

FABI REPRESENTED NOBLY AT THE 24TH IUFRO WORLD CONGRESS

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Between the 6th and the 11th of October 2014, the International Union of Forest Research Organizations (IUFRO) held its 24th World Congress in Salt Lake City, Utah – a beautiful mountainous state in the Great Basin of the USA. An IUFRO *World Congress* is only held every 5 years, which means that these world congresses have been around for 120 years – testament to the important role this organisation plays in forest research globally. That said, for FABI this congress was extra special as founding director, Professor Mike Wingfield, was formally inaugurated as the next president of IUFRO - a great achievement for Professor Wingfield, and also a very proud moment for FABI and all its stakeholders. Moreover, Professor Wingfield is also the first IUFRO president from an African country.



Prof Mike Wingfield gives his acceptance speech as the new President of IUFRO (A). Prof Mike Wingfield participates in a panel discussion with writer David Heskell and the founder of ESRI, Jack Dagermond (B). At a talk on the impact of Laurel Wilt on the indigenous peoples of America (C). Izette Greyling, Jolanda Roux, Lori Eckhardt and Tessa Baumont at one of the “in-congress” tours (D).

The theme of the 24th IUFRO World Congress was 'Sustaining forests, sustaining people: the role of research'. To commemorate the start of this congress, a special tree-planting ceremony was held at the International Peace Gardens in Salt Lake City. Many important figures in the forest research and management arena, including Tom Tidwell, Chief of the United States Forest Service (USFS), and Robert Bonnie, the Under Secretary for Natural Resources and the Environment at the U.S. Department of Agriculture, were present to plant four symbolic forest tree species: Pinyon Pine, Cedar of Lebanon, American chestnut, and the European Beech. Professor Mike Wingfield was among these prominent green-fingers, and was responsible for helping to plant the American chestnut. Since the very existence of the American chestnut today was due to advances in plant pathology research, this was indeed very fitting act for Professor Wingfield.

The tree-planting was also to highlight the role of urban forests, which, among other aspects, is often associated with a higher quality of living in urban areas through cleaning air, filtering water, etc. In fact, Tom Tidwell aptly called urban trees the "hardest working trees". For Salt Lake City specifically, the Mayor has prioritized urban forest initiatives, and this will probably be a future directive for many cities around the globe.

In a sense, the World Congress cannot be synthesized in a single take-home message, since that would be an unfair representation of the *circa* 2400 talks and posters presented, the number of brilliant keynote plenary speakers, the 1000+ students present from across the globe, and the quality of the convention centre facilities. However, since the congress was focussed around sustainability of forests to ensure future human well-being, there were three important future imperatives for global forest research worth noticing:

Firstly, if we want to provide wood material sustainably, then there has to be a stronger emphasis of *forest management* as integral to success. Although this might sound obvious, not all nations are on par when it comes to management aspects such as forest health and good harvesting practices. Not all nations have access to scientist or extension officers which could help manage and regulate their forest commodities. Many under-developed or economically poor nations are producing wood products, and as demand for such products are increasing, consistent management practices becomes vital. We cannot therefore readily extrapolate models of sustainable forest management from one nation to the next. To cross this bridge, we urgently need more reliable data globally.

Secondly, the idea of forest sustainability being a simple idea - e.g. quick and dirty research

studies or management recommendations based on meta-analyses, is naive. To fully comprehend sustainability science, beyond the fad or buzz, is to firstly accept it is a naturally complex endeavour. This is why policy makers and governments should support sustainable forest management studies with a long-term mind-set.

Thirdly, for sustainable forest management to be realised globally, there needs to be a greater emphasis on educating people on the value of forests for providing income, e.g. through tourism and recreation. For example, studies in northern Brazil showed that because little to no recreation areas exist in the local native forests, the local people would more readily support the mining companies in the area for income, which is unfortunate as this short-term solution to income usually equates to more forest destruction and losses in ecosystem services.

Essentially, the only way we can convincingly argue for sustainable forest management is if people can be convinced that their future well-being and the forests they use are not mutually exclusive. And we know the only way to do this is with reliable evidence. That is the role of science and research, and is why it needs heightened attention globally. Forest education, an increased knowledge base, therefore remains the overarching ideal. This was a key message during newly elected IUFRO president Mike Wingfield's acceptance speech. Professor Wingfield also emphasized that it is our responsibility to make sure we meet our future demands for forest products - across all hierarchies of product needs.

All in all, this was a very academically stimulating week, with plenty of quality research papers presented and even more thought-provoking discussion held. We need to be creative to solve a very real and complex global forest health problem. The next World Congress will be held in Curitiba, Brazil, in 2019. For more detailed essays on each congress day, please visit the official FABI website and lookup the news archives (<http://www.fabinet.up.ac.za>).