

**6th CPF – GFIS Implementation
Group Meeting,
Telephone Conference**

December 20, 2005

MINUTES

Global Forest Information Service - GFIS
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Version Control Page

Document control

Document title	6th CPF – GFIS Implementation Group Meeting Telephone Conference, 20 December 2005
Document subtitle	
Author	Eero Mikkola, IUFRO
Status of this version, (draft, issued for comment, approved)	Approved
Contribution from	CABI/Gillian Petrokofsky, CIFOR/Michael Hailu, FAO/Peter Holmgren and IUFRO/Peter Mayer

Version history

Version	Summary of changes	Author/Organization	Date
1.0	New document	Eero Mikkola, IUFRO	24/01/2006
1.1	Amendments	Peter Mayer, IUFRO	26/01/2005
1.2	Amendments	Peter Holmgren, FAO	30/01/2005
1.3	Amendments	Gillian Petrokofsky, CABI	30/01/2005

CPF - Global Forest Information Service (GFIS)

6th CPF – GFIS Implementation Group Meeting

Telephone Conference,

December 20, 2005

MINUTES

Participants:

Peter Mayer, IUFRO, (chairman)
Magnus Grylle, FAO
Michael Hailu, CIFOR
Peter Holmgren, FAO
Eero Mikkola, IUFRO, (secretary)
Toral Patel-Weynand, NBII
Gillian Petrokofsky, CABI

Observers:

Eric Landis, NBII
Jennifer Pollack, NBII

1. Welcome and adoption of the agenda

Peter Mayer (IUFRO) welcomed the GFIS Implementation Group (IG) to the telephone conference and informed the participants of the fact that he would moderate the meeting and that E. Mikkola (GFIS coordinator, IUFRO) would take notes and would prepare the minutes of the telephone conference.

The participants agreed that the objective of the meeting was to follow up an agreed work plan at the 5th GFIS IG meeting and to discuss the status of GFIS.

2. Follow-up of a GFIS work plan agreed at the 5th GFIS IG meeting (Minutes of the 5th GFIS IG meeting, Item 6. Next steps – a GFIS work plan)

P. Mayer (IUFRO) proposed that each responsible organization mentioned in the minutes of the 5th GFIS IG meeting would give a brief report on the progress of the agreed actions.

2.1 Preparation of the GFIS Strategic/Business plan, IUFRO

IUFRO (E. Mikkola) informed the participants that the current structure of the revised draft GFIS Business plan followed the outline proposed by FAO (Holmgren) and CABI (Petrokofsky), and that the outcome and recommendations of the previous GFIS meetings (the Steering Committee and Implementation Group meetings in October) had

been incorporated into the current version. This document had been distributed to the GFIS Implementation Group before the telephone conference. E. Mikkola said that, because of resource limitations, the work on the GFIS Business plan was behind schedule but proposed that the GFIS Implementation Group should discuss the available revised version of the GFIS Business plan in terms of the structure and additional information needed. FAO (Holmgren) noted that the draft dated 14 December 2005 had only very minor additions (less than one page of text) compared to the version dated 13 October 2005. It was agreed to discuss the further development of the document under agenda item 5.

2.2 Updates on the GFIS gateway, FAO

FAO (Grylle) informed the participants that FAO had shortened the left side panel on the GFIS gateway, as agreed during the previous meeting, but comments had been received from IG members on whether this had been done in accordance with the agreed content of that shortened menu. FAO said also that the draft guidelines to information providers on how to manage metadata through the GFIS control panel had been prepared in cooperation with CABI (Petrokofsky), as agreed in the previous meeting. FAO also reported that there had been discussions between IG members about whether the guidelines should be a separate document or should be posted on the website. CIFOR (Hailu) said that his view was that it had been agreed at the Rome meeting that the guidelines would form part of the website. FAO stated that user statistics from the GFIS gateway were currently not available and that the sorting function of search results could not be implemented by the end of 2005 because of resource constraints.

As a response to the progress on the gateway, CIFOR (M. Hailu) informed the participants that the Implementation Group, in his view, had had a detailed and productive discussion and that it had also reached an agreement on the updates needed on the GFIS gateway and its functions. He then stated that, unfortunately, the current GFIS gateway available at www.gfis.net did not totally reflect the outcome of the agreements and, therefore, he expressed concerns on part of CIFOR regarding the development of the GFIS gateway. NBII (Patel-Weynand) and CABI (Petrokofsky) also shared the concerns expressed by CIFOR.

FAO (Holmgren) reminded the IG that he had not participated in the 5th GFIS IG meeting, and stated that he felt that the minutes of the 5th GFIS IG meeting and a GFIS work plan for the next six months did not give clear documentation of the agreed enhancement of gateway functionality and contents. He suggested that in the future agreements should be more precise to avoid misunderstandings. FAO (Grylle) also reported that FAO had limited resources to implement updates on the GFIS gateway and, therefore, FAO had not been able to implement all of the agreed updates. Hailu stated that he felt the decisions taken at the 5th meeting had been clearly documented and that Grylle had prepared a mock-up of the homepage of the website during that part of the discussion. Petrokofsky expressed surprise that there had been any confusion about the website redesign but acknowledged that resource limitations had been a problem for FAO who

were responsible for almost all of the actions noted at the 5th meeting, and all of the technical actions in addition to routine maintenance work on the site.

In this context, IUFRO (the GFIS coordinator) communicated that during the partnership development actions (see item 2.4 below) IUFRO had received the following feedback from current and potential information providers:

- The gateway had been unattainable;
- Unrelated sites or pages appeared on the GFIS site;
- Bugs on functioning of the left side panel and missing “home” link to front page
- Limitation to three information types (news, meetings and job vacancies) available on the GFIS gateway was questioned;
- Missing user statistics from the GFIS gateway.

Based on this feedback, IUFRO stated that it had been difficult to convince new partners to join GFIS as a partner.

As a response, FAO (Holmgren) said that this was the first time these concerns had been brought to the attention of the IG, that it would be important to follow up on the comments received, and requested IUFRO to provide more documentation of the user feedback, in particular on the unattainability of the gateway.

Conclusions:

Based on the information and statements given, the participants agreed on the following principles related to the technical implementation of the gateway:

- Open communication and information among partners are needed;
- Implementation steps should be written down as precisely as possible;
- Resource constraints in the implementation process of GFIS should be communicated to each other as soon as possible;
- If a partner can not fulfill an agreed implementation step, it should be asked whether contributions from other partners were possible.

2.3 Information exchange standard development (CABI, FAO and NBII)

FAO (M. Grylle) and CABI (G. Petrokofsky) reported that they had discussed the adoption of AGRIS AP in some detail. Based on that discussion CABI had prepared a template suggesting which of the AGRIS fields the GFIS IG would require for GFIS and which fields would be displayed and searchable.

The GFIS coordinator recalled that NBII (Patel-Weynand) had provided by email a proposal to adopt the NBII/FGDC metadata standards for forest datasets (email to the GFIS IG on November 23rd), and CABI (Petrokofsky) had made a proposal to adopt the SDMX metadata standards for statistical forest data (email to the GFIS IG on December 1st). It was agreed that more detailed discussions on the adoption of proposed standards would be considered under item 4 “Metadata standards”.

2.4 Partnership development and support, IUFRO

IUFRO (the GFIS coordinator) reported that an invitation by the IUFRO President had been sent to 150 IUFRO members and that part of the potential partners listed at the 5th IG meeting had been contacted. The GFIS coordinator proposed that more detailed information would be given during the 3rd item “Partnership development and support”.

2.5 Promoting and marketing, IUFRO

IUFRO (the GFIS coordinator) communicated that new partners had been requested to prepare media releases when they joined GFIS. They had also been encouraged to have a link to the GFIS site from their sites.

CABI (G. Petrokofsky) informed the participants that GFIS had been given a high visibility through a presentation and on-line demonstrations at the Frontiers in Forest Information conference in Oxford, December 5-7 and that GFIS was also referred to in several presentations. In this context FAO (Holmgren) emphasized the fact that the GFIS IG had to be careful with what was promised to partners and highlighted the danger of overselling GFIS. The IG confirmed this view and restated that no promises should be made to partners which would go beyond the actual status of GFIS.

In this context CIFOR (M. Hailu) stated that CIFOR would not promote GFIS before the agreed updates on the gateway had been implemented.

3. Partnership development and support

3.1 A letter from the IUFRO President

The GFIS coordinator reported that the IUFRO President had sent an invitation to participate in GFIS to 150 IUFRO members on 23rd November IUFRO. So far 25 new institutes had sent their contact information in order to open a GFIS account.

3.2 Preparation of GFIS Russia and Asia projects

The GFIS coordinator stated that the Swiss Agency for the Environment, Forests and Landscape (SAEFL) had confirmed the support of GFIS with an extraordinary contribution of 50 000 Swiss Francs with the goal to promote GFIS in Russia and in Asia. The main target of both projects was to arrange GFIS training workshops to potential information providers in Russia and in Asia in March (Russia) and April (Asia) 2006. The draft project proposal for the GFIS Russia project was distributed to the GFIS IG before the telephone conference. The implementation of the project is coordinated by IUFRO through the GFIS co-coordinator.

In response to a question from FAO (Grylle) as to which Russian institutes would be involved in the GFIS Russia project, the GFIS coordinator said that the core Russian partners in the project were the Moscow State Forest University (MSFU, www.mgul.ac.ru) the All-Russian Research Institute of Silviculture and Forestry Mechanization (ARISFM)

and the Institute of Forest (IF, All of those had demonstrated considerable interest to provide information about Russian forest information resources through GFIS.

3.3 Preparation of GFIS Training Workshop for African partners

The GFIS coordinator explained that a one day GFIS training workshop would be arranged in connection with the First IAALD Africa Chapter Conference in Nairobi, Kenya, 21-26 May 2006, (www.iaald-africa.org).

4. Metadata standards

4.1. AGRIS AP adoption

Based on the report given by FAO (Grylle) and CABI (Petrokofsky) during item 2.3, it was discussed when the AGRIS AP adoption on the GFIS gateway could be implemented in practice. FAO (Grylle) informed participants that, because of resource constraints, the adoption could tentatively be implemented in January 2006. (Note: After the meeting, and following discussions on transferring the gateway to another host, all gateway development has been put on hold)

4.2. Proposal to adopt the NBII/FGDC metadata standards for datasets

The participants discussed the information contained in the email circulated by NBII (Patel-Weynand) on November 23rd on metadata standards for forest datasets.

IUFRO (Mikkola) stated that it was important to choose particular standards for GFIS because a number of partners especially in Russia had expressed their interest in including forestry datasets and databases in GFIS. They considered it important to have one site where they could access forestry data. The GFIS coordinator mentioned that, with the upcoming training workshop in March 2006, it would be useful to include training on metadata standards for forestry data, especially since NBII had offered some training help on metadata standards to GFIS contributors. FAO (Grylle) responded that this is entirely unrealistic, given that the discussion on development and implementation of such standards is only beginning, and further that activities in the near future should not be scheduled if they require functionality that does not yet exist (see also IG conclusion in this meeting under item 2.5 above).

Conclusion:

Based on the discussions the IG agreed on the following actions and principles related to metadata standards and general preparation of work:

- The IG members agreed to review the respective information of NBII sent in a previous email;
- It was also agreed that additional standards for adoption by the IG should be circulated by different IG members in order to be reviewed before the next IG meeting;

- The IG agreed that, before any technical implementation would be done, proposals developed by a sub-group of the IG should be brought to the attention of the whole IG and approved by the IG;
- Furthermore, the IG agreed that it would be desirable that a decision on the adoption of particular standards for the forest data was taken after this discussion either by email or at the next IG meeting.

5. The GFIS Business/Strategic plan

CIFOR (M. Hailu) proposed that, because of shortage of time during the telephone conference, this item would be dealt with at the next meeting. All participants supported that proposal and it was agreed that the GFIS Business/Strategic plan should be dealt with at the next meeting.

6. Next meeting

It was agreed that the next GFIS IG meeting should be convened in February or March 2006. The GFIS coordinator will investigate which would be convenient dates and times for the members of the GFIS IG.

7. Other matters

There were no other matters discussed at the meeting.

8. Closure of the meeting

Peter Mayer thanked all participants for their active contributions to the telephone conference.