

Forests – new EU Strategy

The following recommendations are collated from our partnership network, including our conferences in Brussels (2017) which produced an [Old Growth Forest Protection Strategy](#)¹ and Bratislava (2019)

1) Defining areas for protection

- A clear definition structure for old growth and primary forest, identifying relevant criteria, to enable a standardised approach for protection & restoration; to be set alongside varying national definitions [see [Practical Forest Definition Structure](#)²]
- Strict protection for all old growth/primary forests should involve complete non-intervention - essential for such complex, fragile and irreplaceable ecosystems. This is also the most cost-effective form of management
- The 4% of forests still having old growth/primary status should be framed by a further strictly protected area, generally at least twice its size, totalling c 15%. This consolidates fragmented remnants, enables buffering from 'edge effects', proper ecosystem functioning and linkage. Final areas can be determined by mapping.
- It is important that identification and mapping of the above areas be based on standardised definition structures with a combination of EU overview with national and local implementation. Mapping should include the 4% remnant areas plus adjacent areas whose strict protection is also needed, and involve assessment of ecosystem service potential (MAES)
- The remaining c 85% of forests should be subject to nature-based management: longer rotations, mixed species and age classes to enhance resilience & biodiversity, continuous cover forestry rather than clear-fell

2) Implementing protection

- Adequate monitoring is essential, combining satellite surveillance with local monitoring – with a need to develop support networks that include an Early Warning System for threats [see our LEAF and EWS proposals]
- There must be adequate support for local landholders and communities to incentivise their participation, with reform of compensation systems: appropriate payments, well promoted, readily accessible
- Further funding support should be enabled through full activation of the greatly under-utilised PES agenda - converting economic value into cashflow by promoting best practice and identifying entities to achieve it. This implies capacity building eg for ecosystem service valuation, enterprise implementation and funding facilitation from projects involving carbon sequestration/storage, flood mitigation, ecotourism etc
- This support should form a basis for achieving necessarily ambitious forest protection targets based on inter-sector agreement
- Illegal logging should be effectively addressed - with support for citizen app tracking, reform of EUTR, adequate enforcement and prosecution of criminal activity
- The social mandate of state agencies, managing 40% of forests, requires fuller recognition, with set-aside of forest areas that are uneconomic and often only logged because of statute
- Cessation of subsidies for perverse use of forest products that worsen climate change - notably commercial bioenergy - with redirection of those subsidies to genuine forms of

¹ <https://www.wildeurope.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/old-growth-forest-protection-strategy-outline.pdf>

² <https://www.wildeurope.org/definition-of-old-growth-primary-forest-produced/>

renewable energy (wind, solar, marine), restoration of carbon rich ecosystems and improved insulation, recycling and emission suppression

3) Strategic framework

- Forest Strategy must recognise long-term, effective ecosystem conservation as a key objective, not an adjunct
- The European Court of Justice adjudication of shared responsibility between the EU and Member States correlates with a recognised need for overall EU target setting and standardisation of approach
- Promote similar protection and restoration where appropriate for non-EU countries, eg through Neighbour Agreements, Transition Treaties, trade & aid policy, best practice dissemination
- Uphold the EU's global reputation by ensuring EU policies for the environment, bioenergy, trade and aid do not damage overseas forests