



# LATIN AMERICAN AND CARIBBEAN FORESTRY COMMISSION

## THIRTY-FIRST SESSION

Montevideo, Uruguay, 2 - 6 September 2019

**Forest protection: Integrated fire management; Forest health and invasive species; Preventive approach to illegal logging**

**Secretariat Note**

### I. Introduction

1. Forests in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) are being ravaged by extreme and increasingly frequent and intense events caused by a variety of factors; climate change, forest fires, invasive species (insects, pathogens, weeds and mammals), outbreaks of native insects that threaten ecosystems as well as more frequent and intense hurricanes and floods caused by the El Niño phenomenon. The region has also been affected by chronically weak forest governance: exemplified on the one hand, through undefined property rights and access to forest resources in rural areas, restrictive laws and weak institutions that are susceptible to corruption, and on the other hand, minimal development of production chains for forest products and services that bring value and competitiveness to these ecosystems vis-à-vis other competitive land uses. Deforestation and illegal logging trade of forest products are, therefore, now part of this scenario exacerbating the problems associated with poverty in these territories.

2. Countries in the region have been developing actions to generate information to understand the extent of the problem and make better, evidence-based decisions, define policy and strategies, develop prevention and risk management plans and programs, and implement emergency measures to combat and control events and disasters that are affecting the region's forests.

3. Invasive species are threatening and extensively degrading native forests and could eventually change forest ecosystems and the services they provide. Damages caused by invasive species include

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reduced water volumes, soil degradation, reduction or elimination of populations of particular native species, and change of composition and processes of entire forest ecosystems.

4. The Caribbean is faced with other forest degradation-related problems caused by hurricanes; climate change will likely add to them.

5. Climate change is also favoring the introduction and spread of invasive pests and diseases and outbreaks of endemic insects such as pine bark beetles. This year, the El Niño phenomenon is likely to cause drought throughout Central America, increasing the probability of wildfires and pest outbreaks (especially the outbreaks of pine bark beetles). The dieback of native Araucaria (*Araucaria araucana*) forests in Chile, caused by a fungal pathogen, is likely to further spread as a consequence of changes in temperature and humidity in that ecosystem.

6. SOFO 2018 states that “Effective forest management can strengthen resilience and adaptive capacities to climate-related disasters, underscoring the importance of integrating forest-based measures into national disaster risk reduction (DRR) strategies”.

7. The region is still battling illegal logging and timber trade, namely clandestine logging and laundering, and the informal nature or absence of a recording and traceability system that can provide forest data and data throughout the production chain for timber, both for industrial use and household use as firewood, which is, to a certain degree, a direct cause of degradation of forest resources. It is important to draw a distinction with timber that has been harvested without causing deforestation or degradation although also not recorded in timber use statistics.

## **II. Integrated fire management**

8. The role of fire in vegetation is quite variable. In some ecosystems, fires are essential to maintain ecosystem dynamics, biodiversity and productivity, and play key roles in regeneration. Fire is also an important and widely used land management tool. However, every year, deliberate and uncontrolled fires destroy millions of hectares of forests and other types of vegetation, causing the loss of many human and animal lives, and immense economic damage, both in terms of resources destroyed and the costs of suppression. There are also impacts on society and the environment, for example, damage to human health from smoke, loss of biological diversity, release of carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) and other greenhouse gases, damage to recreational and other values.

9. According to the most recent FAO Forest Resources Assessment (2015) forest fire-related data for Latin America and the Caribbean, approximately 66 million hectares have been affected by fires yearly, especially in South America. It is estimated that, of the approximately 72 million hectares of land that are burned in South America every year, nearly 35 million hectares are forest lands.

10. Forest fires caused by human negligence and others for land clearing purposes continue to be a problem in the region. In addition, climate change has caused extensive drought making forests more susceptible to fires. Also, land affected by fire and uncontrolled burning is often more susceptible to the spread of invasive exotic species. Therefore fire management and control strategies are still a priority in the region. Sustainable forest management, forest landscape management and plantation management applying fire prevention and risk management measures have become common practices in forest services and forest enterprises. Investments in forest services for these purposes have doubled in recent years.

11. Though there are difficulties in global climate modelling, the scientific consensus is on a future increase in dry and hot weather resulting in more frequent and intense fire activity. The future of wildfire is longer fire seasons and large fires due to increasingly difficult fire weather conditions with increased fuel consumption (i.e., more emissions). These ongoing changes in fire activity in terms of location,

intensity, severity, and frequency will likely have immense impacts to biodiversity, ecosystem services, human well-being and livelihoods, and national economies.

12. There are ongoing collaborative efforts in place in LAC to monitor forest fires and for mutual support when they occur. These are based on agreements for resource sharing and support between some countries in the region and building on experiences. FAO supported a review of fire management in Chile in 2016-2017 that was presented to the government. There is also interaction with the USA and Canada on fire management issues.

### **III. Forest health and invasive species**

13. Invasive insect pests, pathogens, weeds and mammals are causing major problems in forestry and livestock activities and can lead to degradation of natural and planted forests in the region. Increasing global trade and travel worsened by impacts of climate change increase the probability of introduction and spread of invasive species in new areas. Although many countries in the region have import and border quarantine controls to reduce the introduction of invasive species, very few have domestic quarantine systems in place; therefore, if an invasive species has already been introduced accidentally, it is highly probable that it will spread within the country.

14. Once an invasive species is introduced in an area, the control of it continues to be complex and expensive, therefore it is necessary to implement programs for prevention, early detection and early action beforehand to minimise introduction in one hand, and costs associated to its control and spreading in the other. This requires reliable, pest surveillance information, as well as knowledge of potential spreading and impacts to determine what actions countries need to take to ensure forest biosecurity.

15. The region has well developed national and regional institutional and legal frameworks to deal with agricultural pests and to coordinate plant protection measures among countries. National research centers and the universities in the region have extensive forest health technical expertise. Countries such as Mexico, Costa Rica, Brazil, Chile and Argentina have sound pest and disease control strategies, frameworks and programs to detect and prevent the spread of forest invasive species and the outbreaks of native pests. However, there is less interaction between agricultural and forestry institutions on transboundary invasive species issues. In 2017, countries in Mesoamerica developed a regional strategy on forest protection, though the implementation has been slow at country level. The region urgently requires multisector and multi stakeholder collaboration and cooperation on prevention, early detection and early action on forest invasive species and implementation of sustainable forest management practices to build more resilient ecosystems.

16. To assist countries on strengthening the implementation of phytosanitary standards in forestry FAO has developed a guideline and a series of e-learning courses. In addition, FAO facilitates four regional Forest Invasive Species Networks to share the expertise and knowledge to address the transboundary issue of invasive species and resource mobilization for activities for prevention, early detection and early action. In 2020-2021 FAO is expecting to revitalize the existing forest invasive species network for south cone countries.

### **IV. Preventive approach to illegal logging**

17. Illegal logging and associated trade are estimated to be worth between USD 30 and 100 billion annually, accounting for 10% to 30% of the timber trade worldwide (UNEP, Interpol 2012)<sup>1</sup>. Forest

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<sup>1</sup> UNEP; INTERPOL. Green Carbon, Black Trade: Illegal Logging, Tax Fraud and Laundering in the World's Tropical Forests; United Nations Environment Programme and the International Criminal Police Organization:

resources governance is fundamental to generate human development and wellbeing, ensure adequate flow management and control, and deliver ecosystem benefits and the conservation of forest ecosystems. The main causes of illegal forest-sector practices is the lack of information and relevant data and/or data monitoring mechanisms, weak legal frameworks and governance systems, lack of resources to adequately implement the legal framework, institutional environments that are favourable to corruption, and limited engagement of key stakeholders in the decision-making process.

18. The European Union and FAO continue to work together in fighting illegal logging and supporting countries through the Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade (FLEGT) program. As a result of FLEGT action plan efforts worldwide, it is estimated that illegal logging has decreased 22% since 2003<sup>2</sup>. The objective of the FAO EU FLEGT program is to counter illegal logging and trade of timber by promoting forest enterprises, value chains and trade of legal timber products, and contribute to sustainable forest management and poverty reduction. FLEGT supports countries to help them:

- increase the transparency and traceability of forest products,
- strengthen decision-making on forest resources management with local communities and generate sustainable and fair processes for these communities,
- develop independent monitoring options that help gain credibility in producer countries,
- support forest authorities implement independent systems to verify the legality,
- support policy and legal framework reforms with broad stakeholder engagement, and ensure inclusive access to forest legality and conservation;
- support forest-related private sector initiatives to stay competitive in a context of legality, and the development of national and regional legal and sustainable markets for timber.

19. The development of a national traceability system to strengthen forest governance through multi-sectoral platforms has been fundamental in the implementation of a peace and land tenure plan in Colombia. This system, together with online applications, can help environmental authorities monitor and control while allowing consumers to access information on the source of the product to be purchased. In the same way, it facilitates the consolidation of governance through the reformulation of the Intersectoral Agreement of Legal Timber in Colombia, which aims to ensure that all timber harvested and sold in the country comes from legal sources. In Peru, support is provided to national and territorial forest authorities to improve forest regulations related to timber utilization and trade, as well as to develop the capacities of organized indigenous communities in the independent monitoring of their own forest resources. The work in Guyana has focused on strengthening the private sector, particularly small operators, to meet the Legality Assurance System (LAS) requirements. More importantly, the programme has assisted relevant authorities in the development and delivery of their plan for Voluntary Partnership Agreement (VPA) implementation. These representatives from different sectors have been supported in due diligence processes and good practices in the legal timber trade under the VPA with the European Union. Honduras has focused on implementing the Complementary Measures and in supporting the VPA, and has made significant progress in building the capacities of forest chain stakeholders and in resolving issues related to land tenure rights and governance. Finally, in Guatemala efforts have been made to strengthen the efficient and effective management of processes that ensure sustainable forest management and the promotion of legal forestry activities.

20. The FAO EU FLEGT program also promotes learning and experience sharing. Guatemala and Honduras, for example, have shared experiences and data on timber traceability and legal instruments to halt the illegal timber trade, lay the foundations for a bi-national cooperation agreement proposal aimed at coordinating and integrating forest governance efforts to benefit communities. In sum, timber

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Nairobi, Kenya, 2012; p. 72. Available online: [http://www.unep.org/pdf/RRAlogging\\_english\\_scr.pdf](http://www.unep.org/pdf/RRAlogging_english_scr.pdf) (accessed on 23 May 2015).

<sup>2</sup> Sam Lawson and Larry MacFaul. 2010 *Illegal Logging and Related Trade: Indicators of the Global Response*. Chatham House. UK. ISBN 978 1 86203 235 4

utilization and trade translate into more income, jobs and competitiveness for stakeholders in the forest products value chain, and enhanced forest governance for countries in the region.

**V. Points for consideration**

21. The Commission may wish to:

- Recognise the transboundary nature of the invasive species and identify opportunities for more effective collaborations among countries to strengthen surveillance, early response and quarantine capacities to enhance forest health and biosecurity.
- Develop recommendations and provide guidance to the Regional Program to strengthen forest protection systems, taking health and biosecurity aspects into consideration.
- Recognize regional efforts to strengthen forest governance and combat illegal logging and forest degradation, and request FAO's continued support to develop policies and incentives to ensure the application of the laws.
- Consider forest degradation issues presented in this document also when discussing agenda item 8.1.3 Restoration of forests and landscapes.