

Caring for European forests

European Forest Owners Manifesto:
Achievements, vision, & commitments

CEPF

Confederation of European Forest Owners

2023

Photo credit: Franz Thoma

ABOUT US



- We are more than 15 million people, women, men, and families, of different ages, cultures, social backgrounds, histories, values, and interests. There are as many different forests as there are forest owners: we are unique;
- Together, our forests account for around 100 million ha, which represents 60% of EU forests, equivalent to twice the size of Spain;
- We are long-term thinkers and doers. We benefit from the results of the work and investments of past generations and invest our time and money for the ones to come and society at large;
- We strive to pass on our forests in the best conditions to the next generations, and this motivates and drives us to take care of our forests with passion in the best way possible;
- We are attentive to forests and forestry research and innovation, and apply findings at our own scale;
- Most of us do not live solely off our forests, but these can be our safety net;
- Forests are a strong part of our identity.



Photo credit: Olivier Martineau © CNPF

Our

Achievements

Our forests are facing unprecedented challenges due to climate change and related natural disturbances, pests and diseases. According to the latest European Forest Fire report , “three of the worst fire seasons on record took place in the last six years” [1].

These uncertainties make forest management decisions increasingly complex and challenging, given that the ecological, economic and societal expectations put on forests for the next years or decades to come are not guaranteed. At the same time, societal demands on forests and forest management are steadily increasing, whether regarding wood supply, carbon sequestration and storage, biodiversity conservation, or even recreational areas.

We are also expected to deliver on numerous, and sometimes conflicting demands, for example: setting fire breaks to limit the propagation of forest fires and ensure access to firefighters, goes against the notion of avoiding fragmentation of forests for landscape and biodiversity purposes.



Photo credit: H el ene Koch

[1] San-Miguel-Ayanz, J., Durrant, T., Boca, R., Maianti, P., Liberta, G., Jacome Felix Oom, D., Branco, A., De Rigo, D., Suarez-Moreno, M., Ferrari, D., Roglia, E., Scionti, N., Broglio, M., Onida, M., Tistan, A. and Loffler, P., Forest Fires in Europe, Middle East and North Africa 2022. Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2023, doi:10.2760/348120, JRC135226.

By managing our forests in a sustainable way over the last decades, we have contributed to:

- Increasing forest area by 14.4 million ha [2], equal to almost five times the size of Belgium;
- Increasing the carbon stock in EU forests by 48% [3];
- Providing a renewable raw material that offers sustainable alternatives to fossil-based materials and energy needed in our daily life as part of an EU bio-based economy;
- Increasing long-term carbon storage in wood products;
- Preserving and enhancing biodiversity by providing various habitats for fauna and flora [4];
- Providing clear and fresh water as well as clean air;
- Increasing the volume of wood in forests by 8.5 billion m³, including high-quality wood for long-life uses [5];
- Providing non-wood forest products such as mushrooms, berries, nuts, and medicinal plants;
- Providing jobs and strengthening social cohesion in rural areas with around 3,6 million people directly employed in the forest and forest-based sector [6];
- Protecting people, homes, and infrastructures against natural hazards (avalanches, floods, rock falls, landslides);
- Maintaining and opening places for recreation and cultural services benefiting human well-being.

Until now, the work we have done with passion has significantly contributed to providing many of these high-value ecosystem services to society for free. **While people are well aware of the benefits they receive from forests, they may not always realise that these have been made possible by us, the people behind the trees.**



[2] Forest Europe, State of Europe's Forests, 2020, Table 3. Ind. 1.1 Change in forest area, 1990-2020

[3] Forest Europe, State of Europe's Forests, 2020, Table 14. Ind. 1.4 Carbon stock in forest, 1990-2020. Data on "Biomass", excluding carbon in "Deadwood" and "Soil and litter".

[4] Forest Europe, State of Europe's Forests, 2020, Biological Diversity in Forest Ecosystems, pg 21; and European Environment Agency, State of Nature in the EU, 2020. Status of and trends in habitats and species (Chapter 3), pg 21

[5] Forest Europe, State of Europe's Forests, 2020, Table 7. Ind. 1.2 Change in growing stock on forest, 1990-2020

[6] Eurostat 2021, Employment in forestry and forest-based industry

Our

Vision

By 2030, we want to be a cornerstone of a safe, sustainable, resilient, and competitive EU, thanks to active sustainable forest management, a prerequisite to healthy and prosperous forests and to a growing bioeconomy.

We want to keep playing our role in addressing the main challenges our society faces, from climate change to loss of competitiveness, high energy prices and social fracture. Our long-term vision is for EU citizens to keep enjoying all the benefits provided by our forests and to connect them with us.





Strength in diversity

We are a diverse group of people, as diverse as our forests spanning across the continent. Our management decisions are tailor-made and locally suited to our forests. These differences make it possible to fulfil the varying needs of society.



Embracing time

We are part of a long-term forest management cycle as it takes at least three generations for a tree to reach maturity.



Independent management of forests

We take care of our forests with decisions based on national and regional forest management legislations, values, scientific information and long-standing field expertise.



Integrated approach to forests

We consider all functions of forests essential. In addition to their environmental benefits, our forests are economically viable and bring social and cultural benefits to society. We contribute to the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

Our

Commitments



Over the last decades, we have managed our forests with multifunctional objectives to meet society's numerous and changing demands.

Continued improvement is needed, and we are eager to evolve, innovate, and adapt.

Sustainable forest management is a dynamic concept, ever-evolving with our knowledge and understanding of forests.

In this context, these are our commitments.



Continuing to optimise sustainable forest management. Forest owners are best placed to understand the complexity of forests and choose management priorities;

Contributing to mitigating and adapting to climate change. Through our forest management decisions and practices, forests should reach a balance between long-term carbon sink, storage (in forests and products), and substitution as well as adaptation and resilience to climate change;

Strengthening cooperation with the scientific community. The aim is to make management decisions fit to answer the multiple expectations and needs of society;

Enhancing cooperation with the whole value chain. Ensure that future wood-made solutions fit forests' future capabilities;

Mobilising more forest owners to manage their forests. A well-managed forest plays a central role in climate change adaptation, biodiversity conservation, and many other ecosystem services, as well as improving resilience towards forest fires, storms, pests and diseases;

Improving communication towards the public. Explain the reality and complexity of forest management, including the difference between various management practices and how these are not competing but complementary;

Fostering links between young and old, rural and urban, and between different socio-economic classes.

Our

Requests

Without proper management, the necessary changes and adaptations needed by our forests are simply impossible. Active and sustainable management is essential in safeguarding the future of Europe's forests.

In 2024, new Members of the European Parliament will be elected and a new European Commission appointed. Together with the Members States, they will all drive a new political agenda, with climate action continuing to be a priority. In this context, European forests and forest management must play a key role in shaping the future of the EU. We ask EU policy-makers to:





Photo credit: Estonian Forest Society

01

Enhance collaboration with forests owners

Consider and trust forest owners as key actors in the preparation and implementation of policies that affect us (i.e. environment, climate, energy, agriculture, health, finance, trade, etc.)

We should be provided with a wider and more direct involvement in discussing policies that directly affect us, reflecting prior and informed consent. Nothing about us without us!

We must make the EU forest-related policy and legislative ecosystem less complex if it is to be effective and if we want to keep the motivation of forest owners on the ground. We therefore call for an assessment and streamlining of EU forest-related policies and legislations in terms of their long-term impacts, their contribution to an actual balance among different forest functions and their potential leakage effects.



02 Support us in our work

Adapt support to forest owners to different forest ownership structures, to different regions, to the many services provided to society, and to the specific long time between the beginning and end of the forest management cycle;

Create enabling conditions to manage forests, in particular measures to adapt forests to climate change (exchange of best practices, scientific support), thus safeguarding forest habitats for the maintenance and enhancement of forest biodiversity and delivering on all other expectations and needs from society.

Provide operational assistance to forest owners through financial support and investments. In particular to small-scale and new-generation owners who are the future of forest management and need to be encouraged to start and keep managing their forests.

Develop tools, public and private, to financially value the provision of ecosystem services such as carbon sequestration, biodiversity enhancement or water purification;

Enhance research and innovation on how to best carry out active and sustainable forest management, including silviculture adaptation to climate change as well as their accessibility for practitioners.



Photo credit: Hélène Koch

03

Acknowledge a ‘one size fits all’ approach cannot work

Ensure sufficient room for tailored practices and solutions that best fit the diversity of forests, their local context and their challenges across Europe. There cannot be a ‘one size fits all’ approach;

Define and implement EU policies taking into account the distribution of competence between the EU and Member States and existing national forest policies, in full alignment with the subsidiarity principle according to the EU treaty [7].

[7] Article 5.3 of the Treaty on European Union (TEU), Protocol 1 on the role of national Parliaments in the European Union and Protocol 2 on the application of the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality.



Caring for European forests

As European Forest Owners, we want to be heard and recognised when it comes to the definition and implementation of EU sustainability objectives. We have much to contribute to the EU's 2050 ambitions and goals, which we highly support. Looking to the future, we require more flexibility and room for adaptation to local conditions to make it work in practice. We are confident that, through an open and constructive dialogue, our contribution will be considered for the next years, especially when it comes to "how" EU sustainability objectives can and should be achieved.



Confederation of European Forest Owners

Contact us

European Forestry House
Rue du Luxembourg 66, B-1000 Brussels
office@cepf-eu.org
www.cepf-eu.org