



## National Development Strategy

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# The Forestry Development Strategy

The authors of the National Development Strategy (NDS) are firm in their view that Guyana's Forest resources should be managed in a sustainable manner. They therefore urge that the systems of forest management which should be adopted should be designed to conserve the country's biological diversity, its water resources, its soils, and its unique and fragile ecosystems and, at the same time, permit the production of timber and non-timber resources in perpetuity.

To this end, they propose that a series of logical steps should be undertaken. First, the Guyana Forestry Commission (GFC) should conduct surveys and inventories of all of Guyana's forest resources. Second, concessionaires should be required to carry out even more detailed forest inventories for the purpose of formulating and implementing forest management plans. These forest evaluation surveys should be checked, of course, by the Guyana Forestry Commission. Third, topographic and other relevant surveys should be conducted in order to identify vulnerable ecosystems. And fourth, the ecological and economic impacts of utilizing timber and non-timber forest products should be assessed by the GFC in conjunction with the Environmental Protection Agency.

In short, forestry in Guyana should be undertaken rationally, and nothing should be left to chance. We should know the quality and volume of our forest resources, where they exist, the nature of the ecosystems of which they are a part and which sustain and nurture them, and the consequences of their exploitation. Management or operational plans, which should be based on the information obtained by the various surveys, should then be an unconditional requirement for the harvesting of all timber and non-timber resources from the nation's forests.

The authors of the NDS also recommend that the Guyana Forestry Commission, in association with other stakeholders, should develop both a Code of Practice which should contain the monitoring criteria and indicators to be utilised in forest management, and a legislative framework to be used for conflict avoidance and resolution, and for the felling, extraction and utilization of forest products, without compromising the conservation of ecosystems and species. Moreover, they suggest that the commercial exploitation of the State

Forests should be undertaken only under concession agreements, which should be based on licences and permits that are transparently allocated through processes of advertisement and bidding or tendering. This, they imply, would go a long way towards removing the mistrust which prevails in some quarters in regard to the issuance of forest concessions in Guyana. The NDS places full responsibility on the GFC for the regulation of operations in concessions, and urges the Commission to identify blocks of forests that are suitable for concessions, and to categorise these blocks into different sizes, in order to provide for investors of different scales. It also recommends that a fair and transparent framework be developed by the GFC not only for the allocation of forest concessions, but also for their revocation, renewal and renegotiation. Of great importance is the NDS's insistence that there be devised a type of forest tenure which would enable forest concessions to be used as collateral for forestry development loans.

The NDS is adamant that concessions should be audited biennially by the Guyana Forestry Commission in order to ascertain whether concessionaires are meeting the standards and conditionalities defined in their sustainable management plans, following established guidelines, and maintaining production. It urges that if the required criteria are being met the duration of the concessions should be rolled over for two years. However, if they have not been met for two consecutive audits, the concession should be abrogated. The NDS stipulates that in order to guard against arbitrary decisions by the GFC, the concessionaire should have the right to appeal to the judiciary.

And in order to ensure the acceptance of our forest products in those overseas markets that are concerned with the possibility that our forests might be over-exploited, the NDS suggests that the GFC, in conjunction with other stakeholders, should develop national standards for certification, which should be used as criteria for guaranteeing that the timber extracted from Guyana has been removed from sustainably managed forests.

We have already referred in this series of articles to the inadequacy of Guyana's road infrastructure, especially in its hinterland areas. In order to overcome this obstacle to our social and economic development the authors of the NDS propose that the establishment of primary access roads by concessionaires should be co-ordinated and regulated in accordance with the NDS's overall proposals for the development of a national road transport system. They recommend that forest concessionaires should be compensated, either by being permitted to charge user fees e.g. tolls, or by a reduction of forest fees, or by any other arrangement entered into with the Guyana Forestry Commission, whenever the extraction routes which they construct form part of a centrally approved national road network plan, and on condition that they are built to specific requirements and are maintained to those specifications.

In regard to the problem of chainsaw lumbering to which reference was made in last week's article, the NDS recommends (a) that a licensing system for chainsaw operators be urgently instituted. This would require that those who transform the wood raw material to lumber should be registered and licensed before they are permitted to operate in authorised areas of State Forests (b) that chainsaw lumbering should be confined to areas that are designated for this purpose by the GFC; and (c) that chainsaw operators should be trained in skills that

would enable them to reduce ecological damage during felling, harvesting and lumbering. The establishment of equitable levels of forest charges is one of the major problems which beset forestry operations in Guyana. The NDS is quite certain that because the forests of the country vary in forest types, in volume per unit area, and in regenerative capacity it would be difficult equitably to prescribe fees that are based on the spatial area of concessions for the utilisation of our forest resources. It therefore strongly proposes that fees be charged on the volume of timber felled, and that the rates should be common to all species. It also insists that, based on approved forest inventories and forest management plans, concessionaires be required to extract a minimum volume of timber from their concessions each calendar year, and suggests that a proportion of the fees collected should be retained by the Guyana Forestry Commission and the remaining revenues should be placed in the Consolidated Fund for the use of the people of Guyana. The share of fees between the two parties should be decided by a negotiated formula.

The NDS also recommends that all the fiscal measures in respect of investment (tax holidays, export rebates, etc) which have been proposed in the general strategy, should be applied to the forestry sector, and that in this regard no distinction should be made between local and foreign investors.

The authors of the NDS are of the opinion that special emphasis should be placed, in the forestry industries subsector, on attracting the more capital intensive, high technology projects, particularly those that are linked to an overseas marketing network. Moreover, they strongly urge that fiscal incentives be provided to encourage the utilization of logs in downstream activity, i.e. to add value to the product. In addition, they stress that the commercial production and processing of non-timber forest resources, such as fibres, latex, oils, and lianes, be promoted as an essential element of sustainable forest utilisation. They also emphasise that new technologies for the economic utilisation of timber, to broaden and diversify current usage, to minimize waste, and to maximize the returns from the conversion of felled trees, should be developed by the GFC and the Guyana Forest Producers Association, so long as the sustainability of the forests is not impaired.

And finally, it will be recalled that in the last article in this series it was suggested that in order to practise sustainable forestry in Guyana and, at the same time, optimize the use of the forest resource, it was essential that certain basic data be obtained as soon as possible. Accordingly, the NDS recommends that a Forestry Research Committee be established to formulate and monitor a national forestry research programme which would be conducted by a National Centre for Research in Forestry. The Forestry Research Committee should determine priorities for research, advise on the most suitable ways for conducting such research, and ensure close collaboration with organisations responsible for research in other aspects of land use. In addition to conventional activities, research into the development of non-timber forest products should be undertaken. A fund for research should be established by the Guyana Forestry Commission. ([Back to top](#))