



**Consultation Summary**  
of proposal for a forest support network

## **Last European Ancient Forests (LEAF)**

including an

## **Early Warning System**

**20/08/2017 V1**

**Updated 25/05/2020 V4**

[tobyaykroyd@wildeurope.org](mailto:tobyaykroyd@wildeurope.org)

+ 44 7793 551 542

# **Last European Ancient Forests (LEAF)**

## **Background - application**

This initiative was originally devised for assessment in the 2017 Brussels conference and incorporated into the subsequent Protection Strategy. It involves provision of a low cost trans-European forest surveillance network staffed by local volunteers.

Stipulation in the 2030 EU Biodiversity Strategy of strict protection for all old growth/primary forest raises the issue of how to ensure appropriate implementation and ongoing monitoring of such protection.

The initiative is thus being offered to the EU, JRC, EEA and any other appropriate institution in support of their role and objectives for the Biodiversity Strategy.

## **How the LEAF system would work**

The LEAF initiative will seek to identify, link and develop NGO operatives together with individual specialists, activists and supportive land holders into a ground-based network adjacent to old growth/primary forest areas throughout Europe.

This network can be built through our own contacts, and those made during the old growth/primary forest mapping process.

Dubbed Last European Ancient Forest – or LEAF – the network would be able to support identification and monitoring particularly of old growth/primary forest.

This would be done by ground truthing, in conjunction with local use of drones. There could also be coordination with use of larger-scale surveillance systems in near-live time.

There would be a Secretariat acting as a central coordination point, reachable by email or phone, to which information would be sent and collated.

This could then be processed and referred to other relevant contacts within the LEAF Network, identifying responsibility for further action, and where feasible overseeing whether this occurs effectively.

## **Early Warning System**

A key role of participants in the LEAF network would be to report any threat to their old growth/primary forest area.

Where possible this warning should occur before any damage has occurred, when a clear intention to fell becomes evident: perhaps via the local planning system, marking of trees, arrival of machinery for track creation, even strong & substantiated local rumours.

Wherever appropriate and likely to lead to rapid action, the LEAF participant would inform relevant local authorities in their own district.

Where this was not feasible, or the threat was of sufficient scale, the Secretariat would be informed and decide action depending on the source of the information, protective status and priority assigned to the threat.

There would also be rapid liaison with appropriate entities outside the LEAF Network: institutions, local or national authorities, EC enforcement personnel (if merited) etc

Following referral by the Secretariat, there would be further liaison by other parties to coordinate relevant actions, including: direct protection, profiling of values (intrinsic biodiversity, non extractive socio-economic activities including ecosystem services), restoration and linkage.

Any local group or individual could report potential or actual threats to old growth/primary forests. In the case of an individual non-expert, they should, wherever possible, do so through a local NGO with forest expertise.

## **Other roles for the Secretariat**

Initially the role of the Secretariat could involve cost-effective basic communication and linkage.

Subsequently, with appropriate funding availability [a basic grant, costs can be minimal] consideration could be given to sharing best practice and training within the LEAF network for eg:

- forest mapping [update and addition]
- representation and media management
- calculating and profiling non-extractive value for promoting protection
- the socio-economic agenda for local communities and landholder benefit
- signposting to funds & support for projects and capacity building

## **A positive, inclusive approach**

It is important to ensure an effective monitoring system, and rapid feedback in the event of any clear threat to forest.

At the same time there is intention to include all parties in this procedure where they are willing to participate - landowners and foresters along with conservation NGOs and individual specialists or activists.

The majority of land owners and users are careful to assist protection of old growth/primary forest on their properties, whether privately or publicly owned.

This initiative seeks to include them, and the Early Warning System would be relevant only for the small minority who would destroy this priceless natural heritage and break the law.