

BIODIVERSITY, HUNTING, COUNTRYSIDE INTERGROUP

2022 EUROPEAN BIODIVERSITY CONFERENCE

EU Forests In the Age of Global Climate Change

On 6 December 2022, the European Landowners' Organization held its annual EU Biodiversity Conference named "CLIMATE-READY FORESTS IN EUROPE", at the Museum of Natural Science. The topics discussed were in the framework of the European Parliament BIODIVERSITY, HUNTING, COUNTRYSIDE INTERGROUP.

Data shows that up to July 16, 2022 some 517'900 hectares of forest have already burned in the EU region, according to Copernicus (EU satellite earth observation programme <https://effis.jrc.ec.europa.eu>). This accounts for more than the 340'000 hectares of forest lost due to fires during 2020.

Before we can start replanting those vast areas, we must ask ourselves in which forests should we plant to give them a fleeting chance to survive for the next 10 years. Climate change is one of the major threats to forests and their biodiversity – a threat that is rapidly progressing and intensifying other stressors, such as the change in land use. Trees are particularly sensitive to changes in climate due to their long lifespan, which does not allow for rapid adaptation (Linder et al., 2010). Any change in the structure of the ecosystem will inevitably change its ability to host other organisms. The European Commission submitted a series of proposals to revise climate law and related policy instruments, in the framework of the Fit for 55. The LULUCF Regulation, the AFOLU sector and the New EU Forest Strategy all emphasize the core role of forests and land in addressing climate change.

The conference addressed the state of play of EU forest readiness to climate change. How to make forests in the European region more adaptable to the new challenges which climate change will bring, so then these are able to cope with natural stressors? There is currently an exponential production of legislation and strategies that address to a degree the management of European forests. How to concretely improve management practices with a holistic approach that takes into account the entire spectrum of sustainability balancing it out with rising issues due to climate change?

Below a picture of the conference organizers' and participants' at the Royal Belgian Institute of Natural Sciences.



Some of the reflections and opinions of speakers were:

MEP, Simone SCHMIEDTBAUER, Vice-President of the Intergroup said: *“We need strategies which reflect the reality on the ground. The one-size-fits-all approach neglects the diversity of European forests. Forest owners are the ones who give life to the EU forest strategy when implemented on their land”*.

Roby BIWER, European Committee of the Regions, member of the ENVE and NAT Commissions Because added that: *“40% of the forest belongs to public authorities. It is important to listen to what the local regional authorities of member states have to say, as they are the ones implementing the regulations at local, European and national levels”*.

Gert-Jan NABUURS, Wageningen University and Research explained that: *“The situation of deforestation has to be improved more objectively and member states have to open up and accept the role of Brussels”*.

Peter LOFFLER, Policy Officer, DG Climate said: *“Forest adaptation is a dynamic process, needs to be done at every policy level, by all sectors and all actors. It works only as teamwork.”*

Els MARTENS, Jane Goodall Institute Belgium emphasizes the role of the new generation: *“Youth empowerment is fundamental for the future of Forest and Biodiversity at EU and International level”*.

Constantin KINSKÝ, Vice President, SVOL - Czech private owners forestry association Czech Republic, made a strong pledge: *“We need to be humble. Humility means biodiversity and flexibility. Need to manage forests by goals and not by process. Do not decide what forests should look like, but define what the forests should do, what services the forests should provide”*.

Silvia MELEGARI, Secretary General of, the European Organisation of the Sawmill Industry, confirmed that: *“The industry can play an important role for the resilience of EU forests but we need to have more predictability on the management choices as well as being involved in the design of the EU Policies”*.

Last but not least, Jurgen TACK, ELO Scientific Director concluded that: *“We can't afford to make any more mistakes. The valuation of Ecosystem services should be part of the future of our economy and be part of the EU's long-term strategic planning”*.

Speaker presentations and video recording of the meeting are available on the “Biodiversity, Hunting, Countryside” Intergroup’s website:

www.biodiversityhuntingcountryside.eu/#events

ABOUT THE EUROPEAN BIODIVERSITY CONFERENCE: The European Biodiversity Conference is an annual high-level conference organized by the ELO since 2010. The conference gathers land managers, landowners, policy makers, NGOs and industry representatives to discuss the participation of land users and land managers in the protection of biodiversity, as much as agro businesses and industries, from different angles.
<https://www.europeanlandowners.org/events/biodiversity-conference>