



Joint EUSTAfor, CEPF and Copega-Cogeca Statements
at the
EU Forest Directors General's Meeting
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Session 1: Vulnerability of forests under climate change - EUSTAfor

Over recent years European forests have suffered from severe damages caused by extreme weather and climate events, followed by pests and disease outbreaks. Thus, European forest owners and managers are aware of the challenges posed by climate change. They are taking various locally-fitted practical measures to address them, despite the considerable uncertainty remains about the future impact of changing climate on forests .

Forests cover more than 40% of EU lands and are crucial for adaptation to climate change, and – at the same time – they are heavily affected by it. Due to its unprecedented scale and impacts, past forest management approaches based on biological automation, natural regeneration and successions, species shifts, and evolutionary trends may no longer be sufficient in the future.

To effectively cope with these impacts and losses new and sometimes significant human interventions in forest management will be required. Whilst high biodiversity and site adapted forestry are important means to strengthen resilience, flexibility is needed in the adaptation of silvicultural measures in order to keep forests thriving despite ongoing climate change. Therefore, it is imperative to include the relevance of adaptive forest management, and the need of investing in resilient forest ecosystems when discussing the vulnerability of forests under climate change.

Adaptive forest management which requires foresters to trial and test new forest management methods and measures in an integrated way.

Examples include: the reduction of tree age, more intensive thinning of stands to create robust climate change-resilient stands with a low height/diameter-ratio and a diverse vertical and horizontal structure, the breeding and planting of improved and climate-resilient seedlings, or the human-assisted migration of tree species, i.e. the anticipatory planting of tree species outside of their current "natural" distributional range, restoration of small water retention and water resources protection whilst preventing erosion, etc. Application of such measures also implies learning by doing, including accepting mistakes which cannot be totally avoided, whilst adjusting solutions to the varied local situation.



Given the high diversity of forests and forestry across Europe, it is possible to identify some overarching priorities for increasing the resilience of forest ecosystems:

- Support to wide range of silvicultural measures from planting of mixed stands, selective thinnings and multi-layer stands, to decrease of rotation age,;
- Enhancing genetic resource management and promoting assisted migration of forest species;
- Increasing prevention, preparedness, and recovery from natural disasters, such as wildfires, storms, droughts, pests and disease outbreaks.

To successfully act in the field, European forest owners and managers need well-designed EU and national strategies that reflect the complexity of sustainable and multifunctional forest management, supported by appropriate financial means. This requires the accurate positioning of sustainable forest management in the overall process of setting well-balanced policy objectives followed by relevant and coherent strategies to reach these objectives. In the climate mitigation context, besides looking at how much CO₂ can be removed from the atmosphere, the stronger focus must be on how to secure the long-term capture of this carbon, whether through well adapted healthy and resilient ecosystems acting as sinks, but also through storage in wood-based products and substitution of fossil-based alternatives. Whether and how certain aspects of sustainable forest management could be improved and could deliver more than today, should be first subject to silvicultural research and serious impact assessments leading afterwards into well-informed policy decisions.

Session 2: Carbon storage in forest and wood products - CEPF

The subject of carbon storage in forests and wood products is of high importance for forest owners and managers that our organizations represent. The starting mandate of the newly elected European Parliament and the mandate of the new European Commission to start shortly, will be in time when practical decisions will need to be taken to continue reducing EU GHG emission reduction, in line with the 90% objective proposed by the European Commission for 2040.

EU forests can contribute to a fair setting encompassing carbon sequestration, storage and substitution, thus enhancing contribution to bio-based circular bioeconomy while delivering on a wide range of ecosystem services, strengthening rural livelihoods .

To maximize benefits both on climate change mitigation and all other expectations from the society, the 3 "S" functions have to work hand in hand with management planning and decisions: sequestration, storage and substitution.

Over the last years, the policy developments have focused and given priority to the carbon sink functions, leading to an unbalanced approach with regards to its other climate functions, in particular substitution. European forest owners and managers strongly support



future policy decisions to provide solutions to reestablish the balance between various forests' functions with regards to climate change.

We would like to share the following considerations and recommendations regarding EU policy developments:

- The European forest sector and its value chain has a strong capacity to contribute to the 90% GHG emission reduction 2040 target set by the European Commission. It is essential for EU institutions to intensify the dialogue with the forest sector to establish how this contribution could be the most efficient. This means finding the path and enabling a policy environment where forestry can contribute along with its capacity to sequesterate, store and substitute fossil carbon.
- In practice, as an example, the revision of the LULUCF Regulation should move the role of forests and forestry from offsetting other sectors' emissions (via the net zero rule) to a separate goal for the sector, built on a balanced approach between sequestration, storage and substitution. Supporting and promoting active and long-term forest management should be seen as a necessary part of delivering carbon storage in products and materials.
- In practice, another example is the carbon removals certification Regulation. Developing and Implementing methodologies that are based on forest life cycle, which are currently under discussion within the EC Expert Group on Carbon Removals - will determine whether and how this tool would allow forests and forestry to actually contribute to climate change mitigation.
- The future EU Bioeconomy Strategy announced by the European Commission for 2025 will also be of utmost importance for the forest sector. The Communication setting the EU 2040 GHG emission reduction target has clearly recognised bioeconomy as a key pillar of the sustainable transition away from the fossil-based economy and the enabling framework for resilient and thriving European rural areas. The future Communication will be the opportunity for the European Commission to set concrete actions and initiatives to develop and strengthen the bio-based economy, including the contribution of the forest-based sector.

Session 3: Innovation directions in forests - COPA-COGECA

Following the successful International Day of Forest theme on Forest and innovation - "New solutions for a better world", we welcome this continued emphasis on the importance of innovation in the forest-based value chain. In this context it was stressed the fact that over recent decades, innovation and research in the forestry sector have unlocked the new potential of using trees in ways we have never imagined before. In addition, it has shown how rapidly evolving remote sensing technologies are contributing to support the



monitoring of forest resources and detection of natural disasters, such as fires, pests infestations, etc..

Research and innovation at EU and national levels play an important role in supporting the sustainability objectives of our sector. This requires funding and investment, as well consistent R&I policies and work programmes aligning with other relevant EU policies.

We believe that only through the multi-actor approach where the active involvement of key stakeholders will ensure more demand driven research and innovation as well as help bridge the gap between research and practice. This will ensure that the results and proposed solutions are feasible for forest owners and managers for a continuously improving sustainable management of forest in the EU.

Effective cooperation and knowledge exchange between stakeholders such as forest owners, managers, professionals, forest advisors, researchers, business, and policy-makers can facilitate the dissemination of best practice, foster innovation and exchange of good ideas.

We are pleased to share some concrete initiatives that we consider relevant to be supported, and can contribute to bringing innovation closer to the reality and needs on the ground, as well as enhancing the collaboration between all relevant actors and stakeholders:

- In the last 10 years the European Forest Institute and The Network of European Regions for Innovation in Agriculture, Food and Forestry (ERIAFF), supported by our organisations have organised five editions of the Forest Innovation Workshop. The next workshop will take place in Brussels on 11 and 12 February 2025 where various EU projects on forest will be presented and discussed. These kinds of initiatives play a key role in exchanging concrete solutions from innovation and research for a more resilient sector. and bringing together practitioners, researchers, academia and policy makers.
- Our organisations are supporting the Business Applications and Space Solutions of the European Space Agency (ESA BASS) to explore how the challenges that forests are facing can be addressed with space-based applications. ESA BASS is planning to launch a Call on Space for Sustainable Forestry in October this year that would promote the development of solutions which use both terrestrial and space technologies. The key objectives include fostering innovation through space technology projects and promoting sustainable initiatives.
- One of the important actions included in the EU Forest Strategy for 2030 is EU Research and innovation partnership on forestry. For forest owners and managers, the strategic research and innovation agenda that will guide the implementation of the partnership, is a great opportunity to address together with Member States the main challenges such as climate change mitigation and adaptation, and to ensure better coordination and exchange between relevant stakeholders to make sure that no one is left behind. This work will need to take into account the SIRA 2030 of the Forest Based Sector Technology Platform that it is an important point of reference for prioritizing future actions that must be undertaken to address the needs of the sector and European society.
