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JOINT STATEMENT

The EU forest sector's role in ensuring sustainable forest management and conserving biodiversity

For the sustainable development and resilience of EU forests, including biodiversity conservation, the following issues raised by the European forest and the forest-based sectors need to be considered in the upcoming EU Biodiversity Strategy.

1. SFM is the ABC of biodiversity conservation in forests

Sustainable Forest Management (SFM), with its variety of practices adapted to local circumstances, should be seen as an opportunity to safeguard biodiversity, taking into consideration the impact of climate change while ensuring that other multiple ecosystem services provided by forests can be delivered in a balanced way.

The future Biodiversity Strategy should further promote SFM, whose definition, principles and detailed criteria have been agreed as part of the Forest Europe process¹, which is under continuous development, and are already an integral part of national legislations and voluntary certification systems.

2. Are more restrictions the best way to preserve forests?

Any type of protection should take into account the current requirements of subparagraph 3 of article 2 of the Habitats Directive according to which the economic, social and cultural requirements, and regional and local characteristics need to be respected when interpreting the species and habitats protection provisions.

Placing more restrictive measures, e.g. through strict protection, is a high-risk solution considering future climate change projections and the ever more common adverse events engendering negative effects on forests. In addition, it would encumber forest owners and managers with unbearable burdens which would, in turn, only result in a counterproductive impact on the delivery of the multiple services that society expects from EU forests, including the climate change mitigation aspect which should be further considered in the Strategy.

¹ [Helsinki Resolution H1 \(1993\)](#)

A dynamic approach to nature conservation as part of SFM is key to the successful implementation of the Biodiversity Strategy. It should focus on well-defined protection objectives which are based on verified data, rather than risk adverse results due to large-scale restrictions. Impact assessment, improved implementation of existing measures on already-designated sites, voluntary approaches, better knowledge as well as effective financial tools, along with the involvement of motivated forest owners and managers, are indispensable solutions to reach the stated objectives.

3. The future EU Forest Strategy should pave the way

The EU Forest Strategy should be used as the main framework to coordinate all policies related to forestry, including the aspects related to biodiversity, while having due regard to the prevailing roles of Member States' forest policies and laws and the subsidiarity principle. We call on EU decision-makers to develop a holistic, multi-dimensional and inclusive EU Forest Strategy post-2020, with SFM principles at its core, which will ensure an effective and balanced further development of the EU instruments related to forests.

In this context, any guidelines related to forest management practices must be part of and developed under, not alongside, the new EU Forest Strategy. These should also be produced and agreed on through strong collaboration between the European Commission and Member States and with the involvement of forest owners and managers as well as other relevant stakeholders.

We would like to emphasize that the EU can rely on its remarkable forestry sector and the people who make sustainable forest management happen. Because they are the custodians of forest biodiversity, they must be at the heart of the EU Biodiversity Strategy.