



The EU Forest Strategy for 2030

Enhancing the resilience of forests and regional value chains

EUROMONTANA'S CONTRIBUTION TO THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION'S CONSULTATION FOR THE 2030 FOREST STRATEGY

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Forests are the most common land cover of mountains in continental Europe, covering 41% of the total area¹. Mountain forests provide multiple functions, essential for human activities. These include not only the production of wood but also the provision of ecosystem services, such as protection against natural hazards, conservation of fauna and flora, landscapes, regulation of water supplies, and carbon storage.

Protection of forests habitats and species

Mountain forests are rich of different habitats and species, including endemic ones, in particular in Mediterranean countries. At the same time, they are particularly vulnerable to forest fires due to land abandonment and climate change. In 2019, 50% of forest fires in Europe occurred in Natura2000 sites, primarily in Romanian, French and Italian mountains².

Euromontana therefore expects the new EU Forest Strategy to bring solutions for forest protections and their adequate management. In particular, we call for the European Commission to promote more integrated approaches to natural hazards management, for example including forestry, agriculture and

¹ European Environment Agency, [Europe's ecological backbone: recognising the true value of our mountains](#), 2010.

² Joint Research Centre, [Annual Report on Forest Fires in Europe, the Middle East and North Africa](#), 2020.

tourism activities, and further training of risk experts. The danger of forest fires is ever increasing with climate change. The need for robust intervention forces (firefighting) and early warning increases.

In particular, it is essential to encourage training among foresters on the consequences of climate change but also to raise awareness among the general public. The [ClimEssences portal](#) for instance provides a series of tools for choosing tree species in the context of climate change (IPCC documents on climate change and forests, factsheets on different tree species etc.) Social innovation can also play a role in raising awareness on the importance of forests and on their protection, its contribution should therefore be enhanced in EU countries. Concrete proposals can be found in the [SIMRA](#) (Social Innovation in Marginalised Rural Areas) research project and more specifically on its [forestry brochure](#).

Increasing forests' resilience towards natural hazards should also be achieved through research, with more focused projects in European research and environmental programmes. The study and monitoring of forest genetic biodiversity can for instance provide evidence on their ability to adapt to climate change. Moreover, the exchange of good practices and experiences should be further encouraged at EU level beyond the project's level; this would fit in the activities of the EIP-AGRI and future CAP network. In order to increase forests' resilience, research and policies should also encourage smarter regeneration of forests.

Setting up an EU mechanism of compensation for ecosystem services should also be considered in the Forest Strategy in order to encourage the protection of forests and their ecosystems, to prevent against natural risks such as rock falls on roads and to retribute forest owners for carbon sequestration. Ecosystem services can also be a tool to reconcile urban and rural populations, between which there is a growing gap in the vision of the forest as a natural recreational activity in untouched forests on the one hand and a natural resource on the other. Promoting ecosystem services derived from the management of forests and raising awareness on the multiple functions of forests among all parties (foresters, tourists, ecologists, hunters etc.) can help to bridge this rural urban divide. The payment of ecosystem services can also contribute to expanding the surface of managed forests, an important factor in improving adaptation to climate change.

Protection of landscapes

In its report on the new EU Forest Strategy, the European Parliament “welcomes afforestation and reforestation as suitable tools in enhancing forest cover, especially on abandoned land that is not suitable for food production, close to urban and peri-urban areas as well as in mountainous areas, where appropriate”. Likewise, the Europe Commission plans to set up a “a roadmap for planting at least three billion additional trees in the EU by 2030”.

If planting more trees can be welcome in many areas, Euromontana alerts against such afforestation without taking into appropriate consideration the territory. Indeed, in some mountain areas, it would close landscapes and damage other habitats and cause irreversible biodiversity losses. Large scale afforestation of natural grasslands or culturally rich historical small-scale landscapes can lead to the loss of specific species, as it is happening in the Alps where meadows and open spaces are disappearing. Thus, a place-based approach is particularly important in mountain areas. In agreement with EUSTAFOR, Euromontana considers that restoration objectives must be precise and based on scientific knowledge and specific causes of forest ecosystem degradation must be identified. Adapted management practices should be encouraged without forgetting the market opportunities provided by wood when forests are correctly managed. Afforestation and reforestation should therefore be prioritised in urban and peri-urban areas, without extending into productive agricultural areas, but rather areas close to major infrastructures and degraded areas that need to be restored, particularly in order to rebuild the ecological network.

Protection of mountains' local economy

Euromontana wants to insist on the necessity to develop a balanced Strategy, in respect of the different existing uses of forests. The timber industry is a key sector in mountain areas, it creates jobs and contributes to keeping our territories dynamic. It is therefore also crucial to maintain funding for animation activities order to raise awareness on the forestry sector and its different jobs but also on the multifunctionality of forests and the ecosystem services derived from them. Such activities can promote dialogue and knowledge exchange between foresters and the public. Campaigns on the sustainable use of wood products and information on the role and essential and fundamental functions that forests offer to today's and future society are also essential to reconcile the multiple users of forests.

In order to maintain the multiple functions of forests (wood production, leisure activities, carbon storage, etc.), mountain forests must be managed collectively and cooperation between public and private actors must be further encouraged. The wider involvement of civil society, in governance and funding, seems essential to ensure that the benefits of mountain forests are recognised at their fair value.

Yet, in mountain areas, the activity of cable-shoring companies is threatening to disappear despite its many advantages. Its economic model is not working: the exploitation of 1m³ of wood by cable costs between 45-50 € m³, (roadside) has the sale for wood of good quality it varies between 60-75 € m³, but the part of less good quality, often representing 40 to 60% of the wood volume is sold at 30-35 €/m³³. The decision to carry out a cut is therefore relying on the net economic result of the cut, without considering the other related services. The sector must therefore receive stronger support and more awareness raising activities must be carried out to increase the knowledge on the benefits of wood cuts. Moreover, to sustain the economic viability and sustainability of mountain wood production, the creation of Geographical Indications for non-agricultural products is another interesting tool to valorise regional producers and non-relocatable products, as demonstrated by the "Jura wood" Protected Designation of Origin. Other initiatives exist to also promote ecosystem services, such as the Sylv'actes approach, which finances forest actions with positive impact on the climate, biodiversity, landscape and economy. Combining such approaches with the certification and promotion of local wood could contribute to establishing a sustainable model, in respect of the different functions of mountain forests.

The wood value chain in mountainous regions can contribute to achieve the Green Deal's objective by proposing cheap biomass heating alternatives to fuel as well as by developing new products from wood waste, in a logic of circular economy. Therefore, the Commission should for example encourage research and innovation on wood stoves and promote the subsidy of biomass heating plant in remote mountain villages.

Experiences, notably from the [Smart Village of Cozzano](#), in Corsica, demonstrate the benefits in terms of reduction of the use of fossil fuels energies as well as in structuration of circular economy regional value chains for wood waste. Such subsidy for biomass heating plant should be encouraged in ERDF funds. In addition, the different non-timber forest products should also be considered in the new Forest Strategy for their interesting development potential. To strengthen forestry value chains, Euromontana also recommends boosting digitalisation in mountain areas in order to support SMEs from the sector.

The cascade use of wood must always be pursued, thus favouring the transformation of wood into noble products, increasing the value of local production, which is an indirect incentive to reduce global deforestation. The progressive replacement of carbon-intensive materials, like cement, steel and plastic, by wood should be supported, for example by encouraging the use of wood in all public buildings.

³ EUSALP, Mountain forests and climate change in the Alpine region, September 2020, event report: <http://www.alpesboisforet.eu/docs/Restitution-Suera-foretmontagne-chgtclimatique-2020-vf.pdf>

Still, the use of wood and wooden products can be encouraged only if originating from sustainably managed forests. Illegal logging remains a huge problem in some East-European countries. The EU Forest Strategy must therefore put forward concrete measures to combat this practice as well as encourage the certification of sustainably managed forest plots.

It is also crucial for Europe to commit to reducing global deforestation, both direct deforestation related to wood products imported from tropical countries, and embedded deforestation related to deforestation virtually incorporated into those goods and services whose production has generated forest loss. It is estimated that EU imports create huge waves of deforestation every year, with European consumption estimated to be responsible of 10% of the global deforestation.

Finally, we call for preserving mountain forests that can capture CO₂, a long-term planning for the regeneration of species as well as an improved governance of forest management in terms of production and land policy.

Euromontana - the European Association for mountain areas

Euromontana is the European Association for mountain areas. Founded in 1996, it assembles around 65 organisations (regions, universities, chambers of commerce, of agriculture, development and environmental agencies) from 15 European countries in and out of the EU. Dedicated to the improvement of the quality of life of mountain people, Euromontana is working on different themes of crucial importance for mountain areas, such as cohesion policy, rural development, climate change, innovation, mountain products, tourism, agriculture and forestry, transport, youth among others. Euromontana is also officially supporting the RUMRA (Rural, Mountainous and Remote Areas) & Smart Villages intergroup of the European Parliament.

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