

LOBLOLLY PINE GENOME PROJECT

EXECUTIVE MEETING

APRIL 29, 2005

MEETING HIGHLIGHTS AND OUTCOMES

On April 29, 2005, the USDA Forest Service convened a meeting of stakeholders from academia, industry, and federal agencies to discuss need, purpose, scope, and implementation strategy for the Loblolly Pine Genome Project (LPGP). This document captures highlights of the discussion. Where specific outcomes emerged, they are noted.

In her opening comments, Ann Bartuska, Deputy Chief for Research and Development, acknowledged that the scientific community has been discussing the LPGP since 2003, but that a broader, consortium-oriented approach is required to truly move the project forward. She said that the USDA Forest Service is committed to the LPGP and would be one stakeholder among many in the effort, largely playing a convening and facilitation role. She shared her hope that the day's discussions would lead to a broader understanding of the major issues and steps on the path forward and that participants would commit to ongoing, active participation in the LPGP.

PURPOSE AND NEED

- There must be a clear and compelling message regarding the need for the LPGP, the LPGP's purpose, and the LPGP's benefits to society. For example:
 - How does this project connect to the important role that loblolly pine plays in the ecosystem, both domestically and abroad (i.e. plantations)?
 - What is the relevance of the LPGP to non-industrial private landowners, to industry, and to non-forestry forest users (e.g. the recreation community)?
 - What is the relevance of the LPGP to issues such as carbon sequestration, biofuels, and forest health?
 - How will this project contribute to the competitiveness of the U.S. forest products industry in the global marketplace? Why is it important to maintain a globally competitive wood products industry in the U.S.?
- Buy-in from end users on the purpose of and need for the LPGP is a necessary ingredient for getting commitments from potential funders and creating champions in the policy community.
- The vision for this project needs to be exciting and big picture oriented. It needs to engage a sponsor/champion who will bring other resources to the table and commit to seeing the project through.

SCOPE

- The statement of scope of the project will be an important factor in gaining broad participation and support. The statement needs to be clear and unambiguous.
- Defining the scope should be influenced by not only the science but the acceptance of the project in the wider community of interest. For example, if forest health is the broadest selling point, the scope should be responsive to that.
- If the scope is too diluted, it may pull the project off course for being able to deliver tangible products in the short term that continue to attract support and provide momentum to the larger collaborative effort.

- Managing expectations will be a critical element of securing on-going commitment from funders and others. If the scope is defined broadly, but the products are not broadly applicable, many would perceive that as failure. If the project is defined narrowly, but the products have broader application, many would see that as success.
- Loblolly and radiata pines are genomically similar. What would be the marginal cost of working simultaneously on two species?
- Loblolly could be the primary focus for building a comparative framework for similar work on other conifers in the future.
- Some aspect of the scope should encourage international collaboration. International collaboration promotes data sharing, defrays costs, and promotes synergies across efforts. There may be opportunities to leverage substantial investments other countries are making in conifers of interest to them to advance the LPGP.

Outcome

- The project's name should remain "Loblolly Pine Genome Project," with the understanding that connections to groups with interests in other pines and conifers will be made explicit.

IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY

Organization

- A coordinating body or structure is needed to coordinate the project's scientific, policy, and communication aspects and to facilitate relationships among different parties to achieve the project's long-term objectives.
- One element of that organization should be a core science group, probably the one that has self-organized already. Such a group gives the project credibility. It might be useful to augment the scientific group by adding some experts on ecosystem issues in order to get the message out to a broader spectrum of scientists.
- There is a need for a group that can work on communications and marketing. Such a group would be tasked with relating the purpose and need for the LPGP to the issues of interest to potential supporters. Key questions for such a group to answer include why public dollars should be spent on the LPGP and why is the LPGP important to society.
- Another group needs to look at models of organization to answer questions about how resources would get to scientists.

Funding and Outreach Strategy

- The funding and outreach strategy should include a component that identifies potential sources of funding and brings the right people forward to interact with those potential supporters. For example, scientists should talk to the agencies that would administer competitive grant programs. Policy professionals and university administrators should talk to Congress and the administration.
- There are many steps in the sequencing project cycle. It is important to understand the interests of different actors (e.g., National Science Foundation, industry associations) in each step.
- The project should look beyond traditional multi-stakeholder models and attempt to engage a principal champion that is willing to use its resources to engage potential sponsors and bring them to the table.
- The LPGP's coordinators need to think beyond traditional models of stakeholder organizing and develop a big, compelling vision for the project that will attract the type of funding needed to make the LPGP a reality.

Other Comments

- Planning for the proper informatics infrastructure should begin early.

Outcomes

- The scientific group that already exists will act as the science advisory group for the project. Its membership should be broadened to include ecosystem scientists. The first priority for the science group is to refine the overall scientific plan for the LPGP.
- A second group will be formed to address questions concerning the following: the value of the LPGP to society; end user groups that should be engaged; developing and marketing a compelling vision; strategies for obtaining funding; and, an overall organizational model for the LPGP.
- Meetings of both the science advisory group and the policy/communications group should include a liaison from the other.
- The leaders of science advisory group and the policy/communications group would meet regularly in order to ensure overall coordination and leadership.
- Key organizations to engage include: American Forest & Paper Association, National Association of Professional Forestry Schools and Colleges, Council of Environmental Deans and Directors, Institute for Forest Biotechnology, National Association of State Foresters, representatives from the non-industrial private forest landowner community, forest users other than industry, organizations who have a specific interest in Southern forests, and the USDA Forest Service.