

Foreword



Forests are a key ecosystem on our planet: without them, life as we know it now would not exist. Thus, protecting them is our essential task. Simultaneously, we depend on goods and services provided by forest ecosystems. Therefore, besides protecting the forests, we have to ensure their sustainable use. That means the use of forests in a way, and at a rate, that maintains their biodiversity, productivity, regeneration capacity, vitality, and their potential to fulfil, now and in the future, relevant ecological, economic, and social functions, at local, national, and global levels, in harmony with other ecosystems.

Sustainable forest management is a dynamic concept which strives for a balance between all those aspects and functions in continuously changing environmental, economic, and social conditions.

For centuries, European forests have provided jobs and livelihoods in rural areas. Taking into account human population in Europe and its historical development, European forests have been shaped by human activities. Only some 2% of them are considered to be undisturbed by man. The majority of forests in Europe are actively managed in the long term. Despite that, in most cases they are semi-natural and, due to their naturalness, large portions have been included in various networks of protected areas with their active management.

Besides commonly occurring changes, which forest ecosystems have existed in and gradually adapted to over the ages, forests and the majority of their functions are today threatened by climate change and the increasing frequency and severity of extreme weather events, leading to large scale forest disturbances. Therefore, to provide a wide scale of benefits for human societies, forests also require our pro-active protection.

Moreover, in Slovakia, but, I believe, also in Europe and worldwide, there is an ongoing societal and political dialogue on possibilities for enhancement of ecosystem protection, as well as wider implementation of close-to-nature approaches in managing forests. A prerequisite, however, is that these ecosystems have to be resilient and able to adapt to extraordinarily fast changes in the environment, which we, as humankind, have caused and are still causing.

Nevertheless, there are challenges and inevitable decisions ahead of us which have to lead to safeguarding European forests and their irreplaceable functions for the benefit of present and future generations.

Such decisions have to be based on the best available information we have. Our next steps should be paved by facts, not emotions.

Internationally agreed pan-European criteria and indicators for sustainable forest management, the core of the State of Europe's Forests report, are important tools enabling provision of relevant and comprehensive information on the main aspects of forests, their functions, and their use by society. Thirty years of forest monitoring according to these criteria and indicators has given valuable information on trends in European forests and their management.

I believe that this new edition of the State of Europe's Forests report will contribute to a constructive and fruitful discussion on forests leading to solutions based on consensus between policy makers, forest owners and managers, science, academia, and other stakeholders within as well as beyond the forest sector, representing diverse societal demands.

Last, but not least, I would like to take this opportunity to thank to all the individuals, institutions, and countries who have contributed to the preparation of this fifth edition of the State of Europe's Forests report.

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