

**7th CPF – GFIS Implementation
Group Meeting,
IUFRO, Vienna, Austria
June 20-21, 2006**

MINUTES

Global Forest Information Service - GFIS
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CPF - Global Forest Information Service (GFIS)

7th CPF – GFIS Implementation Group Meeting

June 20-21, 2006

IUFRO, Vienna, Austria

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Participants:

Peter Mayer, IUFRO
Michael Hailu, CIFOR
Magnus Grylle, FAO
Eero Mikkola, IUFRO
Toral Patel-Weynand, NBII

1. Welcome and adoption of the agenda

Peter Mayer (IUFRO), the moderator of the meeting, welcomed the GFIS Implementation Group (IG) to the meeting and thanked all core partners for their contributions to GFIS.

The participants approved the draft agenda which was circulated by the coordinator on June 2, 2006 with the two following additional items proposed by CABI and FAO:

- Item 3, Review composition and TOR of the IG and make recommendations to the SC on an appropriate structure, suggested by CABI/ Petrokofsky.
- Sub-item 5, Integration of the AGRIS bibliographical search to GFIS, suggested by FAO/Keizer.

2. Status of GFIS

2.1 Partnership development and support

The coordinator (Mikkola) informed the participants of the following ongoing GFIS partnership actions:

- a) The GFIS Russia project was launched in March 2006 with the following objectives:
- To provide an open-access internet information service to support sustainable forest management in Russia;
 - To facilitate exchange of knowledge and experience among the forest community, universities, state forest research institutes, Russian Academy of Sciences, NGOs;
 - To promote information about forest-related sciences and forest education in Russia and
 - To create networks and partnerships between Russia and other countries and international organizations.

Three core organizations, namely the Moscow State Forest University (MSFU), the All-Russian Research Institute of Silviculture and Forestry Mechanization, and the Sukachev Forest Institute, the Siberian Branch of the Russia Academy of Sciences, were trained on the GFIS Training Workshop at MSFU on 17-18 May 2006. The training was prepared in collaboration with FAO, Metla and IUFRO and it was carried out by IUFRO and Metla.

MSFU is establishing a temporary server at *www.gfis.ru* to Russian forest information resources of the partners so that they can post their information resources and metadata to the server until partners have established their own permanent servers. Based on a project plan, the first set of metadata feeds from the Russian partners should be provided and linked to the GFIS gateway by the end of July 2006.

In this context, FAO (Grylle) asked in which language the Russian partners were willing to provide their metadata. The coordinator stated that language had been discussed with the Russian partners and that it had been agreed with them that they would provide the first metadata feeds in English. If the next phase of the project can be implemented the question as to how to manage information resources in Russian on GFIS should be solved.

b) The coordinator (Mikkola) gave the following information on the European Forest Information and Communication Platform (EFICP):

The goal of the project is to design and implement a platform to be used by the European (and international) forest community enabling the user to search, access, analyze, view and download a wide range of forest related information, such as geographical data, statistical data, news, reports and others. Following up previous initiatives and building on their results, the EFICP platform is seen as a major step towards the implementation of the original European Council Regulation No 1615/89 concerning the creation of a European Forestry Information and Communication System (EFICS) whose objective has been and continues to be to "collect, co-ordinate, standardize, process and disseminate information concerning the forestry sector and its development".

EFICP shall operate as an information provider to GFIS and it aims to be interoperable with a wide range of information sources and data providers throughout Europe, directly or indirectly related to the forest sector.

A Portuguese IT-company EDISOFT (<http://www.edisoft.pt/>) which is implementing an EFICP system has contacted the GFIS Coordination Unit in order to ask which technical requirements are needed to become a GFIS information provider.

The participants discussed the cooperation between GFIS and EFICP and agreed on the following:

- The cooperation between GFIS and EFICP is welcome and worthwhile for GFIS

- Duplication should be avoided in all phases of the cooperation in terms of metadata provision
- Metadata records harvestable by GFIS should be harvested from an original source

c) IUFRO (Mayer) stated that ITTO contributed to GFIS in cash and IUFRO and ITTO had agreed that ITTO would support the following GFIS actions:

- Finalization of the GFIS Strategic Framework;
- Upgrade of the GFIS gateway ;
- Implementation of the GFIS training workshop for potential new GFIS partners in Asia. IUFRO invites 10-15 communication/information experts from ITTO member organizations/countries to the training workshop in order to train them to promote information about the use and trade of tropical forest resources through the GFIS gateway.

IUFRO has agreed to present the outcomes of the implementation of the agreement at the Forty-first Session of the International Tropical Timber Council, Yokohama, Japan, from 6 to 11 November 2006.

d) The coordinator (Mikkola) reported that he had started to communicate with the current GFIS information providers in order to fix their existing metadata feeds on GFIS or provide new feeds to GFIS when the GFIS harvester, parser and indexer were fixed to manage agreed information exchange standards by Metla.

e) CIFOR (Hailu) reported that he had attended the First IAALD Africa Chapter Conference on 1-5 May 2006 in Nairobi in which he had met the GFIS African partners who were concerned about what was happening to the GFIS Africa, because there had been no concrete GFIS action since the GFIS Africa project ended in 2003.

Based on that information it was agreed that the current GFIS African partners should be contacted in order to inform them of the current status of GFIS and to create new metadata records from their news, events and coming GFIS information types from their information available in Africa. It was also agreed that new GFIS contacts should be established through existing networks e.g. FORNESSA, AFRONET.

f) IUFRO (Mayer and Mikkola) informed the participants that the Republic of Korea contributed to IUFRO through various projects and that the Korean Forest Research Institute (KFRI) had contributed to GFIS in cash for several years. In addition to the current contribution to GFIS, KFRI is willing to support GFIS partnership development in Asia and Russia and they have offered to provide a person for a regional GFIS coordinator in Asia and in Russia. Mayer reported that the GFIS Steering Committee had approved the terms of reference for the GFIS Regional Coordinator in Asia and in Russia. In addition to ToR, a formal agreement between IUFRO and a host institute is needed in

order to agree on the duration and level of support provided by the host country/institution in accordance with the provisions outlined in the terms of reference.

The participants highly appreciated the contribution from KFRI, welcomed the establishment of the position of a regional GFIS coordinator for Asia and Russia, and agreed with the related tasks to promote GFIS in these regions. It was also agreed that the title for regional activities should be GFIS Regional Coordinator. The participants stated that coordination of these activities with the current regional efforts in Asia such as APAFRI was very important.

2.2 System development

Firstly, the coordinator (Mikkola) thanked FAO for making the transfer of the GFIS gateway from FAO to Metla smooth, because full technical support from FAO was available during the whole transfer.

The coordinator stated that the GFIS software was transferred from FAO to Metla on March 6 and a GFIS test site was up on a server of Metla on April 26, 2006. Based on the comments of the GFIS IG, amendments to the test were implemented and the GFIS gateway had been up and running since May 8, 2006. The first user report for May 2006 was sent to the GFIS IG on June 1, 2006 and a news window on the front page was opened on June 13, 2006.

The coordinator also informed the participants of the following two major problems met during the set up the GFIS gateway at Metla:

- A database, web pages and a GFIS search index are built using ISO Latin-1 character encoding. Also XML feeds of the information providers are only used if they use ISO Latin-1 or similar encoding. In addition to the ASCII characters, ISO Latin-1 mostly contains characters needed for writing languages of Western Europe. This means that the number of languages supported by GFIS is limited. In order to support different languages from all over the world the UTF-8 character encoding should be used.
- Information providers have various ways to write a date field on their metadata feeds. Metla and the coordinator have investigated into how information providers have written a date field and how a GFIS parser and indexer manage a data field. Based on that, Metla has fixed the GFIS parser and indexer and the coordinator has been communicating with the current information providers so that they could correct date fields in their feeds to the standards. The coordinator said that a correct and workable a date field was an essential condition in order to manage the GFIS index appropriately.

The coordinator also reported that CIFOR and Metla had been preparing a proposal for a new GFIS interface which would be dealt with under item 6.

The participants welcomed the improvement made on the gateway and agreed that that was a good baseline for the further development. Based on the given information, the participants discussed and agreed on the following:

- The news window should not be dominated by one information provider and this should be checked by the coordinator.
- There should be an indication on the gateway pointing out that there were more news items available on GFIS than the five freshest news items displayed on the front page of the GFIS gateway.
- There should be an indication of the different languages of metadata available on GFIS on the GFIS site.

3. Review composition and TOR of the IG and make recommendations to the SC on an appropriate structure

At first, communication principles of the GFIS Implementation Group were discussed and the participants agreed on the following principles:

- Communication between the GFIS IG partners should be shared among all group members in order to avoid information deficits
- The coordinator should circulate brief information about the main GFIS issues monthly.
- Regarding technical implementation, the coordinator should send a proposal with a deadline to the GFIS IG in order to receive the opinion of the GFIS IG on the technical implementation.
- Based on that communication, the GFIS IG will set priorities for the practical work on GFIS

Then there was discussion about potential members of the GFIS Implementation Group, the Korean Forest Research Institute (the main sponsor of the GFIS coordination unit), for example, or Metla (the host of the GFIS gateway). IUFRO (Mayer) said that KFRI had expressed interest in becoming a core partner of GFIS, and the coordinator reported that Metla was not willing to become a member of the GFIS IG for the moment. In this context it was recalled that the GFIS Steering Committee would make all decisions related to new members. Therefore the IG recommended that the GFIS SC should discuss the issues of donors and their potential membership in the GFIS SC or IG.

The participants reviewed briefly the terms of reference of the IG prepared by the GFIS SC at its 3rd meeting at FAO in October 2005 and agreed that they were workable and appropriate for the time being.

4. Draft GFIS Strategic Framework

IUFRO (Mayer) proposed that general issues and the structure of the draft of the GFIS Strategic Framework could be discussed first and then the participants could go through the document chapter by chapter.

At first, all welcomed and appreciated improvements made on the document. FAO (Grylle) commented that in order to avoid confusion the current draft version should have been named 'draft' with a version date instead of final draft. NBII (Patel-Weynand) proposed that two separate documents would be needed: a long detailed plan for the current and potential partners and a brief vision paper to introduce GFIS briefly to potential external information providers and users. CIFOR (Hailu) emphasized the need for two separate documents: a document which responded to all operational issues and a document for promotion purposes. Hailu criticized that the current document was a combination of the old and the new GFIS and proposed that the document should better identify the position of GFIS on the global forest information marketplace.

It was agreed that the strategic framework should identify GFIS as a global platform for sharing knowledge for the international forest community and that information that would not be offered in a compiled form at other places, e.g. news, upcoming events and job vacancies, should be promoted. It was also agreed by the IG that, in addition to the strategic framework document, a short version should be produced as communication tool with the external world.

Then the draft document was gone through chapter by chapter and the participants agreed on a new structure and amendments on the strategic framework. The participants agreed on the following time-table in order finish the strategic framework document:

- The coordinator (Mikkola) will implement a new structure by June 28, 2006.
- The GFIS IG will comment on that version of the strategic framework by July 31, 2006. At this stage written input from the GFIS IG partners is welcome.
- The coordinator (Mikkola) will incorporate all comments and amendments by August 31, 2006 and send the final draft to the members of the GFIS Implementation Group on September 1, 2006. Then the GFIS Implementation group has one week time to give their final comments on the strategic framework and, based on the final comments, the final version of the GFIS Strategic Framework will be provided by September 15, 2006.

Once the final version of the GFIS Strategic Framework is complete, a short vision document should be prepared.

5. Information types and information exchange standards

Firstly, the participants discussed the principles of how a new GFIS information type and information exchange standard should be created in GFIS. It was agreed that information

types could be expanded if enough background information about a new information type was provided. A new information type should be tested before it was released publicly unless it was based on the existing practice.

5.1 Status of current information types: news, events and job vacancies

The mandatory fields for the current GFIS information types (news, events and job vacancies) were discussed, because they were labeled to be in draft format at the GFIS gateway. Based on the discussion, it was agreed that mandatory fields for the information type

- *news* should be “title”, “link”, “description” and “pubDate”;
- *event* should be “title”, “link”, “description”, “pubDate”, “dc:period/dc:start”, “dc:period/dc:end” and “dc:period/dc:spatial”, and
- *job vacancies* should be “title”, “link”, “description”, “pubDate”, “dc:period/dc:end” on which “dc:end” would be an expiring date for a job application.

In this context, the coordinator (Mikkola) proposed that a separate job vacancies feed containing job vacancies by the GFIS partners could be maintained on a GFIS server at Metla, because job vacancies appear rarely and it is time-consuming for an information provider to create a feed for one job advertisement. In this case, a title, a link, a description and an expiring date for a job application could be sent to a GFIS webmaster who should maintain the job vacancies feed on the GFIS server. The participants agreed on that proposal and recommended that that option should be added to the guidelines on the GFIS site.

It was also agreed that the guidelines on the GFIS gateway should be updated based on the decisions of this meeting.

5.2 Integration of the AGRIS bibliographical search to GFIS

The participants discussed the following options regarding an implementation of the GFIS bibliographical search provided by FAO (Keizer) before the IG meeting:

Option 1: The bibliographical data and search engine are hosted at FAO with AGRIS. GFIS partner submit their records to AGRIS or make their OAI AGRIS AP harvesting interfaces available to AGRIS. FAO will prepare a specific skin and search interface for GFIS.

Advantage: GFIS has no further work with managing these data, updates of the AGRIS search engine will be automatic for the GFIS search, forest-related records from AGRIS that are not from GFIS partners would be automatically included.

Disadvantage: Creating a common index on the bibliographical data and other data hosted at Metla would be more complicated. GFIS would have to ask AGRIS for improvements of the interface and the skin; integration with the overall website is more complex. Version 1.0 of the new AGRIS search engine should be released at the end of

June, version 1.3 in November and version 1.5 early next year. The GFIS service from AGRIS could be operable in August 2006.

Option 2: The bibliographical data and search engine are hosted at Metla. GFIS partners submit their records to Metla or make their OAI AGRIS AP harvesting interfaces available to Metla. Metla will produce the related index and set up the search interface. AGRIS will deliver to Metla the search technology developed to search AGRIS AP bibliographical data and also all the updates to this search technology.

Advantage: GFIS has more direct control over the interface and its development. Integration into the GFIS portal is easier.

Disadvantage: Updates of the AGRIS search technology will not be automatic. GFIS will have to invest to learn and understand the search technology and to apply upgrades. FAO are committed to support GFIS also in this alternative. FAO will be able to deliver version 1.0 of the search engine in July, successive releases would be published.

The participants concluded and agreed on the following:

- All IG members agreed that it would be a big advantage for GFIS information providers if their bibliographical information resources/records could be searched both through the GFIS search and the AGRIS search, because one of the main objects of GFIS was to promote information resources of GFIS partners and, based on that arrangement, we could offer two channels to promote their bibliographical resources.
- The GFIS IG supported the option 01. However in order to avoid disadvantages for users, the IG agreed that web service technologies should be utilized so that users could search all GFIS information types (including publications) in one search on the GFIS gateway at www.gfis.net and thus a separate search interface for GFIS publications should be avoided..

5.3 Adoption of the NBII/FGDC biological data profile for GFIS forest datasets - standard and technical facilities offered by NBII

USGS/BIO (NBII) (Dr.Toral Patel-Weynand) reported that she has consulted with several of NBII's colleagues through a series of meetings and discussions over the last three months regarding the adoption of the USGS/BIO/FGDC biological data profile in GFIS forest datasets, and the outcome on the specifics was encouraging. Dr. Patel-Weynand stated that USGS/BIO agreed with the assessment that housing forestry data and metadata and making them available as a GFIS service is very important for the global forestry community. Dr. Patel-Weynand also said that there would be a couple of options to harvest and house data that could be provided to GFIS data providers:

Option 1: Once a metadata record is created and saved in XML, the provider could email or place out on the USGS/BIO (NBII) ftp site the XML record to the USGS/BIO Fort Collins Center in Colorado where QAQC would take place and where USGS/BIO would

place the folder on their server in Denver. At this point the USGS/BIO(NBII) clearinghouse will automatically pick-up the record and display it under a GFIS tag name.

Option 2: GFIS data providers could store XML metadata records in a web accessible folder on their server, and the USGS/BIO clearinghouse would then harvest the records which would go to a GFIS display on the NBII clearinghouse. In this case the QAQC would be done by the partner providing the metadata and using basic metadata parsing/quality control tools at their site. This would be done via the NBII and USGS/BIO would then provide (a free tool called "Metadata Parser (MP)"), although in the beginning GFIS could send the metadata records to the NBII expert in Denver for QAQC.

For hosting forestry data and metadata, the other concrete services USGS/BIO can provide to the forestry community and GFIS include:

- Tools to create metadata:Metavist and other tools are free, stand-alone software product that would be provided to GFIS to create metadata records;
- Training workshops to understand standards and how to implement usage-- this might require some funds to support depending on the location of the workshop;
- Training to use tools - this will require some funds to support depending on the location of the workshop;
- Training to use the clearinghouse (records for clearinghouse must be in XML), and how to manage GFIS records for the Clearinghouse;
- Crosswalks to ISO standards (when they become available)

Based on the information given by USGS/BIO at the meeting and sent by the coordinator before the meeting, the necessity of standards for forest datasets, use of standards and definitions for data sets were discussed exhaustively.

All participants welcomed and appreciated the offer made by USGS/BIO (NBII) and it was agreed that the NBII/FGDC biological data profile for datasets should be adopted in GFIS. Before a standard can be adopted in GFIS in practice, a definition for a GFIS information type dataset should be agreed on by the GFIS IG. It was agreed that NBII (Dr. Patel-Weynand) should provide a definition for a GFIS information type dataset and then arrange a telephone conference between NBII, CIFOR and FAO in order to discuss and agree on the definition.

It was also agreed that Option 1 should be implemented in order to ensure a high quality of metadata. The implementation of a search function for GFIS datasets should be discussed and agreed upon between USGS/BIO and Metla.

In this context, the need for GFIS vocabulary was discussed, because some information providers have requested whether GFIS keywords could be offered on the GFIS gateway. As CABI, FAO, IUFRO and USGS/BIO (NBII) have their own forest vocabularies, it was agreed that all those vocabularies should be offered for the use of

GFIS information providers through the GFIS gateway. It was agreed that the coordinator would discuss with the partners how their vocabularies could be integrated into the GFIS gateway.

5.4 RSS2.0 specifications for information types: contacts, projects and web sites

A proposal provided by the coordinator (Mikkola) concerning the new information types - contacts, projects and web sites - based on RSS2.0 specification was discussed by the participants. After a short discussion it was agreed that the proposed new information types would not be approved, because the current information types and a new specification for forest datasets should be populated with the current information providers before new information types would be accepted.

6. New GFIS interface

A proposal for a new GFIS interface was prepared in collaboration with CIFOR and Metla. IUFRO (Mikkola) informed the participants that the main reason to upgrade the current interface would be to improve the usability of the gateway and to stop using frame technology on the gateway, because it was difficult to follow user statistics on the site through the frames. The participants discussed a new GFIS interface based on prints provided by Metla.

All participants welcomed the proposal for a new GFIS interface with the following amendments:

- There should be “About GFIS” instead of “Information about GFIS” on the menu;
- There should be “Upcoming events” instead of “Latest events” on the front page;
- Events should be displayed based on a pubdate and should be searchable through a calendar function based on startdate and enddate fields;
- There should be “Forest job opportunities” instead of “Latest job vacancies” on the front page;
- A check box should be considered for choosing information types to be searched on the front page and
- Quick link/Browse function should be removed.

It was agreed that CIFOR and Metla should go ahead with the development of the new interface and agree on the distribution of work needed.

7. Next steps

The following main GFIS actions until the end of 2006 were agreed upon:

7.1 Partnership development:

- Communication with the current information providers in order to fix their current metadata feeds and to create new metadata feeds for the existing GFIS information types (IUFRO)
- Two GFIS training workshops with the aim to provide metadata training for information providers are planned to be held in Asia. The first course should be held in China in October 2006, together with the Chinese Academy of Forest (CAF). A second course should be convened in early 2007 in Indonesia together with CIFOR. (IUFRO)
- Promotion of GFIS at the II Latin American IUFRO Congress in La Serena, Chile, 23 – 27 October 2006 (IUFRO)

7.2 System development:

- Upgrade of a GFIS interface (Metla and CIFOR)
- Integration of the AGRIS bibliographical search to GFIS (Metla and FAO)
- Adoption of the NBII/FGDC biological data profile for GFIS forest datasets (Metla and NBII)

It was agreed that the coordinator would communicate with the partners responsible for the actions listed above and, based on that communication, would provide a more detailed work plan for the next six months by end of August.

8. Other matters

The participants discussed how the core partners could find funding for capacity building and for travel of the IG members as well as the possibility of other IG members to find financial support for GFIS activities.

9. Next meeting

NBII offered to host the next GFIS IG meeting in the US. The participants thanked NBII for that offer and agreed that the best time for the next meeting would be in six months time at the beginning of 2007. The coordinator will communicate with the members of the GFIS IG accordingly before the end of this year.

10. Closure of the meeting

Peter Mayer thanked all participants for the productive and open discussion and closed the meeting.