

KEEPING FORESTS HEALTHY

Five Ways to Do it

In contrast to the prevailing perception, Europe's forests are sustainably managed, growing in size and substance and are in a good health. For instance, forest area in Europe has grown by 17 million hectares over the last 20 years – about half of the size of Germany.

Healthy forests require on-going care and we must not rest on our laurels; in fact, it is reassuring that most of Europe's forests have management plans that ensure their sustainable use.

Providing the best available information for reliable monitoring; facilitating policy dialogues for increased awareness; and building capacity for sustainable management are vital for the health of forests.

Keeping Europe's forests healthy – five ways to do it:

Be wood-wise: Using wood to build, heat and furnish our homes and businesses – timber, food, fuel, flora and fauna, clean air and clean water are all because of well managed forests. While oil wells run dry and mines peter out, forests grow back. Managed forests grow forever; oil, steel, and concrete do not.

Keep your environment safe: Our impact on the environment or “footprint” can be less if we use sustainably produced wood instead of non-renewable products. Forest products such as wood and cork are renewable and reliable. Wood stores carbon, helping to regulate how much of it is released into the air and thus helping to keep the climate stable – this is why managing our forests, knowing how much we can use and where we take it from, understanding the impacts of different actions helps us be smart, responsible benefactors of our forests.

Conserve biodiversity: Forests are a treasure trove of biodiversity so protecting significant areas of forests keep ecosystems healthy and also allow us to enjoy the recreation and sports common to wooded areas – fishing, hiking, biking and more. In fact, the area of protected forests in Europe has increased by around half a million hectares annually over the last 10 years, thanks to policies that favour nature conservation.

Be innovation-minded: New ways of using wood means we can develop technologies that go into making high-performing products and components in industries such as electronics and automotives; and in hygiene and packaging. Specific innovations include bioplastics, cellulose-based materials, new types of textiles and engineered wood products such as cross-laminated timber.

See, in fact, a whole factory! Forests support our economies and sustain our resources. The largest recreation areas, food and fuel, clean air and water, so many raw materials to build, create and engineer from – all are done by these centuries-old natural factories.

Keeping forests healthy as a driving force for a greener economy requires action by all stakeholders at all levels.

The “Action Plan for the Forest Sector in a Green Economy” developed with the support of UNECE and FAO is on its way. It outlines steps to deliver on a steady and secure future for Europe’s forests and spans five pillars for uptake by all sectors working together with the forest sector:

- Sustainable production and consumption of forest products
- A low carbon forest sector
- Decent green jobs in the forest sector
- Long term provision of forest ecosystem services
- Policy development and monitoring of the forest sector in relation to a green economy

More information about:

- European Forest Week 2013:
<http://www.unece.org/forests/efw2013.html>
<http://www.fao.org/forestry/efw2013/en/>
- European Forest Week 2008: <http://www.fao.org/forestry/48456/en/>
- Metsä2013: <http://www.unece.org/metsa2013.html>
- Green economy: <http://www.unece.org/forests/greeneconomy.html>