Backgrounder:

Model Forests and the International Model Forest Network

Over 30 years for landscapes, partnerships and sustainability

What is a Model Forest?

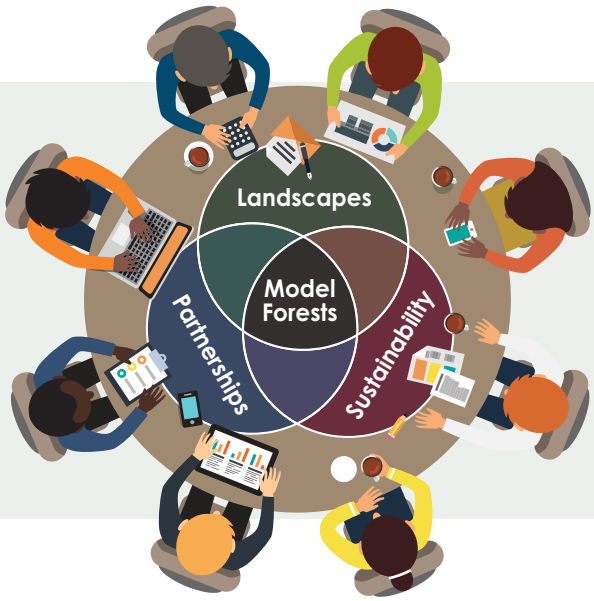
A Model Forest can be described as a large-scale landscape encompassing many different land uses; a specific partnership-based approach to sustainable forest management; and a long-term process that adheres to a broad set of principles to promote sustainability.

The partnership is voluntary and made up of stakeholders – such as local community associations, indigenous peoples, governments, academia, and industry – representing the environmental, social and economic forces at play within the landscape.

The partnership works to define a shared, locally relevant operational vision of natural resource management and then collaborate to achieve it in concrete terms for the benefit of all stakeholders Model Forests bring joint solutions and innovative strategies to shared challenges such as climate change, governance, land degradation, food security, wildfires, markets and livelihoods, health and well-being, and land-use conflicts.

Through the network structure and a commitment to knowledge sharing and capacity building, best practices and lessons learned in one Model Forest can be shared with others to accelerate learning and collectively make lasting progress to realize sustainable development, both locally and globally.

Model Forests are a proven multi-stakeholder platform for good governance and shared stewardship of forests and the larger landscapes that surround them.



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Our Story #IamModelForest

The International Model Forest Network (IMFN) is a voluntary global community of practice whose members and supporters work toward the sustainable management of forest-based landscapes and natural resources through the Model Forest approach.

The Model Forest approach was first developed and implemented by the Government of Canada in the early 1990s in 10 sites across the country. It was a response to a period of significant conflict in Canada's forest sector, when environmentalists, governments, indigenous peoples, communities, and forest workers were struggling over forest resources and how to manage them sustainably. The idea behind the Model Forest concept was to move away from valuing forests for timber alone towards a vision where social, environmental, economic and cultural benefits and trade-offs would be considered equally.

The approach showed immediate promise as people came together to find common solutions to the challenges they faced, such as logging practices, biodiversity conservation and economic stability. Bolstered by this success, the Government of Canada announced the development of an International Model Forest Network at the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in Rio de Janeiro, with the goal to scale up the lessons learned in from Model Forests in Canada and provide a platform to share its experiences with international partners.

The IMFN Secretariat was officially established in 1995, and today continues to be hosted by the Governement of Canada at Natural Resources Canada's Canadian Forest Service in Ottawa, Canada. The IMFN Secretariat provides the central day-to-day coordination of support and development services to the IMFN, and develops and strengthens the IMFN and its profile internationally.

What began in Canada in 1990 is now the world's largest network dedicated to sustainable landscape governance.

The trends and conflicts that gave birth to the IMFN over thirty years ago have become increasingly relevant these days. Inclusive and shared governance approaches to natural resource management are even more relevant in accelerating action to address the twin crises of climate change and biodiversity loss.

There is no solution to climate change and terrestrial biodiversity loss that does not involve forest ecosystems. Forest ecosystems, and how we sustainably manage forests, are a key nature-based solution to many issues, including climate mitigation, biodiversity loss, and increased efforts in conservation.

As the international community looks for ways to help forests adapt and remain resilient while achieving their domestic commitments under the Sustainable Development Goals and other agreements, the International Model Forest Network offers three decades of experience to chart an even stronger future and path forward together.

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