

EUSTAFOR's input on the European Commission Roadmap: EU's strategy on adaptation to climate change

The European State Forest Association (EUSTAFOR) welcomes the European Commission's initiative to develop an ambitious EU Strategy on adaptation to climate change, as announced in the European Green Deal.

We would like to address the following three components, relevant for the upcoming Strategy:

- The importance of forests and the role of sustainable forest management (SFM) for climate change mitigation,
- The negative effects of climate change on forests,
- The role of SFM in adapting forests to climate change, thus making them healthy and resilient to the above-mentioned negative climate change effects.

All the above elements are equally important and should be well-balanced to ensure the optimal contribution from forests to solving the climate problem.

When assessing the type and pace of actions required, we believe that existing good silvicultural practices need to be recognized, further promoted and financially supported. In order to maximize the potential of forests to regulate climate, they must be actively and professionally managed to make them "climate-fit." SFM improves the ability of forests to maintain and enhance carbon sinks and stocks, including by transferring carbon to wood products and substituting fossil and other energy-intensive materials. Furthermore, forests and forest products function as a cornerstone of Europe's bioeconomy. They have a long history of providing a sustainable alternative to fossil-based materials and fossil energy, helping decouple economic growth from resource depletion and adverse environmental impacts.

As stated in the Roadmap, the new adaptation strategy will be designed to support the achievement of the objectives of the EU Climate Law. In that context, EUSTAFOR wishes to express its concern that the current proposal for the Climate Law does not do enough to promote the phasing out of the use of fossil energy and materials. It is overly focused on the no net emissions target, without defining it precisely. This may lead to the unsatisfactory elimination of fossil energy and products in the economic system, while pushing expectations to compensate them by forest carbon sinks too high. Such a simplified approach may also lead to new demands for setting aside forest lands, which is a risky climate strategy considering that old and unmanaged forests are more vulnerable to storms, pests and diseases, fires and other calamities.

Already now, climate change is having a significant visible impact on forests. The JRC PESETA IV final report (1) shows that in recent years, in the EU and UK, two-thirds of the total biomass, was found to be potentially vulnerable to natural disturbances. Nearly half of that amount (46%) is threatened by windstorms, followed by forest fires (29%) and insect outbreaks (25%). A case in point is the recent severe damage of 1,2 million hectares of European state forests resulting from extreme weather and climate events, followed by pests and diseases, throughout Europe. EUSTAFOR's

1 https://ec.europa.eu/jrc/sites/jrcsh/files/pesetaiv_summary_final_report.pdf



members report that in 2018-2019, over 36 million m³ of wood have been lost and recovery will require additional workforce and funding of up to 800 million EUR, presenting both logistical and financial challenges for many state forest organizations (2).

In EUSTAFOR's view, it is the key responsibility of the EU to support European state forest organizations in combating the biotic and abiotic climate change-induced impacts on European forests and nurturing climate-fit forests which are able to resist the anticipated, and most likely increasing, aforementioned impacts. This requires active, climate-smart forest management by professional foresters in close cooperation with scientists, climate change modellers, the private sector, and other stakeholder groups, in contrast to a protectionist approach which just sees forests as a standing carbon sink, increasing the risk of natural disturbances and calamities. Moreover, European multifunctional forests must provide a wide scope of other ecosystem services, including regulating ground and surface water flows, protecting micro-climates and infrastructure, as well as offering recreational and aesthetic values to society. SFM aimed at providing biomass, timber, non-wood resources and other ecosystem functions and services, can lower GHG emissions while improving forest adaptation to climate change. The importance of locally adapted solutions developed by skilled and experienced forest professionals who are familiar with local ecological and socio-economic conditions must not be underestimated. While mitigation and adaptation of forests are closely related, and in many cases, mitigation activities will also support the adaptation of forests and vice versa, it must also be acknowledged that there will be certain necessary trade-offs between the different services which forests can provide. Future climate policy design will consequently need to find a balance between these different societal demands.

Considering the crucial role forests and SFM play not only for climate change mitigation and adaptation, but also for human health, the economy, and biodiversity, EUSTAFOR strongly believes that EU policies and actions in this area can be most effective and provide the most added value. However, these interventions should be identified within the framework of the EU Forest Strategy, including by the proper involvement of experts from the Member States and stakeholders through the Standing Forestry Committee and the Civil Dialogue Group on Forestry and Cork. State Forest Management Organizations, with their knowledge and expertise, can actively contribute to the initiative in assessing how to reinforce the resilience of forests through SFM, including the conservation and enhanced use of existing genetic resources, as well as restoration, reforestation and afforestation measures. Well-designed EU strategies and financial instruments are needed more than ever! Only healthy and thriving forests can efficiently provide climate-related services.

² [EUSTAFOR Internal report: Forest dieback/damages in European State Forests and measures to combat it](#)