Questions and Answers: European Green Deal: new EU Forest Strategy for 2030

Brussels, 16 July 2021

What is the new EU Forest Strategy post 2020?

Forests are an essential ally in the fight against climate change and biodiversity loss: They function as carbon sinks and reduce the impacts of climate change, for example by cooling down cities, protecting us from heavy flooding, and reducing drought impact.

Forests are valuable ecosystems that are home to a major part of Europe's biodiversity and their ecosystem services contribute to our health and well-being through water regulation, the provision of food, medicines and materials, disaster risk reduction and control, soil stabilisation and erosion control, air and water purification. Forests are a place for recreation, relaxation and learning, as well as securing livelihoods.

The new EU Forest Strategy for 2030 is one of the European Green Deal flagship initiatives that builds on the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 and addresses all the multiple functions of forests. It contributes to achieving the EU's greenhouse gas emission reduction target of at least 55% in 2030 and climate-neutrality in 2050, and to the EU's commitment to enhance its removals by natural sinks as per the Climate Law.

The strategy sets a vision and concrete actions for increasing the quantity and quality of forests in the EU and strengthening their protection, restoration and resilience. It aims to adapt Europe's forests to new conditions, weather extremes and high uncertainty brought about by climate change. This is a precondition for forests to be able to continue delivering on their socio-economic functions and to ensure vibrant rural areas and thriving rural populations.

Promoting the most biodiversity and climate-friendly forest management practices will be done hand in hand and in synergy with supporting a strong and sustainable forest-based bioeconomy. Wood-based industries represent 20% of manufacturing enterprises across the EU, supporting 3.6 million jobs, with an annual turnover of EUR 640 billion. The strategy calls for the optimal wood use in line with the cascading principle and prioritises wood products that can replace their fossil-based counterparts, with particular focus on long-lived wood products. It also aims to boost the non-wood forest economy, including ecotourism.

The strategy reaffirms the need and commitment to strictly protect the last remaining primary and old-growth forests in the EU. While this includes only a small part of EU's forests, it will help to ensure that the main biodiversity reservoirs and important carbon stocks are well preserved for future generations. The strategy also sets out actions to enhance the sustainable forest management concept on climate and biodiversity related aspects, promotes the most climate and biodiversity friendly forest management practices as well as foresees the establishment of binding nature restoration targets for forests in the upcoming EU Nature Restoration Law as announced in the EU 2030 Biodiversity Strategy.

The strategy also foresees the development of payment schemes to forest owners and managers for providing ecosystems services, e.g. through keeping parts of their forests intact. It calls on Member States to set up, inter alia, under the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), payment schemes for ecosystem services for forest owners and managers in order to cover for costs and income foregone. It also calls on Member States to accelerate the roll out of carbon farming practices, for instance via CAP's eco-schemes on agroforestry or rural development interventions. A dedicated carbon farming initiative, announced in the Farm to Fork Strategy and to be presented by the Commission at the end of the 2021, will further promote a new green business model that rewards climate- and environment-friendly practices by land managers, including forest managers and owners, based on the climate benefits they provide. In close cooperation with Member States and forest stakeholders, guidance on closer-to-nature forestry practices will be developed and their uptake promoted through a voluntary certification scheme.

Also a set of other enablers is put forward, ranging from research and training to guidance and
These will create the right conditions for improving the state of EU forests. In addition, the updated governance structure for forests will create a more inclusive space for Member States, forest owners and managers, industry, academia and civil society to discuss about the future of forests in the EU and help maintain these valuable assets for the generations to come.

The strategy is accompanied by a roadmap for planting at least 3 billion additional trees in the EU by 2030, in full respect for ecological principles.

In order to have a comprehensive and comparable picture of the state, the evolution and the envisaged future developments of forests in the EU, the Forest Strategy announces a legal proposal on Forest Observation, Reporting and Data Collection in the EU. Harmonised EU data collection system, combined with strategic planning at Members States' level is paramount to making sure that forests can deliver on their multiple functions for climate, biodiversity and economy as agreed at the EU level.

Last but not least, the Commission is strengthening enforcement actions, to make sure that EU Member States apply the EU law on forest protection and timber marketing.

**What is the state of EU forests?**

Currently, 43.5% of EU land – close to 182 million hectares are forests and other wooded land. While many data gaps still need to be filled, it is clear that European forests are under increasing pressure, partly as a result of natural processes but also because of increased human activity and pressures, including demand for biomass, climate change, air and water pollution, urban sprawl, landscape fragmentation, and habitat and biodiversity loss. Forest area has become bigger in the last decades thanks to natural processes, afforestation, sustainable management and active restoration, but in parallel tree cover loss has accelerated and conservation status of forests is poor, including in the 27% of the EU forest area that is protected and should be the healthiest.

Climate change is a particularly serious risk factor for Europe’s and world’s forests. Global warming has already been strong enough to induce changes of forest habitats, and large forest areas in the EU have been affected in the last few years by unprecedented bark beetle outbreaks, severe droughts, and new wildfire patterns. This situation is expected to worsen and increase the risks for the delivery of other vital forest ecosystem services.

There is therefore an urgent need to reverse negative trends and adopt novel and more biodiversity-friendly forest management, afforestation and restoration practices that strengthen forest resilience and adapt forests to climate change. There is also the need to ensure that the supply of wood is done in synergy with improving the conservation status of European and global forests. Wood of high ecological value should not be used, and the wood-based bioeconomy should remain within the boundaries of sustainability and be compatible with the EU's 2030 and 2050 climate targets and biodiversity objectives.

**Will the Strategy reduce forest harvesting in the EU?**

The strategy's objective is to make sure that the forests in the EU are growing, healthy and resilient for decades to come. The strategy aims to ensure that wood is used optimally, in line with the cascading principle, that harvesting remains within the sustainability limits and that the requirements of the European Climate Law and the 2050 climate neutrality target are respected, as agreed by all EU Member States. It is clear that, in light of EU's climate targets in 2030 and 2050 perspective, wood is not a limitless resource and Member States need to take that into account. As indicated in recent scientific studies, until 2050, the potential additional benefits from harvested wood products and material substitution are unlikely to compensate for the reduction of the net forest sink associated with the increased harvesting. Member States should pay attention to this risk, which is in their responsibility under relevant applicable legislation.

**How will the Commission ensure that additional 3 billion trees are planted?**

Planting and growing additional trees has to be done in full respect of ecological principles favourable to biodiversity and in anticipation of future climate conditions. That means the right tree has to be planted in the right place and for the right purpose in forests, in agroforestry- and urban areas. The pledge of 3 billion trees will be carried out with a long-term planning and monitoring scheme ensuring that the trees are not only planted, but are also allowed to grow over time and thrive in a changing climate. The Commission's role will be to facilitate, motivate, count and monitor the progress.

The success of the pledge will greatly depend on grassroots initiatives. Individuals, associations, companies, public bodies such as cities and regions are encouraged to participate in the initiative. Liaising with other relevant initiatives such as the Climate Pact or the Education for Climate Coalition, the Commission will promote the pledge and mobilise citizens and schools. The [Roadmap on 3 billion](#)
trees specifies the conditions for trees to be counted as additional.

For financing seedlings, workforce costs for planting, ground preparation and aftercare, some EU funding mechanisms will be made available for co-financing, such as LIFE Programme, Cohesion Policy Funds, European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development. Private-sector financing will also play an important role. Horizon Europe will support the initiative by improving the scientific knowledge on restoration, afforestation and reforestation.

Europeans will have the possibility to follow the progress and keep track of the tree planting through a website and an online interactive map with an integrated 'Map-My-Tree' counter developed by the Commission, together with the European Environmental Agency.

How will the Strategy support foresters and forest owners?

Private forest owners and managers, especially of small holdings, often depend on forests directly for their livelihoods. The other benefits, especially the provision of ecosystem services, are rarely or never rewarded. This has to change. The estimated value of all harvested non-wood products in Europe is EUR 19.5 billion per year, with significant growth potential.

Forest owners and managers need drivers and financial incentives to be able to provide also ecosystem services through forest protection and restoration and to increase the resilience of their forests through the adoption of most climate and biodiversity friendly forest management practices. This is particularly important in parts of Europe that have been hit by climate change earlier and harder than anticipated and where rural areas have suffered from the loss of income, livelihoods and even lives due to forest disasters.

The new CAP (for 2023-2027) offers increased flexibility to design forest-related interventions according to national needs and specificities, as well as reducing red tape, while linking and ensuring a synergetic approach between the European Green Deal, the national forest policies, and the EU environment and climate legislation. The recommendations to Member States on the CAP Strategic Plans, for the 2023-2027 period have encouraged due consideration of forests. The Forest Strategy further calls on Member States to set up, inter alia,under the CAP payment schemes for ecosystem services for forest owners and managers, and accelerate the roll-out of carbon farming practices through this and other public instruments.

The Strategy also provides for life-long training and advice to support foresters in their efforts to achieve sustainable forest management and adapt forests to climate change. The Commission proposes to map core forest-related skills needed and aims to launch training programmes to match job demand and supply.

Finally, the Commission will work with the Member States to strengthen the role of forestry in the European Innovation Partnership-AGRI. The aim will be to accelerate the uptake of innovations, to promote knowledge exchange, cooperation, education, training and advice in support of sustainable forest management practices and to unlock the socio-economic and environmental potential of forests in rural areas.

The Horizon Europe research mission on soil health and food will provide a powerful tool to support sound and site-adapted forest and soils restoration.

What is the role of bioeconomy in the Forest Strategy?

Sustainable raw wood and non-wood materials and products are key in the EU’s transition to a sustainable climate-neutral economy. The Forest Strategy aims to boost the entire sustainable forest bioeconomy so that it works in synergy with the EU’s ambitious climate and biodiversity goals.

Regarding wood, the EU has to focus on innovative products and shift from short-lived to long-lived uses of wood. The longer-lasting the product, the better it is for climate mitigation, as sustainably-produced and long-lived wood products can add to carbon removal through their embodied carbon.

The construction sector, in particular, provides a great possibility to use more wood and substitute fossil-based counterparts, so that our built environment would become part of our carbon sink, as the wood storing the carbon will be maintained and reused. The New European Bauhaus initiative will provide support for innovative projects in wood construction. In addition, the Commission will develop a 2050 roadmap for reducing whole life-cycle carbon emissions in buildings, as well as a methodology to quantify the climate benefits of wood construction products and other building materials.

Also short-lived wood-based products have a role to play, especially in substituting their fossil-based counterparts. However, wood used for the production of short-lived products as well as for energy production should rely on the kind of wood that is unsuitable for long-lived materials and products, and secondary woody biomass such as sawmill by-products, residues and recycled materials.
In line with the new EU Circular Economy Action Plan, rather than increasing wood harvests from forests, priority should be on better using, reusing and recycling all wood-based products. Enhanced circularity of products offers a possibility of maintaining all wood-based products longer in the economy for the multiple uses.

Next to wood-based forest bioeconomy, the strategy underlines the importance of promoting non/wood based bioeconomy, including recreation and ecotourism, to diversity revenues in rural areas with co/benefits for climate and biodiversity.

The increasing multifunctional role that forests will play in the transition to a sustainable and climate neutral future will require an increased skill-set. There will be the need for experts in enhanced sustainable forest management practices and afforestation, architects, engineers and designers, food experts, data specialists, chemists, ecotourism facilitators. Supportive tools will be created for the development of the necessary new skills.

**How does the Strategy propose to improve forest monitoring and information in the EU?**

There is a general need for more, better and comparable data on European forests and the way they are managed. Today, no comprehensive reporting requirements exist, there is insufficient planning for the forests, which would address in a coordinated manner and provide a comprehensive picture of the multifunctionality of forests in the EU, especially regarding climate mitigation and adaptation, ecological condition of forests, forest damage prevention and control, and forest biomass demand and supply for different socio-economic purposes.

This leads to a situation where, on the one hand, Member States have agreed, including in the European Climate law, to rely to a great extent on forests and forest-based bioeconomy in the EU's transition to a climate-neutral economy. On the other hand, there are several scattered monitoring and reporting mechanisms, but no strategic framework, which would bring these together and make it possible to comprehensively and jointly with Member States demonstrate that the EU is on the right track and that the forests can actually deliver on their multiple demands and functions.

To address these gaps and weaknesses, the Commission will propose an EU Forest Observation, Reporting and Data Collection legislative framework to be able to compare in a comprehensive way the overall condition, evolution, management and use of EU forests and forest resources. The framework will use remote sensing technologies and geospatial data integrated with ground-based monitoring, which will improve the accuracy of monitoring, as well as include Strategic Plans for Forests that will be developed by competent national or, where applicable, regional authorities, on the basis of common general structure and elements.

The *Forest Information System for Europe (FISE)* is currently the single entry point for data and information to support forest-related policies in Europe and already now helps monitoring European forests based on data and information coming from the EU and EEA member states. The new EU Forest Monitoring Framework will further strengthen FISE and build on its infrastructure.

**How does the Strategy ensure the principle of subsidiarity is respected?**

There is a clear balance of competence between EU and Member States when it comes to forests. The EU has a variety of competences shared with Member States that address forests, including climate, environment and agriculture, which the Union has exercised respecting the principle of subsidiarity. The Court of Justice of the EU has confirmed already in 1999 that forest protection falls under the EU environmental legal basis. The Commission has exercised this competence on forests and forestry in several cases, e.g. the *Habitats Directive*, the *Timber Regulation*, the *Regulation on Land Use and Land Use Change and Forestry* in climate policy and the *Renewable Energy Directive*.

In exercising these competences, the Commission is working in close cooperation with Member States' competent authorities and all stakeholders, in full respect of the principle of subsidiarity.

**How have stakeholders been involved in drafting this strategy?**

A large number of consultation activities have been carried out during the preparation of the strategy. A roadmap consultation took place and an open public consultation was carried via the website of the European Commission in all official EU languages which received more than 19000 answers. Targeted consultations were also carried out with the competent authorities of the EU Member States responsible for forestry, with forest-based industries and businesses, NGOs, academia and international organisations. The evaluation of the current EU forest strategy and other policies related to the forest (e.g. biodiversity, rural development) were also taken into consideration. Relevant input from the other EU institutions was also considered. This included relevant Council Conclusions (e.g. on the review of the EU Forest Strategy and on the new Biodiversity Strategy) and recent resolutions on forests by the European Parliament.
The results of the consultation process are summarised in a Staff Working document accompanying the strategy.

**What is the Commission doing to prevent deforestation abroad?**

The Commission fully recognises that forest related challenges are inherently global. While this Strategy focusses on the EU, the Commission remains entirely committed to implementing the 2019 Communication to Protect and Restore the World's Forests. As one of the commitments made, the Commission is currently working on a new legislation to address EU-driven deforestation and forest degradation, and the proposal should be adopted later this year. The objective is to prevent that products and commodities causing deforestation are sold on the EU market.

**For More Information**

Press release

EU Forest Strategy for 2030

---

Press contacts:

Tim McPHIE (+32 2 295 86 02)
Arianna PODESTA (+32 2 298 70 24)
Daniela STOYCHEVA (+32 2 295 36 64)
Alvaro Rangel-Hernandez (+32 2 291 36 65)

General public inquiries: Europe Direct by phone 00 800 67 89 10 11 or by email