

Ministerial Roundtable 1: Adapting forests to changing climate

Wednesday 14 April 2021, 10:45 – 16:00 hrs.

I. Background

Climate change is ongoing and, besides the global warming trend (current global temperatures are already 1 degree higher compared to the pre-industrial levels), it is particularly worrying that extreme events are amplified, resulting in extended periods of hot spells and drought. In recent years, European forests have been affected by severe droughts, widespread wildfires, a series of windstorms, and rapidly expanding bark beetle infestations, somewhere accompanied by new invasive pests taking advantage of the weakening of trees through the aforementioned disturbances. Evidence is increasing that these events have become much more frequent and more threatening because of ongoing climate change. What makes this situation different from the past is not only the number of disturbances but also the extent of damage, the number of human fatalities (e.g. the Attica fire in Greece 2018 killed 100 people), and the fact that severe disturbances are occurring all over Europe even in a single year, often in locations that have not experienced similar events before. It is also noteworthy that observed impacts exceeded the expectations from past impact projections. With continuing climate warming, the current extreme weather patterns may soon become common and the future will probably bring even more extreme temperatures and drought spells. There are calls for adapting forest species composition and a changed silviculture to adapt to changing climate conditions as well as to meet new demands which society puts on forests.

There are various approaches to climate-change adaptation and many supporting measures to be considered. A group of experts nominated by signatory countries and the EU coordinated by the Liaison Unit Bratislava (secretariat of FOREST EUROPE in 2016-2020) developed a set of policy recommendations for integration of adaptation measures into sustainable forest management (SFM) in Europe (see https://foresteurope.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/Key-conclusions_CC.pdf).

Effective adaptation policies must be responsive to a wide variety of economic, social, environmental and political circumstances. A high priority should be, however, given to the coping with and adapting to forest disturbances while maintaining and enhancing the diversity and resilience of forest ecosystems.

The forestry community, as well as the public, need to understand the effects of climate change on forests and determine which adaptive actions could be taken now and in the future to respond to this threat.

In this regard, the Bratislava Ministerial Resolution, to be endorsed at the Conference, will provide a mandate to establish a pan-European forest risk knowledge hub.

III. Objective and modalities of the Ministerial Roundtable

The main objective of the Ministerial Roundtable is to provide an opportunity for ministers and heads of delegations to present their views and to participate in an interactive discussion on the principal challenge of adapting European forests and the forest-based sector to climate change and its impacts, and on how to address this in the most effective way through policies and concrete actions.

The Ministerial Roundtable will consist of two main elements:

- (1) an interactive panel discussion with a professional moderator and panellists that will be followed by
- (2) ministers' and observers' statements.

In order to achieve the objective of the roundtable and enhance interactivity between these two elements, ministers / observers as well as panellists are encouraged to follow guiding questions below when making interventions and statements and, as far as possible, refer to other speakers. **The maximum duration of each statement by ministers and heads of delegations is four minutes for signatories and three minutes for observers**, which will be strictly enforced. The panellists will have the opportunity to share observations and conclusions on the overarching messages at the end.

II. Guiding questions

1. How to enhance resilience and adaptive capacity of forest ecosystems under the conditions of climate change to meet increasing demands which society puts on forests (in carbon sequestration, biodiversity protection, raw material production, work and recreation opportunities)? How far do policy objectives and practical measures aimed at adaptation of forests harmonize with carbon sequestration and / or biodiversity protection? How could possible conflicts be overcome?
2. Are there gaps between scientific knowledge and evidence on the one hand and practical experiences of forest managers on the other? In which aspects should science and research be more active? How can forest owners and managers be motivated to make efforts to increase resilience and adaptive capacity of their forests?
3. How can transboundary and cross-sectoral cooperation to cope with climate change impacts on forests be increased and what are main topics in this respect?
4. How should the wood-based industry adapt to changing quality and quantity of wood supplies?