

EU forests at our service

It's hard to imagine life in Europe without forests. Satellite images show a continent covered by green trees. Nearly half of Europe's land area is forest or woodland.

EU forests thrive in many environments, from sub-Arctic to Mediterranean, from Alpine to lowland, in flood plains and deltas. In all regions, they are home to a large number of animals and plants.

Forests provide many benefits, some more obvious than others. Wood and other forest products make an essential contribution to economic growth and to raising living standards. Well-managed forests are at the heart of sound and balanced natural environments and ecosystems. They also offer valuable breathing space and areas of repose and calm for Europe's highly-urbanised society.

What do we get from forests?

- raw materials for construction and other wood-based industries
- jobs and incomes for people, often in remote areas
- green energy (biomass) to replace fossil fuels
- better climate, air and water quality
- more fertile soil
- protection against erosion, landslides, floods and avalanches
- clean water supply
- places for people to relax and pursue outdoor activities
- shelter for wildlife and favourable micro-climates for rare species

Link to DG Agriculture website on forestry:

http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/fore/index_en.htm

Link to Brochure: 'The EU Forest Action Plan 2007-2011':

http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/fore/publi/2007_2011/brochure_en.pdf



Europe's forests in profile

- 42% of EU land – 177 million hectares – is forest or woodland
- Of these, 89 million hectares are used primarily to obtain wood and non-wood products
- Forests are growing – from 1990 to 2010 an area the size of Hungary was afforested
- Five million people work in forest-related sectors
- Output in wood-based manufacturing sectors is worth over €500 billion
- 13% of EU forests are protected areas
- 30% of Natura 2000 sites are forest habitats, covering 23 million hectares (Natura 2000 is an EU-wide network of nature protection areas)

2011 – International Year of Forests

Forests are one of Europe's greatest renewable resources, providing multiple benefits to society and the economy from earliest times to the present day. The way we manage, protect and develop our forests today is vital for our children and grandchildren.

Forests are a global asset, which is why the United Nations has declared 2011 the International Year of Forests.

The objectives of the International Year on Forests are reflected in the EU's Forestry Strategy and Forest Action Plan which aim to:

- improve and protect the environment
- contribute to our quality of life
- improve the long-term competitiveness of the forest based sector
- foster coordination and communication

To find out more on the international year of forests go to:

<http://www.un.org/esa/forests/2011/2011.html>

Directorate General for Agriculture and Rural Development

<http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/>

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Europe's forests Sustaining life

2011 is the international year of forests



Sustainable forest management

Unlike other parts of the world, Europe's forest areas are growing thanks to afforestation programmes and natural regeneration. These areas need to be carefully maintained in the economic, environmental and social interests of the citizens of our densely populated continent – and in the interests of the forests themselves.

EU forests have been managed for centuries, to provide raw materials and services to people and to the environment. Active management is necessary to prevent damage to the health of forests. The media have made us very aware of calamities such as forest fires. Large parts of the EU's forest area are also affected by insect damage and disease (sometimes as much as 10%) and storms (up to 6%). Climate change is likely to aggravate these problems.

How does the EU promote sustainable forest management?

- The EU Forestry Strategy, and the Forest Action Plan with its 18 key actions, provide a framework for member states to manage their forests in a sustainable way and cooperate in forest related policies;

- The EU's Rural Development Policy provides money to support sustainable forest management. Member states' programmes include support for over 120 000 activities to enhance environmental and social benefits from existing forests, and for planting approximately 890 000 hectares of new forest;
- €8 billion will be spent on forestry measures between 2007 and 2013;
- Funds are provided to protect forests against fire, pollution and natural disasters over an area of more than two million hectares;
- Many of the beneficiaries are small forest owners, who play an important role in sustainable forest management. For example, more than 80 000 forest owners receive support for attending training, for using advisory services or for improving the economic value of their forests;
- The European Forest Data Centre provides policy-relevant data and information. A major part of it – the European Forest Fire Information System – is devoted to forecasting forest fire risks and damage assessment.



EU forests fight climate change

Forests play an important role in the fight against climate change.

- forestry is the most important sector for extracting carbon from the air and storing it in soils and biomass;
- this carbon storage above and below ground helps to stabilise our climate;
- forests provide wood as a renewable material, and biomass for energy to replace emissions from fossil materials and fuel – wood is a renewable and environmentally friendly resource.



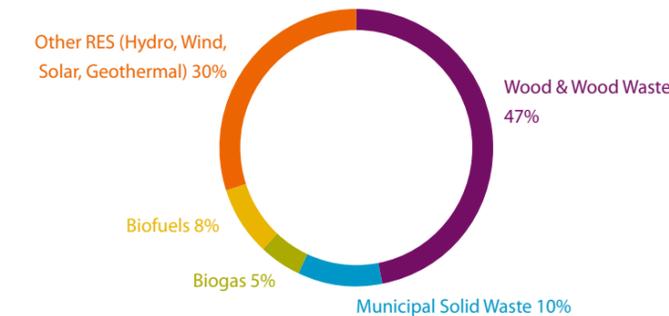
In this way, forests contribute to EU energy and climate policy which aims, by 2020, to cut carbon emissions by 20% and raise the share of renewables in the EU's energy mix to 20%. Appropriate forest management is necessary to maintain and improve carbon storage in standing trees and harvested wood products, mitigating the effect of emissions from fossil fuels.

Carbon stocks in EU forests are steadily increasing. Only two thirds of the wood that our forests produce is actually harvested. Afforestation is financially supported in most member states.

Nearly half the EU's renewable energy already comes from biomass, most of it woody biomass from forestry, with some from agriculture.

Renewables gross consumption 2008

(151.047 Mtoe, source: Eurostat)



Looking ahead to 2020

Forestry contributes significantly to the EU's '2020 Strategy', which sets out to create a sustainable economy, delivering high levels of jobs, productivity and growth to all regions of the EU.

- **Employment:** there are 16 million forest owners in the 27 EU member states. There are also many direct and downstream jobs, providing work for rural people;
- **Production:** forests produce a huge variety of natural materials which people have used for millennia;
- **Regional development:** forests make a big contribution to rural economies, helping to prevent population drift to urban areas.

Forests are an asset we need to care for wisely. By using sustainably produced wood and other forest products and services we take care of our environment, provide jobs and enrich our daily lives.

Forests contribute to the prosperity and well being of current and future generations. Think about the things we do with wood and wood materials:

- we build houses
- we make furniture and fittings
- we produce paper
- we heat our homes
- we use wood to create arts and crafts

The EU harvests only about 60-70% of its annual wood growth. So an increase in the supply of wood is possible and can be put to good use – without undermining sustainable forest management.

