

Brussels, 9 September 2020

CEPF Feedback on the European Commission Roadmap on the Long-term vision for rural areas

The Confederation of European Forest Owners (CEPF) welcomes the European Commission initiative to design a long-term vision for rural areas. As important feature of rural areas, sustainably managed European forests are of great consequence to achieve the goals of this initiative. In this view, CEPF is convinced that that forest owners can be key enablers of the success of the Commission announced long-term vision for rural areas.

More than 40% of EU's land area is covered with forests and other woodlands, with a major share located in rural areas. CEPF therefore believes that forests, the multiple socio-economic and environmental benefits they provide, and the people responsible for their management should be at the core of the design of the long-term vision.

CEPF underlines that the long-term vision should acknowledge the essential role of those who are "behind the forest", managing it and contributing to life and dynamism in rural areas. Custodian of 60% of European forest heritage, European forest owners (most of them family forest owners) are committed to sustainable forestry.

As rural areas are expected to answer to many policy priorities laid out in the EU Green Deal, a coherent approach is essential. In this context, CEPF welcomes the approach to strive towards complementarity and coordination of the different policies under the European Green deal. CEPF strongly supports the achievement of a holistic vision of rural areas under the long-term vision, including a coherent and holistic approach of the EU forest-related policies through the new EU Forest Strategy.

EU forest-related policies and the long-term vision for rural areas must reflect that rural areas are prone to natural hazards impacts and that sustainably managed forests contribute to increase resilience of rural livelihood and landscape features.

Healthy and resilient forests and their owners will contribute to the improvement and support of resilient of rural areas and will also contribute to provide numerous goods and ecosystems services expected by society. As they grow, EU forests deliver on, among others, biodiversity, drinking water, carbon sequestration, wood and non-wood forest products or recreational and spiritual spaces. In this, EU forests in rural areas have a long-term role to play in the achievement of UN SDGs or EU climate neutrality goals. The many EU-forest related-policies should support appropriately these through coherent aims, appropriate funding sources and good scientific knowledge base.

Lastly and specifically, following the impacts of Covid-19 on the EU economy, the European forestry sector can contribute to our recovery, in particular in rural areas.

For this, CEPF highlights the crucial of role that the EU Bioeconomy Strategy should play in the long-term vision as the essential tool to tackle the specific issue of rural poverty and land abandonment. Economically viable European forests provide the largest non-food renewable resource for a sustainable bioeconomy and around 5 million jobs in forestry and related industries. Supporting this contribution will provide further innovations, jobs and value creation to sustain living rural areas.

CEPF looks forward engaging with the European Commission on this important initiative

