

Preface

There is no better time to issue this comprehensive analysis of forests in the pan-European region than 2011, the International Year of Forests. Information and work related to forests is indeed at an all-time high, and the political attention given to forests and sustainable forest management is rising in the pan-European region, as well as globally.

Since the 1990s, the forest area in Europe has been increasing steadily. In the FOREST EUROPE region alone, the forest area increased by 17 million hectares in the last two decades. In addition to forest area, the volume of wood in pan-European forests is growing and a steady amount of roundwood is delivered by forests every year.

While productive, European forests also play an important role in the conservation of biological diversity and the area of forest primarily designated for this purpose is expanding. Moreover, while globally, terrestrial carbon stocks are decreasing as a result of the loss of forest area, thus causing substantial carbon emissions, forests in the FOREST EUROPE region store and sequester increasing amounts of carbon in their biomass.

Nevertheless, it should not be forgotten that European forests still face severe threats, such as the effects of climate change including climate variability. Europe will also need to address an increasing pressure on resources, and competition amongst uses such as wood energy, timber production, biodiversity conservation and carbon storage. This will make sustainable forest management even a more crucial tool to maintain healthy, diverse and productive forests.

This report is an attempt to provide you with a clear picture of the interactions between forests and society, and a snapshot of the main forest functions, their status and trends. This is also a tale of twenty years of commitments towards sustainable forest management in the pan-European region. The report confirms that sustainable forest management has proven to be successful in addressing challenges through the promotion of a balanced approach to forest uses that is capable of supporting environmental, economic and social functions alike. It is worthwhile noting that sustainable forest management was proved to be effective in countries with different social and economic backgrounds and natural conditions.

This success is a vital message put forward by this report as the region looks to be able to address old as well as new challenges for forest management. The report is not only addressed to forest experts, but also to the world of sustainable development, as it embarks on the Rio+20 process that will culminate in the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development in 2012. It is essential that when discussing sectoral issues and solutions, forests and sustainable forest management are acknowledged as crucial in the efforts to move towards a green economy.

We trust that you will find this report of interest and hope it will further stimulate discussions and deliberations on the role of forests in society and implementation of sustainable forest management in the region.

We also wish to thank all the contributors that made this publication possible. This publication reflects the effort and commitment of over 60 authors and 400 national experts who have worked together to provide us with the most up-to-date information on the status and trends of forest in the region. To them goes all our gratitude and congratulations.



Arne Ivar Sletnes
Head
FOREST EUROPE Liaison Unit Oslo



Paola Deda
Chief
UN ECE/FAO Forestry and Timber Section