

FOREST EUROPE High-Level Talks

High-Level Policy Dialogue 2023

Growing healthier forests: How can Sustainable Forest Management enhance resilience? Take-home messages

Prepared by FOREST EUROPE Liaison Unit Bonn.

This year's FOREST EUROPE High-Level Policy Dialogue on the topic "Growing healthier forests: How can Sustainable Forest Management (SFM) enhance resilience" was organized by the Liaison Unit Bonn (LUBo) with the support of the Federal Ministry of Food and Agriculture in Germany. Considering the ever-increasing risks that the climate change and biodiversity crises pose for European forests, the event offered a platform to reflect upon the synergies between SFM and resilience in the pan-European region and to discuss a joint way forward.

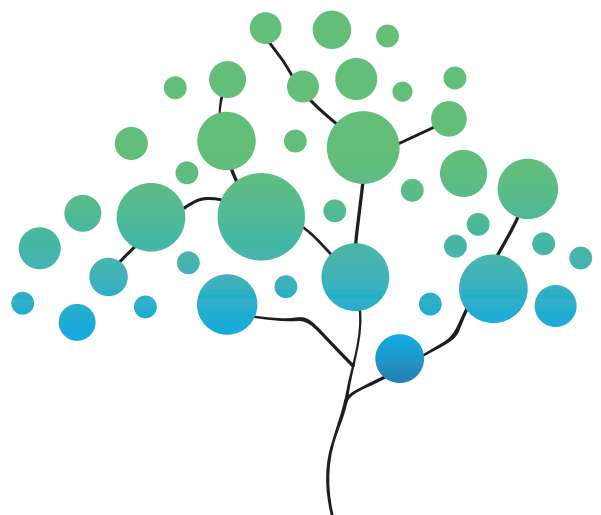
We are living in times of drastic changes challenging forests all over Europe.

Our forests are facing disturbances that are increasing in severity, scale, and frequency due to climate change, thus leading to rapidly advancing tree mortality and canopy loss in Europe. Moreover, disturbance events are becoming increasingly complex as different and sometimes emerging disturbances are linked, occur simultaneously, or reinforce each other, exacerbating the current challenges at the national and regional levels. The unprecedented forest damages all over Europe **require rethinking and constant analysis of adaptation strategies** and approaches to enhance the resilience of forests, landscapes, and society.

So, what do we mean by resilience? Resilience indicates the ability of a system to absorb or withstand changes and disturbance while also maintaining important ecosystem processes and functions. Since 2018, an increase in the disturbance frequency has been observed, and it is likely that forests in Europe may no longer be able to recover from or absorb the damage. The impact on society and the loss of essential ecosystem services and functions that forests provide (e.g., carbon sequestration, healthy soil, drinking water, and wood products) could be irreversible. Therefore, **when dealing with resilience in forests and landscapes, we need a holistic approach that considers societal needs, the entire value chain of the forest process, and ecosystem integrity and conservation.**

Increasing resilience through SFM practices could provide a way out of the combined climate and biodiversity crisis our forests face.

We may not be able to prevent the disturbances, but every crisis is also an opportunity to transform forests into more resilient ecosystems with enhanced biodiversity. **SFM and the integration of nature conservation** in active forest management practices have proven successful all over Europe. **SFM is a dynamic concept, able to be adapted to changes,** and remains the conceptual backbone for the future of European forests. Increasing forest resilience through SFM practices will be instrumental in reinforcing and maintaining the adaptive capacity of forest landscapes and their ability to cope with the tremendous speed and pressure that climate change effects exert on them.



Enhancing forest resilience in Sustainable Forest Management practices includes:

- **Pro-active management to prevent and prepare for forest disturbances and mitigate future impacts**, for example, by increasing the diversity of tree species, structures, and management methods to create more diverse forests and landscapes to face an uncertain future. Considering most climate-adapted provenances and tree species can be taken up as an option. From the perspective of genetic sciences, it's important to note that these may not necessarily be native species. Therefore, in shaping future species mixes to enhance resilience against potential disturbances, it's essential also to consider tested non-native species.
- **Comprehensive recovery approaches need to combine forest restoration and climate change adaptation at the same time.** In addition, we need to consider different dimensions from the smaller to the larger scale; forests need to be managed as part of the landscape and become an integrative part of landscape restoration concepts.
- **Not only do forests and forest management need to become resilient, but also forest value chains and society.** With increasing and competitive demands for forest products and services, we must ensure that forest resources and services are put to the best possible use and strike the right balance. This requires developing new technologies and products, well-trained, informed, and receptive personnel as well as efficient communication strategies.
- **We need more science to inform decision-makers and practitioners and implement more effectively.** There is an increasing need for monitoring disturbances and early warning systems to improve our understanding of forest risks. More research on unmanaged areas should be conducted to comprehend natural adaptation processes better.
- Private forest owners often face new and seemingly insurmountable challenges that may force them to abandon their land. **Providing assistance and training to landowners needs to go beyond subsidies and regulatory frameworks; it is necessary to understand their values and objectives** while developing policies and increasing awareness.

The need to act on the climate and biodiversity crisis together is growing, requiring international and coordinated actions.

Countries face different challenges at different times, and priorities regarding risk management differ. Climate change and biodiversity loss do not respect borders, and urgency is an issue; solutions must be developed by joining forces, always keeping the country's differences in mind. As there is "no one-size-fits-all", **locally adapted solutions need to be elaborated**, with the transparent involvement of different interest groups.

Several participants highlighted the urgency of **strengthening cross-border collaboration and transparent dialogues through a FOREST EUROPE Forest Risk Facility (FoRISK)**. Such pan-European cooperation platform on risk prevention and management is currently being examined by the FOREST EUROPE's signatories and envisaged to be adopted at the 9th Ministerial Conference on 1-2 October 2024 (further information on the Ministerial decision under preparation can be obtained from the Liaison Unit Bonn upon request).

This discussion prepared the ground for **further investigation of the relationship and potential synergies between the two concepts of SFM and resilience building.**