



UNECE

United Nations Economic Commission for Europe

Press Release ECE/TIM/08/P07
Geneva, 29 October 2008

Forests combat climate change, provide renewable energy and supply fresh water: policymakers must integrate all these elements in a sustainable way

European Forest Week, 20-24 October 2008

The first ever European Forest Week took place last week, 20-24 October 2008 in Rome, Brussels and all over Europe, to discuss the role of forests and the forest sector in combating climate change, providing renewable energy and supplying water. The Week highlighted measures necessary to fully utilize the sector's potential.

The Rome-based events brought together some 450 participants from the forest, water, energy, and housing sectors. The week marked the first ever policy-level meeting between the forest and water sectors. In Brussels, a Conference by the European Economic and Social Committee addressed the "role of forests in meeting EU's climate change commitments." All over Europe, about 150 affiliated events took place in 30 countries, to highlight the potential of Europe's forests and what it takes to fully utilize it.

Mr. Christopher Prins, Chief of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE)/Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) Timber Section, summarized the key facts and messages related to the main themes of the week as follows:

Forests and climate change

There is more carbon in forests than in the whole atmosphere. There is seven times more carbon in Europe's forest than annual greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions from all anthropogenic sources. Forests combat climate change by sequestering carbon from the atmosphere in trees, storing it in trees and products and replacing more carbon intensive fuels and materials. The construction and use of buildings accounts for up to 40% of GHG emissions: building green with sustainably produced wood can significantly reduce these CO₂ emissions.

However, forests are also vulnerable to changes in the climate, which can cause storms, fires, insect infestations and melting of the permafrost. Foresters must develop and implement climate change adaptation strategies.

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Forests and energy

Wood energy constitutes about 65 per cent of all renewable energy sources in Europe, and demand is growing, in light of the ambitious targets set by policymakers. Harvesting more wood to meet the growing demand is feasible if policymakers, forest owners, forest-based industries, and wood users work together. At the same time, sustainability needs to be assured: biodiversity, and forests' regulating functions including climate, flood and disease regulation, and water purification must all be protected.

Forests and water

Forests influence water quantity and quality, for instance by regulating floods and filtering water supplies. At the same time, some forest management practices can harm water quality. Foresters and water specialists must work together, to address these issues, develop integrated landscape management strategies, and test Payment for Ecosystem Services (PES) schemes.

Working together for forests

European forest sector organizations work together through established partnerships, between UNECE, FAO, the Ministerial Conference on the Protection of Forests in Europe, the European Commission, and many research, private sector and civil society organizations. Building on the approach of the European Forest Week, the forest sector is reaching out to society as a whole to communicate the solutions offered by the forest sector. Realizing the full potential of forests and their multiple services can make a lasting contribution to combating climate change, and in general to promoting the sustainable development of the region.

For more information on the European Forest Week, please visit:
<http://www.europeanforestweek.org>

Or contact

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