participants noted at the outset that the content or subject matter of the message(s) to be conveyed will be more readily identified once the group has settled on a clear vision and set of goals that it wishes to pursue. Nevertheless, many participants noted that a key message would always be one aimed at maintaining and increasing the level of resources as well as developing a new generation of approaches to address the problem. Similarly, an underlying message to voters should be to voice their support for action on forest invasives issues to their elected officials. Another overarching theme for public awareness efforts suggested by participants was to highlight the serious economic implications of the problem that may not be well understood by the public but which compel action. There were also suggestions that the group could craft a more immediate message to take advantage of the legislative attention focused on the upcoming Farm Bill.

Certification and Other Voluntary Incentive Programs

Benefits. Participants identified benefits that should flow from any potential certification or incentive program including benefits for forests in terms of changed behavior (improved management practices and compliance) and increased awareness as well as benefits for the industry participants in terms of greater predictability and better market access or reputation. Participants noted that one advantage of voluntary, non-regulatory programs was that they could be developed more quickly and less expensively than programs relying on the regulatory process. Such programs, participants noted, can promote creative approaches to reach desired results and more quickly address areas where regulations are not (yet) working well.

Challenges. A key challenge identified by participants was finding or developing the necessary economic driver (consumer demand) to make a certification program attractive to potential industry participants. For example, in the case of sustainable forestry certification, demand for certified product from large wood product customers such as Time, Inc. was the underlying economic driver. Participants seemed to believe that with support from a program of education and awareness that there may be markets for “pest free” or “tree safe” products. Another challenge identified by participants was coordination of any certification effort with existing and ongoing agency programs. In other words, some participants observed that it should be clear at the outset that a certification or other incentive program will actually “add value” in terms of additional protection for the resource over existing regulatory programs and that it will not be only a marketing tool for participants. Some participants noted also that even if regulatory programs are in place, there may still be an opportunity to leverage their effectiveness through enhanced attention and marketing and to use their “labels” to raise public awareness. The Dolphin-Safe tuna labels may be an example of this approach. Other identified challenges included the potentially high costs of start-up, the diversity of the nursery industry (especially in the size of individual nurseries), and the difficulty of engaging full stakeholder groups and reaching consensus on program requirements with real impact. An outstanding question for participants was whether a certification program should be run through an agency, accredited third party certifiers, or another method.

Integration with Other Efforts. Participants noted that any new certification or incentive-based program should be supported by the group’s education/outreach efforts and in turn will be a tool to spread awareness. And it was observed by most participants that the involvement of the relevant industry in the development of program standards is essential for the industry to ensure buy-in and effective implementation and for the participants to feel ownership of the program.

Possible Certification Programs. Participants discussed various ideas for certification programs that would benefit forest protection from non-native pests and pathogens. For example, some participants suggested certification programs that would provide incentives for better reporting by providing insurance or other safety nets. In general, some participants suggested, efforts would be best focused on domestic markets and industries.

Specific examples offered by participants focused on particular pathways, including the following:

- Nurseries/Live Plants
 - Program would provide certification for practices that go beyond existing (or reasonably anticipated) requirements
 - Program would need to leverage or build an identifiable demand for “tree safe” products

- Solid Wood Packaging
 - Program would provide certification for approved or best management practices to ensure clean/safe wood packaging materials
 - Certification could apply to consumer product providers (e.g., large retail or home improvement businesses)
 - Program would need to build customer awareness and demand for certified products
- Firewood
 - Program would provide certification of best practices for largely unregulated industry with many small decentralized participants
 - Program would need to build customer awareness and demand for certified products
- Logs/Lumber
- Shipping/Airline Companies
 - Program would help ensure cleaning of ship superstructures and perhaps airliners to reduce potential movement of non-native insects and diseases as “hitchhikers”

Other Strategies or Objectives

Participants discussed several other related forms of collaborative action. In general, participants suggested learning from other examples such as the programs developed in Australia, New Zealand and South Africa. Another suggestion was to develop an ombudsman-type program to ensure better coordination among various agencies and other actors. It was also suggested more generally that the group should think collectively about completely new, original approaches to these issues. Some participants also expressed an interest in more generally demonstrating or displaying the breadth and depth of this group to highlight the importance of these issues and to leverage additional funding.

Adding Key Partners. Participants discussed the need to add additional key partners to the Dialogue action planning process. Examples suggested by participants include:

- Exotic pest plant councils
- State invasive species councils
- Other industries (besides wood products and nurseries) such as pallet manufacturers and users including large retailers and home improvement centers as well as shippers, importers, railroads, port operators and others
- More universities and their extension programs
- Community level volunteer organizations such as master gardeners and scouts
- Other major environmental NGOs at the national, regional and local level such as the Audubon Society and land trusts
- Arboriculture organizations (for municipal, utility and commercial arborists)
- U.S. Department of Defense (and other major federal landowners)

Near Term Advocacy for Policy Reform. Some participants also suggested some near term actions directed at policy reform. One suggestion was to develop a position paper, to be followed by active follow up from group representatives, to convey the message to federal appropriators about the need for multi-year funding for early detection/rapid response and prevention programs. Another similar suggestion was to develop a position paper with respect to the Farm Bill, perhaps suggesting

the creation of an industry-funded response fund (like an invasives Superfund) based on a per-container fee or other funding mechanisms. Other participants wondered whether there was broad support within this group for that type of cost-spreading mechanism, even if costs could be passed on to consumers.

Assessment of Current Programs and Resources. Based on the group's sense that many participants did not have a good handle on the extent and status of existing programs and efforts to reduce the threat of invasive forest pests and pathogens, many participants felt it was very important for the group to take an inventory of existing efforts so that the group's efforts can be targeted to add the greatest value.

IV. Next Steps

To close out the meeting on the third day, participants were presented with some of the ideas of the steering committee for moving forward toward a second meeting and had the opportunity to discuss both the goals for a subsequent meeting and a process for interaction and preparation leading up to that meeting.

Planning for a Second Meeting of the Dialogue

Many participants expressed a clear interest that the agenda of a second meeting look forward and focus on developing plans for action and not cover ground already covered at this meeting. Some participants suggested that the steering committee bring "straw dogs" to the second meeting and that the goal of the meeting should be to turn the "straw dogs" into "real dogs."

Participants also suggested that the group should incrementally but steadily build up and diversify its membership along the lines that had been discussed earlier, but that such expansion should not slow down the progress of the group toward implementing action. Members of the steering committee expressed their interest in receiving ongoing feedback and suggestions leading up to the second meeting.

Ongoing Information Exchange and Preparation

Leading up to the next meeting, participants were informed that there would be a process to revise the vision and goals for the group and to develop proposed plans for action based on the input from this meeting. There will also be opportunities for meeting participants to have input as those materials were being developed. Participants expressed a preference for using a web-based system for providing input on materials and documents leading up to the next meeting along with the selective use of email and conference calls to provide timely input on key issues or concerns.

Possible Additional Participants

Finally, the plenary group took some time to brainstorm in some detail a list of additional parties that might be invited to become additional Dialogue participants. (A list of suggested additional parties, including suggestions made here and at other times during the meeting, is attached.)