

Terms of Reference

Workshop to Develop a Regional Strategy for Forest Pests and Wildfire Management in Central America

I. Background Information

Forests in Central America are subject to various destructive agents, particularly to windstorms, insect and disease outbreaks, wildfires, and human activities. Since 1998, two agents have been particularly devastating – wildfires and southern pine beetle outbreaks. Wildfires ran rampant throughout much of southern Mexico, Nicaragua, Guatemala, and Honduras in 1998 as a result of a severe drought. More recently, over 60,000 hectares of pine forests were lost to massive outbreaks of the southern pine beetle (*Dendroctonus frontalis*), particularly in Belize, Nicaragua, Guatemala, and Honduras during the years 2000-2001, and the problem is still not under control.

In the past, Bark beetles seriously affected the pine forest in Honduras and Guatemala. What makes the difference with the ongoing *Dendroctonus* situation is its regional presence on pine forest with meaningful outbreaks in every country in contrast with very modest efforts and resources to control the pest, prevent further damage and salvage the affected forest.

The Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) is financing natural resource management projects and technical cooperations with forestry components in most of the Central American region. The Norwegian Consultant Trust Fund in the IDB is currently financing a technical cooperation in the Mountain Pine Ridge region, Belize (ATN/NC-7458-BL) to evaluate alternatives for forest rehabilitation and sustainable management after the bark beetles destroyed most of the forest there the last years. The present workshop is a way of giving updated technical knowledge that have been felt as especially critical in the Central American forest management during the last years, and to help the national institutions to join forces through a regional pest & fire management strategy. The IDB is currently developing a new broad forest strategy for the region, where pest and fire management will be considered. The seminar will be financed by the Norwegian Consultant Trust Fund in the IDB and co-financed by USDA/USAID and sources in the region.

In March 2002, Dr. Ronald Billings, bark beetle specialist with the Texas Forest Service, and Paul Schmidtke, fire specialist with the USDA Forest Service, completed a 3-week assessment of current bark beetle and fire management programs in each Central American country (Belize, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Panama). In their final report to the US Agency for International Development (USAID) entitled *Central America Southern Pine Beetle/Fire Management Assessment*, one of the primary recommendations was to bring together national fire and pest coordinators from each country (including southern Mexico) for purposes of developing a more effective regional strategy for management of the southern pine beetle and wildfires.

II. Objectives and expected results

The proposed workshop is designed to fulfill the following objectives:

- a) Improve the technical knowledge regarding forest pests and wildfires in the Central American countries, through case studies and lessons learned;
- b) Start collaboration between the countries in the region regarding prevention and mitigation of pests and forest fires, as well as to prepare a draft strategy document for regional collaboration on these subjects.

The expected results of the workshop are:

- 1) Improved technical know-how for the participants through provision of training and published documentation to national forest protection coordinators from Central America and southern Mexico, on standardized methods of detection, ground evaluation, suppression, and prevention of forest pests, with main emphasis on southern pine beetle outbreaks, and prevention and suppression of wildfires.
- 2) Sharing of experiences of national forest pest and fire coordinators responsible for forest protection programs, including discussions on the preliminary results of the Technical Cooperation in Belize and the results of the Central American southern pine beetle/fire management assessment recently completed.
- 3) Presentation of formal case studies for both fire and pest management actions that have proven to be successful (or unsuccessful), including recommended field actions and lessons learned.
- 4) A collectively developed draft regional strategy for management and reporting of wildfires and forest pest outbreaks. This draft regional strategic plan will be developed by the workshop participants to be presented to the Central American Environment and Development Commission (Comisión Centroamericana de Ambiente y Desarrollo, CCAD) and the Heads of the Forestry Agencies of each country, to ask for their feedback before a final document can be approved within the framework of the regional collaboration.