

Towards a European forest strategy for biodiverse forests

Forests are at a crossroads: the crossroads of the climate and biodiversity crisis and faced with ever-increasing societal needs. We face a choice: fully integrate these issues to redefine a fairer and more sustainable forestry economy or ignore them, and run the risk of pushing the forestry-wood sector towards a dead end.

This choice is being made right now in the European Union (EU). In the wake of European Parliament elections, the Commission committed itself to reviewing all its policies within the framework of a European Green Deal. The first elements of the text for a future European forest strategy have started to circulate. We, scientists, foresters, wood industry and NGOs also want to make our voices heard and explain why we believe that the Commission's text is generally on the right track.

The strength of the guidelines proposed by the Commission is that they anchor forests in a broader biodiversity strategy. The forest debate is too often limited to a quantitative approach: yes, the area set aside for trees is increasing in Europe, but this indicator is insufficient. The vast majority of plantations that are currently established have little diversity or are even monocultures. Despite the EU's international commitments under the Convention on Biological Diversity, public policies have not succeeded in halting the erosion of biodiversity or restoring the quality of our ecosystems. While biodiversity loss has been particularly concerning in agricultural environments, forests are also being degraded: according to the latest assessment carried out in the framework of the Habitats and Fauna and Flora Directives, more than three out of four forest habitats monitored are in an unfavourable conservation status.

However, scientific studies converge on one point: in general, the richer a forest is in biodiversity and the more diverse a stand of trees is, the more stable, resilient and productive it is. Maintaining or restoring biodiversity-rich forests is probably the most effective strategy for absorbing carbon dioxide and adapting these ecosystems to climate change.

The Commission's plan does not mean entirely dedicating forests to biodiversity and leisure. It is compatible with those who believe in continuing wood production, and those who think that wood can be a modern response to the new challenges our societies face.

Biodiversity is not an issue that is limited to protected areas alone: it must be at the heart of forest management. Good silvicultural practices have been known and implemented by foresters for years. These practices not only improve carbon storage in the forest, protect soils and increase the biodiversity of the forest, but also produce quality wood for long-term uses such as construction. Finally, these types of forest management are much better for local communities as they avoid the brutal modification of the landscape.

To integrate all these issues, we need a unifying and inspiring vision of the forest based on a new social contract between foresters and citizens. It is because we believe that the initial guidelines proposed by the European Commission are along these lines that we support them and that we are calling for the implementation of an ambitious European strategy for forests.