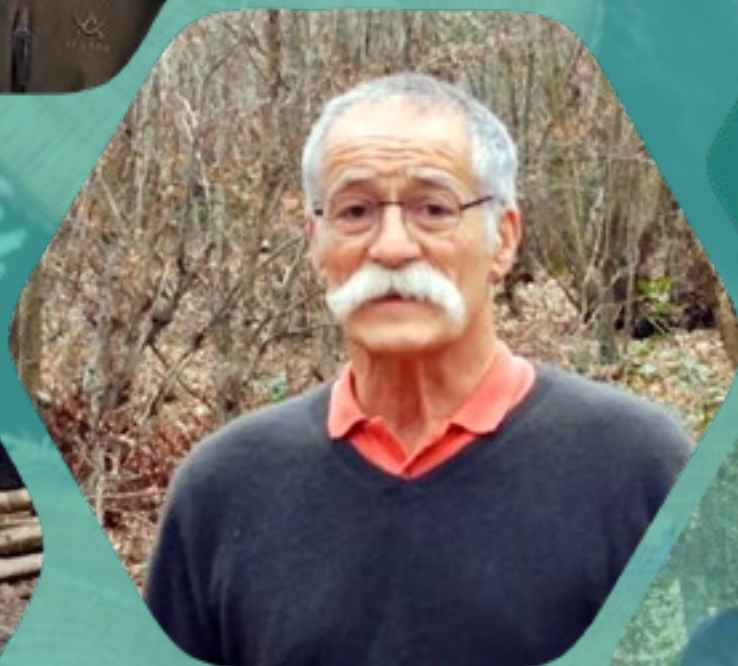




JOINT POSITION

THE NEW EU FOREST STRATEGY

OUR FORESTS
OUR FUTURE



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The EU Forest Strategy (EUFS) should remain the main policy tool for an integration of European forests and forestry into all other policy areas.

This paper brings to the forefront the views of forest owners and managers, and highlights some of the realities on the ground, and some of the main aspects that should be considered if we are to have a forest strategy that can effectively be the reference document for European forests and forestry.

Forests and forestry have great potential in that they can simultaneously address many of the societal challenges identified in the European Green Deal. They have a major role to play in our joint efforts towards a more sustainable society and economy.

Instead of giving in to the temptations promised by polarising views, we should explore ways of maximising synergies and minimising potential trade-offs between the diverse functions of forests. This requires thorough analysis, forest sector know-how, particularly considering the impacts from dynamic natural conditions, markets and societal developments.

What do we know (or not know) about European forests and the people behind them?

If we look at the current EU policy debates on the state of EU forests and their role in achieving key EU objectives, it seems that basic but important facts about our forests and expertise of forest owners are not sufficiently considered.

When working on the new EUFS, it is important to take into account the most recent figures on the state of our forests. It is also important to be well informed about the diverse realities on the ground and the mosaic structure typical of European forests. The EU sets an international example for sustainable forest management (SFM), which is implemented on the ground. SFM has been developed over the centuries. To date, the biggest drivers of change affecting forest and forestry come from outside the sector. This includes climate change, which is already having major impacts on our societies and ecosystems, with storms, droughts, floods, pests and diseases, and megafires. Therefore, the overall resilience of

ecosystems, including forest ecosystem, cannot be taken for granted.

A recently published report on the State of Europe's Forests states that:

- European forest area has increased by 9% over the last 30 years;
- The volume of wood and the weight of carbon stored in European forests have grown by 50% over the last 30 years;
- About 3/4 of the net annual wood increment is felled;
- The volume of wood supply has grown, reaching 550 million m³, which is 40% more than in 1990;
- Stands composed of two or more tree species predominate in European forests
- Populations of common forest bird species are stable;
- The area of forests designated for biodiversity conservation has increased by 65% in 20 years, and the area designated for landscape conservation by 8%;
- The number of genetic conservation units has increased about 10 times since 1990;
- Between 2010 and 2018, foliage loss has increased by 19% in European forests.

Under the new EUFS, the ownership structure, the human and social dimension, the competences and jobs linked to the management of forests should also be considered.

The average size of a private forest holdings in the EU is about 13 hectares. However, approximately two-thirds of the 16 million private forest owners – covering 60% of the EU forest area – have holdings of less than 3 hectares. For forest owners, the generational perspective of their forest is of the utmost importance. This perspective means being altruistic and caring about others more than yourself.

What have we learned from the current EU Forest Strategy?

The mid-term review of the current strategy shows that the new strategy must address a growing societal demand regarding forests and increased climatic pressure. This requires additional efforts

and commitments from all relevant actors to intensify coordination, cooperation and expert involvement, including across sectors and between the Commission, Member States and other stakeholders.

In addition to the point above, the new strategy must raise awareness for the societal value and importance of well-managed forests. This ensures strong societal support for SFM and increases the contribution of forests towards achieving EU objectives.

What should the future strategy look like according to European Parliament and Council?

The European Parliament² and the Council³ sent strong messages to the Commission regarding what should be the main role and objectives of the new EU Forest Strategy. It is important that some of their key requests (listed below) are reflected in the final Commission proposal:

1. The new strategy needs to be ambitious and ensure coherence and a better integration with all relevant EU forest-related policies. It needs to be balanced, and should be developed in coordination with Member States and stakeholders.

2. The strategy should include concrete and effective measures to enhance the resilience and adaptation to climate change, creating strong synergies between mitigation and adaptation through SFM and sound research and innovation.

3. In order to achieve its objectives, the strategy must promote the use of EU financial tools such as the rural development measures under the future CAP Strategic Plans to support the implementation of SFM including the adaptation of forests to climate change, preservation of biodiversity, and viable rural areas.

How to move forward? 3 key requests of forest owners for the future strategy.

Our Vision - By 2030 the EU Forest Strategy should:

- Substantially contribute to integrating the concept of SFM in all relevant EU policies for the forest sector.
- Provide support with a view to promoting investment, innovation and cooperation

for resilient forests and a sustainable forest-based sector.

- Provide a solid basis ensuring that forestry and the whole forest-based value chain can act as an important contributor to the bioeconomy and to continue on the path towards climate neutrality.

1. Management of our forests: adapt but not reinvent.

Societal expectations towards forests have been rising over the last decades. Forests are expected to provide key solutions for mitigating climate change, enhancing biodiversity, contributing to economic and social recovery in the context of the Covid crisis. Citizens also expect more wood-based materials, clean water, clean air, nice and open forest recreational areas etc. There are different ways to achieve this multifunctionality in practice, so flexibility is needed when it comes to management choices and practices. The common roots of our understanding of “managing forests in a sustainable way” must be preserved and developed, not reinvented. By building on these existing roots, the new EUFS will be able to ensure coherence among the increasing number of EU forest-related policies, which is highly needed today.

EU forests are as diverse as their owners, their forest management decisions and objectives. The SFM definition, criteria and indicators⁴ that have been agreed upon and endorsed by more than 46 countries and the EU at Pan-European level are the foundation of EU forest management practices. There is a continuous effort to improve and possibly revisit this later to ensure that they respond to current and future challenges and opportunities.

Forest management decisions are not easy and straight forward to make, contrary to what some will believe in the ongoing EU debate. In addition, in spite of what we can read and hear these days, forest management practices definitely encompass biodiversity preservation. Not taking care of biodiversity would mean shooting ourselves in the foot, since the ultimate objective we all have, and this goes for forest owners first and foremost, is to preserve healthy and resilient forests for future generations.

In the current EU debate on “what do we want from our forests in the next decades?”, the SFM concept and its implementation are being questioned and challenged as part of some policy

2 - European Parliament resolution of 8 October 2020 on the European Forest Strategy - The Way Forward (2019/2157(INI))

3 - Council conclusions on Perspectives for the EU forest-related policies and EU forest strategy post 2020 - Council Conclusions (10 November 2020)

4 - Forest Europe SFM criteria and indicators



attempts to modify this approach, which strikes a balance between all sustainability functions.

At a time when forests are increasingly suffering from climate change, forest management must be supported and accompanied in order to keep adapting and evolving, as it has done successfully over the last decades. In the context, the key role that producers organisations and cooperatives play to support forest owners to adapt to climate change and to other challenges needs to be recognised. Among other things, the new EUFS should present specific measures that complement the horizontal measures announced in the recent EU Climate Change Adaptation Strategy ⁵.

We should trust and support an approach to forest management that has been implemented at EU level for decades in a dynamic and evolving way. Having the current SFM definitions and principles as the basis of the new EUFS does not mean remaining static and not facing the existing challenges. On the contrary, it means that forest owners will continue to adapt, learn and innovate as they work with nature to maintain EU forests and respond to societal expectations.

2. Maintaining healthy forests does not happen by itself or for free without investments

The new EUFS should recognize the achievements made so far and consider the possibilities forest owners have and their motivation when it comes to managing their forests. Such recognition should be accompanied by actions and measures aiming at supporting EU forest owners in their management activities. Indeed, forest management does not simply happen by itself – it requires substantial investments, in time and money, and entails risks prior to generating any revenue, which is very often modest in relation to the work carried out.

When addressing forests and their benefits, one should remember that there are people behind healthy forests. Forest owners are the caretakers of forests. It is essential that policymakers acknowledge the important role they play and strive to keep them motivated, as they are the ones who are ultimately taking on the responsibility of all consequences related to these decisions.

In certain parts of Europe, we can already observe the disengagement of forest owners

from their forests for various reasons, which can put forests and their rural areas at a high risk of abandonment, with all of its consequences. In this context, improving the ability of small holdings to sustainably manage their forests needs to be considered.

The main ecosystem service that generates revenue today for forest owners and managers is the supply of wood. The other benefits provided to society through SFM are rarely rewarded.

Forest owners need drivers and incentives if they are to continue to invest. The new EUFS should gather concrete proposals for faster progress and create an incentive for providing ecosystem services, including climate protection. Without support and risk management tools, forest owners will be less inclined to keep on investing and taking increasing risks related to natural disturbances. The new EUFS should also promote practice-oriented advisory services and knowledge exchange.

We should give our trust and support to those who use their valuable and long experience to take care of our forests. Their work, their efforts and their commitment must be acknowledged through existing and new innovative financial measures, as well as advisory services that are adapted to their needs. In doing so, the new EUFS could send a clear signal that provides an incentive, thus ensuring that forests continue to be actively managed, which in turn contributes to achieving the European Green Deal's objectives.

3. More timber in construction: what else? And where from?

In its communication “A Renovation wave for Europe – Greening our buildings, creating jobs, improving lives”⁶ the Commission has shown strong support for wood in buildings: « Nature-based materials such as wood can play a crucial role in the design of the New European Bauhaus as they can have a double benefit: stocking carbon emissions in buildings and avoiding emissions that would have been needed to produce conventional construction materials ». This is a positive signal sent to the EU forest-based sector regarding the development of a bio-based economy. However, support for the use of wood as renewable raw material should not be limited to the building sector.

The EU aims to reach carbon neutrality in 2050. The EU forest sector is an essential ingredient in the recipe for achieving this goal since it contributes

5 - EC Communication on Forging a climate-resilient Europe - the new EU Strategy on Adaptation to Climate Change

6 - EC Communication on A Renovation Wave for Europe - greening our buildings, creating jobs, improving lives



to climate change mitigation in three essential ways (the 3 S's): carbon sequestration, carbon storage in trees and wood products and carbon substitution by providing raw material that can substitute fossil fuel-based material and energy. As far as the third of these benefits is concerned, developing the bioeconomy also ensures outlets for resources derived from sustainable management practices. These practices prevent abandonment of forests and pastures and mitigate risks associated with biomass surpluses such as fires and pest outbreaks. This potential is worth being harnessed.

Harvesting high quality wood raw material happens when the tree has reached a certain level of maturity and its quantity has increased during the last phase of the forest management cycle. Prior to this step, it is necessary to carry out several other management operations which produce other sorts of wood for other uses. Therefore, supporting the use of wood in construction means supporting active forest management as well as supporting the production and consumption of wood-based products such as paper, packaging, and energy, which are necessary to achieve EU carbon neutrality objectives. If there is a political will to use and pay for locally produced EU resources for the EU renovation wave instead of possibly relying on increasing wood imports, we need to manage EU forests actively and sustainably. However, the political message regarding the origin of the woody raw material that is to contribute to this development, as well as the role of other wood uses, is still unclear. Indeed, further restrictions for EU forests might be introduced in the future to protect biodiversity.

In addition, there are calls today to increase wood consumption in buildings but to decrease consumption for other uses (packaging, paper, etc.). Such calls are simply ignoring forest management cycle realities, and the resulting different products from each operation.

We should trust and support the idea that using wood to replace fossil-based material and energy is one of the most effective solutions for mitigating climate change and reaching EU carbon neutrality goals. By supporting active and sustainable management of EU forests, the new EUFS would provide the EU forest-based sector and society overall with clarity regarding the fact that using wood raw material contributes to a viable EU local economy and EU rural areas.

For more information, please contact:



The Confederation of European Forest Owners (CEPF) represents national forest owner organisations in Europe. At EU level, CEPF promotes the values of sustainable forest management, private property ownership and forest sectors' economic viability. Based in Brussels, CEPF is a non-profit organisation, representing nearly 16 million forest owners. <https://www.ceph-eu.org/>



Copa and Cogeca are the united voice of farmers and agri-cooperatives in the EU. Copa represents over 22 million farmers and their families whilst Cogeca represents the interests of 22,000 agricultural and forestry cooperatives. <https://www.copa-cogeca.eu/>



ELO - European Landowners' Organization, is the umbrella organisation for national rural organisations of businesses managing agricultural, forestry and environmental land all over Europe. <https://www.europeanlandowners.org/>



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european farmers european agri-cooperatives

ELO^{*}
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