



Forest Communication and the International Year of Forests 2011



Upcoming Forestry Meetings: FCN and the European Forestry Commission

- March 21-25: [Regional Forest Information Week](#) (Switzerland)
- March 22: [Symposium on Ecosystem and Landscape-Level Approaches to Sustainability](#) (Spain)
- April 12-14: [Meeting of the UNECE:FAO Team of Specialists](#) (Hungary)
- July 4-6: [Payments for Ecosystem Services workshop](#) (Switzerland)
- October 3-7: Second World Landslide Forum (Italy)
- October 10: Joint Meeting-36 European Forestry Commission & 69th UNECE Timber Committee (Turkey)
- Nov-Dec: Forest Products Marketing Workshop (Slovenia)

Details on Forest Communicators' Network [meetings](#) and the European Forestry Commission [meetings](#)

The [International Year of Forests](#) has officially begun! On February 2, 2011, the United Nations General Assembly held its inaugurating ceremony in New York City to welcome the year that both celebrates and promotes the sustainable management, conservation, and development of forests. Several influential figures such as Ms. Wangari Maathai, Nobel Laureate and United Nations Messenger of Peace for Environment and Climate Change, and Ban Ki-Moon the Secretary General of the United Nations, delivered an address during the ceremony.

The International Year of Forests 2011 is being implemented by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) secretariat, in collaboration with state governments, non-government organisations, and private corporations. Ultimately, the goal this year is to build a stronger, larger community that participates in activities which encourage the sustainable development of forests around the world.

The UNECE Fighting for Forests

Over the past few years, the UNECE has made continuous efforts to promote the conservation and sustainable management of forests. Due to a lack of common interest in forest issues and the need to improve communication among those concerned with forests, the UNECE Timber Committee and the FAO (Food and Agriculture Organisation) European Forestry Commission decided to create the Forest Communicators' Network (FCN).

As time has passed it appears that people have become increasingly detached from forests. The dense migration to urban areas has created a physical barrier between people and forests, which contributes to a loss of interest in the topic. Nonetheless, it is in everyone's interest to protect forests granted that they are indispensable for climate mitigation, the provision of various products and medicines, and essential to the livelihood of over 1,6 billion people who depend directly on forests for subsistence on a daily basis. Raising awareness about forests thus became one of the FCN's main activities from the moment it was created.

While aiming to increase exposure to forest issues is important, the FCN saw miscommunication among multiple state bodies as a major obstacle to promoting the protection of forests. Those concerned with forest issues on multiple levels (scientific, political, and educational) often have the same goals in mind, but are unable to achieve them because they are not communicating amongst each other. The FCN therefore set out to remedy such miscommunication while promoting the protection and sustainable development of forests. It continuously strives to effectively communicate with people within and outside the forest and forest product industry to achieve its goals.



Tropical forests cover 23 per cent of the Earth's land surface, but they are disappearing at a rate of 4.6 million hectares a year

Dan: FreeDigitalPhotos.net



The Forest Communicators' Network: Connecting to the Forest World

Throughout the years, the FCN has continuously encouraged "state-of-the-art communication approaches" to facilitate exchanges among people involved and interested in the forest industry. In 2008, the network released a publication on Forest Communication Best Practices around the world. The release provided over 20 examples of effective forest communication practices that have taken place in a number of nations and that varied in both method and scope. Some projects were very interactive in order to target children and included activities such as trips to the forest, art exhibitions, concerts, and craft-making. Others, targeting a larger audience, utilised the media or consisted of educational workshops and seminars. Among the most innovative strategies implemented were: the Forest Pedagogic program in Australia and in the Czech Republic, the Forest Week project in Estonia, the "Don't litter the Forest" campaign in Latvia, and Forest Day in Sweden.



More than 1.8 million hectares of dry deciduous forest disappear every year
Dan: FreeDigitalFotos.net



"By declaring 2011 as the International Year of Forests, the United Nations General Assembly has created an important platform to educate the global community about the great value of forests – and the extreme social, economic and environmental costs of losing them"

Ban Ki-moon, United Nations Secretary General.



Forest Pedagogic in both Australia and in the Czech Republic was created to stimulate children's attachment to forests. The programme organised free activities, which allowed children to interact with forests and foresters, and also set up forestry fairs for the public to attend in order to learn about issues regarding the forest. In Estonia, conferences, excursions, seminars, exhibitions, concerts, and other events dedicated to forests and forestry were held so that a broad audience, regardless of their age, could participate in any of the activities. The "Don't Litter the Forest" campaign targeted families in Latvia through advertising via TV and radio. This educative campaign drew support from the Ministry of Agriculture, the Ministry of Environment, Waste management companies, private enterprises, NGOs, and the Environmental protection and the Development of Forest funds to shift the public attitude towards littering. Finally, Forest Day in Sweden takes place every year on a Saturday or Sunday and consists of excursions to the forest where children can engage in fun activities such as treasure hunts and constructing objects out of wood. To read all about the Best Practice examples, refer to the [UNECE-FAO Communicators Network publication, "Best Practices in Forest Communication"](#).

Upon establishing the year 2011 as the International Forest Year, the United Nations General Assembly requested that the UNECE Secretariat serve as the focal point for the implementation of the year. As a result, the FCN has been actively involved in the preparations for the year.

What to Expect this Year...

The International Year of Forests theme is "Forests for People" and the message is meant to call forth the collaboration of all people as a means to promote the sustainable management and protection of forests. The year is meant to raise public awareness of the challenges faced by forests as well as the people who depend on them, while also celebrating sustainable forest management initiatives that some have adopted worldwide.

In preparation for the year, the UN has undertaken several tasks with the collaboration of governments and several non-governmental organisations. Prior to the inauguration ceremony that took place earlier this month, preparations for the event included: creating an official logo and a website, contacting film and media industries to develop a communication strategy for the year, reaching out to individuals who generate media attention and inviting them to large events taking place to promote the International Year of Forests, and organising a film festival as well as several art competitions during the year. Many nations have already expressed their intentions to carry out activities throughout the year. Everyone can celebrate and profit from the various opportunities to get involved in forest activities during this International Year of Forests! For a list of upcoming events visit the [Calendar section](#) of the UN official International Year of Forests 2011 site.

Forest Facts:

- Forests store more than 1 trillion tons of carbon
- Deforestation accounts for 12-20 percent of the greenhouse gas emissions that contribute to global warming
- Forests make up 31% of the world's land area.
- Primary forests make up 36% of forest area
- Forests are home to 80% of terrestrial biodiversity
- 300 million people live in forests