

Bratislava Ministerial Resolution

Adapting pan-European Forests to Climate Change

Adopted by Expert Level Meeting through a silence procedure on 17 November 2020 for consideration and signature by the ministers at the Eighth FOREST EUROPE Ministerial Conference

We, as representatives of the Signatories of FOREST EUROPE, at the Eighth Ministerial Conference on the Protection of Forests in Europe, held in Bratislava on 14-15 April 2021,

1. RECALLING and BUILDING on FOREST EUROPE resolutions, declarations, and decisions, specifically Strasbourg Resolution 4, Helsinki Resolution 4, Vienna Resolution 5, and Madrid Resolution 2.
2. RECALLING that the impetus for the First Ministerial Conference (Strasbourg, 1990) was the need to tackle specific challenges in forest protection, such as combating the negative effects of air pollution, and STATING that our forests now face similarly grave threats.
3. ACKNOWLEDGING that climate change and biodiversity loss are the pressing and urgent issues of our time and their impacts are global in scope and unprecedented in scale, and therefore ACKNOWLEDGING that FOREST EUROPE should revisit and enhance its engagements.
4. RECALLING the findings of the IPCC Special Report on Climate Change and Land, the IPBES Global Assessment Report on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services, the IPBES Assessment Report on Land Degradation and Restoration, and the EEA report Climate Change, Impacts and Vulnerability in Europe 2016.
5. RECOGNISING that urgent actions to maintain and enhance the health condition of forests and the multiple role they play, including for future generations, are necessary to implement the objectives of the Convention on Biological Diversity, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, and the Paris Agreement.
6. BEING CONCERNED about negative impacts on European forests from storms, fires, drought, pests and diseases, which are increasing in severity due to climate change, affecting the ability of forests to fulfil their multiple functions.
7. UNDERLINING that the adaptation of forests to the negative effects of climate change is necessary if forests are to fulfil their essential role in mitigating climate change, as well as to prevent damage to forests, enhance their resilience, and safeguard the multiple functions of forests.
8. RECOGNISING that halting the loss and degradation of forest ecosystems and promoting their restoration are essential to reaching the targets of the Paris Agreement, and, in relation to that, RECALLING the United Nations Decade on Ecosystem Restoration.

9. UNDERLINING that sustainable forest management safeguards the biodiversity and enhances the productivity, regeneration capacity, vitality, and resilience of forests, while maintaining relevant ecological, economic, and social functions in harmony with other terrestrial ecosystems.
10. ACKNOWLEDGING the potential of forests to provide long-term mitigation of climate change, including through sustainable forest management, afforestation, forest restoration, sustainable use and conservation of forest genetic resources, and sustainable use of forest biomass in the development of a bio-economy, reducing the use of fossil-based products and materials associated with high emissions of greenhouse gases.
11. HIGHLIGHTING that the further development of forest-based, renewable resources into innovative bio-based products and long-lived wood products, as well as non-wood products and other ecosystem services that healthy and sustainably managed forests provide, can make significant contributions to sustainable development and climate change mitigation.
12. RECOGNISING that action taken to address climate change is most effective if based on the best available scientific knowledge and fact-based evidence fed by forest management experience, both being continually re-evaluated in the light of new findings.
13. EMPHASIZING that forests are the most biologically rich terrestrial systems and it is therefore vital to sustainably manage them in order to safeguard and restore their biodiversity and the ecosystem services they provide.
14. NOTING the recommendations of the FOREST EUROPE Expert Group on Adaptation to Climate Change, WELCOMING the on-going work on forest protection and risk management carried out by international organizations and processes, and APPRECIATING the need to further cooperate with those actors.

As representatives of the Signatories of FOREST EUROPE, we commit ourselves to:

I. Strengthen our national efforts in order to:

15. Further increase work on the adaptation of forests and implement findings into forest management policy and practice to prevent and mitigate adverse impacts caused by changing conditions at local, national, and regional levels in order to secure all functions of forests while increasing their resilience to natural hazards and protecting them against threats.
16. Continue to raise public awareness of the vital role of sustainable forest management in protecting forests and strengthening their vitality, and increase efforts in the dialogue with society and forest owners.
17. Strengthen the national implementation of policies, tools, and measures for the protection, conservation, and appropriate use of forest genetic resources in order to contribute to the adaptation of forests to changing climatic and site conditions.
18. Facilitate research in the fields of protection of genetic diversity, adaptation of forests and forest management to climate change, including testing and selecting of species and suitable provenances for future conditions in line with international recommendations on Invasive Alien Species as well as on forest damage.
19. Strengthen work on forest landscape restoration, the rehabilitation of degraded forests and, where relevant, on afforestation.
20. Strengthen the work on development and implementation of disturbance risk assessment approaches in the context of national forest programmes and strategies, namely those that can be caused by biotic and abiotic agents, such as pests and forest fires, with the aim of better prevention and increased preparedness towards disturbances and managing them, if they occur.
21. Invest in the education and training of skilled forest staff and forest owners in order to promote and embed appropriate adaptation attitudes and actions into sustainable forest management practices.
22. Accelerate our actions to ensure that the global contribution of forests and forest products to mitigating climate change is maintained and enhanced by 2050, in order to reach the targets of the Paris Agreement.

II. Improve international cooperation in the pan-European region in order to:

23. Share examples of best practice and lessons learned, *inter alia*, on sustainable forest management, in order to make forests more resilient to the impact of climate change.
24. Continue to exchange experience on the restoration and rehabilitation of degraded forests.

25. Further promote interaction between research, innovation, policy, and sustainable forest management practice on the adaptive capacities of forests to climate change and the prevention of natural hazards in cooperation with international organizations and initiatives active in this field.
26. Further support transboundary forest health monitoring and enhance initiatives in the field of vegetation vitality monitoring, especially with a view to the identification of long-term trends.

III. Connect national and international activities to work towards a coordinated pan-European forest risk knowledge mechanism

27. Work towards a coordinated pan-European forest risk knowledge mechanism. The format will be defined by terms of reference to be adopted by the signatories of FOREST EUROPE, taking into account already existing mechanisms and networks at European and sub-regional levels, with the premises to synergize efforts, add value, and avoid duplication. When developing the terms of reference, stable funding for such a mechanism and the potential role of national focal points will be duly considered, taking into account the following topics, *inter alia*:
 - a. Science-based best practice to inform policy makers and forest practitioners on how best to enhance forest resilience and foster adaptive capacity in the forest sector in order to manage forest disturbance risks;
 - b. Transboundary cooperation on disturbance risk management with specific but not exclusive focus on pests and diseases and forest fires;
 - c. Risk prevention and preparedness to improve the ability to cope with future disturbance events and thus offer assistance at the pan-European level;
 - d. Early response and recovery best practice to inform forest practitioners and decision makers after disturbance events;
 - e. Enhanced knowledge exchange opportunities in order to build expert capacity in the field of disturbance risk management;
 - f. Improved information sharing on climate change impacts and natural hazards, changes in site conditions, damaged areas, types of forests affected and wood volumes as well as insect, pest, and disease dynamics;
 - g. Proactive engagement with the public and media, and dissemination of information in an accessible and appropriate format.