

Forest Inventory and Analysis

General Field Data Collection Job Description

Background

Forest Inventory and Analysis (FIA) is a National program of the USDA Forest Service that conducts and maintains comprehensive inventories of the forest resources in the United States. The Southern Research Station FIA Unit in Knoxville, TN in cooperation with southern State forestry agencies are responsible for inventorying over 250 million acres of forestland spread across 13 Southern States, Puerto Rico, and the US Virgin Islands.



The primary field data collection effort is completed by the State forestry agencies although the USDA Forest Service FIA has a small number of field staff. All quality assurance (QA) functions are completed by USDA Forest Service FIA personnel that are located throughout the southern US. Data collection in the commonwealth of Puerto Rico and the US Virgin Islands is completed by USDA Forest Service personnel based at the International Institute of Tropical Forestry in Rio Piedras, PR.

General Inventory Description

The FIA Program inventories the southern forests using a three-phase sample. In phase 1 (remote sensing), we use aerial photography and/or satellite imagery to determine forest area in each State. In phase 2 (field plots), we visit a selection of the forested acres identified in phase 1 to further describe the forests. In phase 3, we visit 1 out of every 16 phase 2 field plots during the summer and collect additional information about the forest.

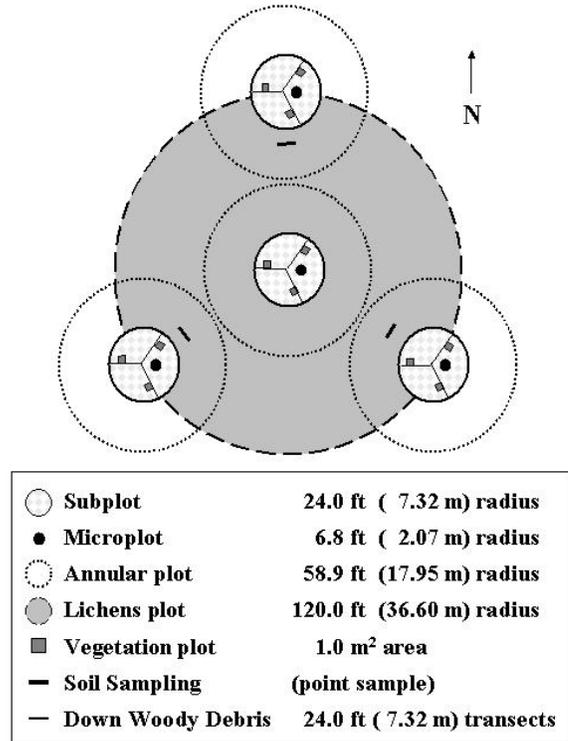
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On all of our field plots (phase 2 and phase 3) we gather quantitative and qualitative measurements that describe: tree measurements and characteristics, counts of tree regeneration, general land use, and general stand characteristics (such as forest type, stand age, and disturbance). In addition, changes in land use and general stand characteristics as well as estimates of growth mortality, and removals are determined by revisiting plots from the previous time period.

On the phase 3 plots, we collect a more extensive set of data during the growing season – June, July, and August. These measures relate to forest ecosystem function, condition, and health. The current measurements on the phase 3 plots can be grouped into the following categories: crown conditions, soil erosion potential, soil chemical and physical analyses, lichen communities, vegetation diversity and structure, and down woody debris.

Phase 2/Phase 3 Plot Design



General Position Descriptions:

Because of the various state organizations involved in data collection, specific information regarding salaries, benefits, and duty location cannot be covered in this document. Interested applicants should contact the appropriate state forestry agency. One general comment that can be stated regardless of the particular State forestry agency or the USDA Forest Service, is that often the field inventory positions have been used as entry-level trainee positions for other jobs within the respective governmental organization.

The field inventory crew individuals collect basic forest resource data; locate selected points on the ground from aerial photographs or other imagery; run compass lines and measures distances; make plot and tree measurements; identify all woody vegetation on selected plots; classify stands according to forest type, age, site index and various land use classes. Field inventory crew individuals count stumps on inventory plots and contact landowners, county and state officials, and others to collect information on timber removals and to determine land ownership, ownership size, and ownership tenure.

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Field crews must be able to use basic forestry equipment, read aerial photography to identify locations on the ground, and identify tree species within their geographic area. These skills can be refined during the first couple of months after starting field work. Field crews also use GPS units and portable data recorders to collect information on FIA plots.

All newly hired field crews go through a on-the-job training period. This training period involves exposure and application of all field data collection activities. On-the-job training generally involves working with a series trained individuals for six to eight weeks. Training is culminated with a certification plot. Field crew individuals have two chances to pass a certification plot. All state forestry agencies and USDA Forest Service policies require that the field crew individual pass a certification plot to satisfy probation requirements for continued employment.

These positions involve travel. Applications must show evidence of willingness to travel. Mobility is a required condition of employment for field inventory positions and the individual should expect reassignments to other work locations. Some work may be in remote wilderness areas with extended hours and overnight camping. The individual should expect to work in adverse weather conditions.

For more information on the Southern Research Station, Forest Inventory and Analysis Program:

Visit our web page at: <http://srsfia2.fs.fed.us/> or you may also visit the National FIA web page at: <http://fia.fs.fed.us>

You can also contact us at the following address:

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For more information on the various state forestry agencies, Forest Inventory and Analysis Program: Contact the various state forestry agencies at the following addresses:

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