

Policies Governing the Integrated Management of Forests, River Basins and Coasts in Japan

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From the mid-1950s to mid-1970s, during the period of high economic growth in Japan, development and industrialization by large-scale logging of natural forests, river development and dam construction, and coastal land reclamation were conducted. As a result, flood hazards, water shortages, sediment runoff, water pollution from industrial drains, degradation of agricultural production capacity, and fisheries and aquaculture damage occurred frequently in Japanese coastal areas. As a result of this environmental deterioration, conflicts occurred between industries that promoted development and citizens who tried to protect their communities and environment, and citizen movements developed.

The reasons why these problems occurred is that consideration was not given to the fact that land-based human activities in forests and river basins were having an impact on coastal resources and the natural environment, and forests and river basins and coasts were being functionally developed and utilized sectorally.

After the 1980s, sustainable development and resource use based on environmental conservation gained global consensus, allowing the reconsideration of values other than economic ones regarding the local resources of forests, rivers, and coasts, socio-cultural values such as multifunctionality, for example, have since been reconsidered, and awareness of integrated management of forests, river basins and coasts has increased.

However, forests, river basins, and coasts still face several problems. As a result of depopulation and an aging society in forested and agricultural lands, under-use results in abandonment and ruin of formerly cultivated land due to depopulation in the upper stream areas and population density in down stream ones: marine debris through runoff via rivers and streams further aggravates the loss of mudflats and shallow sea areas due to reclamation and over-exploitation reduces fisheries production. To solve these problems, integrated management of land and coastal areas is needed, but because of sectoral management, lack of cooperation and coordination, and sectoral and national legislation, these localized problems cannot yet be solved.

Against such a background, the Basic Act on Ocean Policy and Basic Plan on Ocean Policy, which promote integrated management of the coastal zone, were enacted in 2007 and in 2008 respectively in Japan.

The objective of this study is to clarify the necessity for integrated management of forests, river basins, and coastal areas by considering needs and measures, and to contribute to the formulation of policy for securing functional integrity and sustainable use of coastal areas by sharing and disseminating research results.

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