

# The History of the Montreal Process

Forests are home to at least 70 percent of the world's terrestrial animals and plants, and forests provide us with essentials such as timber, medicines, food, water, and jobs. Forests also clean the air we breathe; help filter pollution from our lakes and rivers; and protect against flooding, mudslides, and erosion. Forests are renewable resources as well as rich, resilient ecosystems. When managed sustainably, they can supply us with goods and services, help to conserve plant and animal species, and stabilize the environment for generations to come.



*Beech trees*

At the United Nation's 1992 Rio de Janeiro Earth Summit, world leaders from 102 countries adopted two international declarations that affirm the importance of the forests of the world. The Statement of Forest Principles was the first global agreement on forests and their sustainability, and Agenda 21 is an international action plan for sustainable development.

Since the meeting in Rio de Janeiro, several national and international programs have been launched to measure progress toward sustainable forest management. The most comprehensive and potentially far-reaching of those programs are the regional and international initiatives, which now involve more than 100 countries. Those initiatives define *criteria*, or categories of conditions for sustainable forest management, as well as *indicators*, or

measurable signs of those criteria. By endorsing the initiatives, each participating country has made a commitment to work toward the sustainable management of all of its forests.

The Montreal Process is one of those international initiatives and is geographically the largest, encompassing most of the world's temperate and boreal forests. It began in September 1993, when an international seminar was held in Montreal, Canada, on the sustainable development of boreal and temperate forests. After the seminar, Canada drew together countries from North and South America, Asia, and the Pacific Rim to develop criteria and indicators for nontropical forests. The European countries elected to work as a region in a separate initiative called the Pan-European Forest Process. Similar initiatives include the Ministerial Conference on the Protection of Forests in Europe; the Tarapoto Proposal for the Amazon Basin countries; the Central America, Near East, and Dry Zone Africa regional initiatives; and the International Tropical Timber Organization.

The Montreal Process includes 12 countries on five continents: Argentina, Australia, Canada, Chile, China, Japan, Republic of Korea, Mexico, New Zealand, the Russian Federation, the United States, and Uruguay. The participating countries account for 90 percent of the world's temperate and boreal forests (as well as areas of tropical forests), 60 percent of all forests on the globe, 35 percent of the world's population, and 45 percent of the world's trade in wood and wood products.

In February 1995, those 12 countries met in Santiago, Chile, where they defined seven criteria and 67 indicators to guide policy makers, forest managers, and the general public in the conservation and sustainable management of temperate and boreal forests. The Santiago Declaration is an important step toward implementing the sustainable forest management principles agreed to in Rio de Janeiro.

The Montreal Process criteria and indicators consider sustainable forest management in a holistic way, taking into account all forest goods, values,

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and services. They are intended to be applied to all the forests of a country and across all types of land ownership. By endorsing those criteria and indicators, each participating country has made a commitment to work toward the sustainable management of all of its forests.

The criteria and indicators characterize the essential components of sustainable forest management, and they provide a framework for answering a fundamental question, "What is important about forests?" They recognize forests as ecosystems that provide a wide, complex, and dynamic array of environmental and socioeconomic benefits and services. Used to monitor and assess national trends in forest conditions and forest management, criteria and indicators provide information essential to the formulation of policies that promote sustainable forest management.

## Montreal Process Criteria

The Montreal Process Working Group agreed on a framework of criteria and indicators that provide member countries with a common definition of what characterizes sustainable management of temperate and boreal forests. The Montreal Process criteria are categories of conditions or processes by which the sustainability of forest management may be assessed. Each criterion is characterized by a related set of indicators that are monitored periodically to assess change. The 67 indicators associated with those criteria are ways to assess or describe the criteria in order to detect changes and trends.

Many indicators can be measured, such as the percentage of a country's forest cover, while others are more descriptive, such as indicators related to forest planning, public participation, and investment or taxation policies. All indicators provide information about present forest conditions and, over time, will signal changes in the forests.



*Taiga Forest, Alaska*

Together, the seven criteria and the 67 indicators of the Montreal Process reflect an ecosystem-based approach to sustainable forests and the need to serve human communities. They represent an important step toward international cooperation in managing the world's forests.

## Sources

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