

# FOREST EUROPE POLICY BRIEF



## State of Europe's Forests 2011. Status and Trends in Sustainable Forest Management in Europe.

The State of Europe's Forests 2011 report demonstrates that Europe has one billion hectares of forests: 25% of the world total. The majority of Europe's forest area (80%) is located in the Russian Federation, and Europe is the most forest-rich region in the world, with forests covering 45% of the land area.

Contrary to what most Europeans believe, Europe's forests are expanding, and the forest area increased by 17 million hectares over the past 20 years. There are about 30 million private forest holdings, and many factors, including ownership, vary greatly between countries.

### Environmental, economic and social importance

European forests remove 870 million tons of CO<sub>2</sub> from the atmosphere every year, equivalent to about 10% of European countries' greenhouse gas emissions. The area of protected forests is expanding, and forest management practices increasingly promote conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity. Most forests have management plans, and the forest sector accounts for about 1% of GDP and 4 million jobs. The net annual increment in forest volume is higher than annual felling in almost all countries. Across Europe as a whole, only about 40% of the increment is felled, and the total growing stock of forests increased by nearly 9 billion cubic metres between 1990 and 2010.



**FOREST EUROPE** has developed and adopted six pan-European criteria for sustainable forest management. The criteria state objectives on important aspects of sustainable forest management, common across the European region. These criteria and their associated indicators are used for national reporting, and the national data are combined to assess progress towards sustainable forest management in Europe. They are regularly evaluated in the State of Europe's Forests report.



FOREST EUROPE Signatories and their forests

■ Forest ■ Other land

### **Policy instruments for sustainable forest management**

The State of Europe's Forests 2011 report identified that policy objectives and instruments have been adapted in more than half of the FOREST EUROPE signatory countries since the previous Ministerial Conference in 2007. Forest policies are increasingly influenced by international processes and by developments in other sectors – in particular energy, climate change and biodiversity policies. Challenges remain for improving consistency between the different policy areas that influence forests and forest management.

### **Forest sustainability, opportunities and threats**

An experimental method for assessing sustainability of forest management in Europe was developed for the 2011 report. The results are broadly satisfactory for most country groups and criteria, but they also identified threats to forests. Threats include nitrogen deposition exceeding critical limits in many areas, putting forest soils at risk; significant damage caused by insects, diseases and forest fires, as well as the risk of increasing severity of damage because of a changing climate; and increasing fragmentation of forest landscapes, with potentially negative impacts on biodiversity. In a very few countries the forest area is declining because of external pressures, or because fellings exceed increment. Employment in the forest sector is decreasing, and accidents and injuries continue to be a challenge. The net revenue of forest enterprises is negative in a few countries, raising concern for economic sustainability. Information problems persist, especially in South-West and South-East Europe and, without proper data on status and trends for important forest features, it is not possible to say whether forest management is sustainable.

### **Sound policies needed to solve national, European and global challenges**

Four complex policy areas facing challenges and opportunities were identified in the 2011 report: forests and climate change; wood for energy; conservation of forest biodiversity; and the role of forests in a green economy.

The challenge for the forest sector in the context of climate change is to find a proper balance between measures to sequester and store carbon and measures to substitute for non-renewable products and fuels, while at the same time adapting forests to the changing climate. Furthermore, forests and forest management must be properly integrated in the evolving international climate regime.

Wood is the largest renewable energy source in Europe, and is expected to play a major role in meeting future policy targets. Intensification of forest management and other measures to mobilise wood will require proper attention to trade-offs and

solutions that protect biodiversity and other environmental and social values in the future.

Progress in the conservation of forest biodiversity is identified. Questions still arise over whether the current situation is satisfactory, and what the consequences for forest biodiversity might be of changes in forest management in response to climate change mitigation measures – including the provision of more wood for energy purposes.

The 2011 report shows that the European forest sector already has several of the characteristics of a green economy: it is low-carbon, resource-efficient and, at least partly, socially inclusive. The sector therefore has the potential to be a role model for other sectors in the move to a greener economy. Nevertheless, waste and pollution could be further reduced in the sector, sustainable consumption patterns further developed, and new systems of payment for forest ecosystem services explored.

#### **State of Europe's Forests 2011 - Status & Trends in Sustainable Forest Management in Europe**

The State of Europe's Forests 2011 report was launched at the FOREST EUROPE Ministerial Conference on the Protection of Forests in Europe, 14-16 June 2011 in Oslo, Norway.

The overall aim of the report is to provide up-to-date, comprehensive and fact-based information to decision-makers and the wider public on the status and trends in forests and sustainable forest management in Europe for the period 1990-2010. The report was jointly prepared by FOREST EUROPE, UNECE and FAO, with major contributions from organisations, countries and hundreds of national correspondents, experts and authors from all over Europe.

Edited and published by  
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