



INTACT

International Action for Primary Forests

**An Old Growth/Primary Forest Action Summit
Mobilizing European civil society
for primary forest conservation**

organized by:



WILDHERITAGE



**WILD
EUROPE**



European Forests in a Global Context

An international perspective on how European NGOs can gain a historic opportunity

At this time of pandemic and climate and extinction crisis, Europe and the EU in particular is in an important position to influence international standards on forest use: for good...and bad.

if we act immediately, our continent has a last chance to save its most natural remaining forests and contribute to the conservation of larger forests around the world.

In this two-webinar series, international forest ecologists and conservationists give their thoughts on an action agenda for how Europe can generate the most impact: for itself, and for global forest conservation. We hope to create a better understanding of biodiversity-climate mitigation linkages and inspire a stronger movement in support of old growth/primary forests in Europe and beyond.

Old growth / primary forests¹ are irreplaceable globally for their biodiversity because they contain the large majority of Earth's terrestrial species. They also protect vast carbon stocks² and are a huge carbon "sink," drawing down large amounts of carbon dioxide globally each year. They are also essential to the rights, livelihoods and cultures of communities and Indigenous Peoples around the world, and very often are the homelands and territories of Indigenous Peoples. In addition, they are critical to prevent future pandemics because they act as natural quarantine areas, keeping people separate from wildlife with zoonotic diseases.

They also provide a range of additional and valuable ecosystem services, including flood mitigation, the highest quality air and freshwater, erosion prevention, pollination – and nature tourism. In short, old growth/primary forests are fundamental to life on Earth.

Old growth/primary forests are therefore a key convergence point. There is no hope of solving the biodiversity, climate change, social justice and zoonotic disease crises unless we protect our remaining primary forests and engage in large-scale ecological restoration of degraded forests.

But forests are under siege globally: a third of the planet's original (pre-agriculture) forests are gone, less than a third of remaining forests are primary and we lose millions of hectares of primary forest each year.

The situation in Europe is even more dire: only 4% of Europe's forests are primary or old growth

¹ For the purposes of this discussion we are defining old growth / primary forests consistent with the Wild Europe guidelines document circulated in conjunction with this concept note, and with the EU's Biodiversity Strategy 2030, which calls for a strict protection management standard for these forests. We believe a strict protection approach means a non-intervention standard, including no extraction of any type.

² Natural forests store far more carbon per hectare than managed, degraded or plantation forests.

forests, and what remains is often under serious threat, and urgently needs to be buffered and connected to other primary and old growth forests.

IntAct: International Action for Primary Forests <https://primaryforest.org>, is a civil society coalition (coordinated by Wild Heritage), with many European signatories, focused on promoting the importance of primary forests.

IntAct signatories have worked together and with other networks (e.g. Climate Action Network, Climate Land Ambition and Rights Alliance, Wild Europe) to help generate major policy advances in the last eighteen months. These include:

- in the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), which now explicitly recognizes the critical importance of primary forests and ecosystem integrity
- in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), which also has new language on the importance of ecological integrity
- in the New York Declaration on Forests, which recently called for prioritizing primary forests in its five-year assessment report
- in IUCN, which just launched a new policy on primary forests
- and of course, in the European Union’s Biodiversity Strategy for 2030, which calls for strict protection of Europe’s remaining old growth/primary forests.

These are critical breakthroughs. They indicate that change is indeed possible and provide hope that we can reverse the disastrous trend of deforestation and forest degradation in Europe and globally.

However, more needs to be done to scale up and accelerate change. International policy negotiations will intensify in 2021 as new policy frameworks and conservation targets are drafted for the next decade. We also need to ensure that the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030, with its necessarily ambitious targets, is fully secured and implemented and that the EU Forest Strategy is also sound.

These two objectives are interrelated: Europeans cannot credibly advocate for change internationally if they do not have their own house in order. Likewise, international policies and norms do trickle down and will certainly impact European policy objectives, while European policies can have profoundly negative impacts abroad.

We therefore urgently need an “amplified” IntAct network, activating existing and new IntAct signatories, to support policy change more effectively, in Europe and globally. The aim is to ensure that old growth/primary forests are fully embedded in new policy frameworks and that climate funding goes to old growth/primary forest protection and ecological restoration.

Currently very little climate funding (~3%) goes to forests, and many international policy and funding mechanisms do not adequately prioritize old growth/primary forests over degraded forests or plantations, which provide far fewer benefits. Nor do they emphasize ecological restoration: almost half of government “restoration” pledges are in fact for commercial plantations. Compounding the problem, governments spend trillions annually in subsidizing extractive industries (\$5-6 trillion on fossil fuels alone according to the International Monetary Fund) and industrial agriculture, with catastrophic impacts for primary forests (and forests in

general).

Wild Europe www.wildeurope.org is a network of organisations and specialists advocating a coordinated strategy for the protection and restoration of large natural ecosystem areas – wilderness and wildlands.

Conservation of old growth and primary forests is a key element of this strategy which Wild Europe has promoted since 2013, with conferences in Brussels (2017) and Bratislava (2019) to raise awareness and secure funding for a range of projects: purchase, carbon valuation, no-impact management and policy support. Wild Europe is currently involved in the EC Working Group on implementation of the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 for forests and nature.

In a European context, a successful Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 will represent crucial progress, but supplementary goals are required to complete its objectives, including eg:

- sound definitions for strict non-intervention management
- policies and programs to ensure that remaining areas of primary/old growth forest are adequately consolidated, buffered and linked
- support for “proforestation” of degraded natural forests.

European Old Growth/Primary Forest Action virtual Summit European Old Growth/Primary Forest Action virtual Summit

Wild Heritage and Wild Europe will therefore organize a **European Old Growth/Primary Forest Action virtual Summit** in March of 2021, convening Europe’s leading forest campaign organizations and networks (some of which are already IntAct signatories) under the IntAct banner, and other partners (foundations, media etc.) to develop a joint primary forest protection communications and advocacy campaign plan.

The overarching goals will be to:

- **Support strong primary and old growth forest policy in Europe.**
- **forests globally, and a no-logging or other extraction objective for Europe, and for maximizing opportunity for restoration of natural forest - “proforestation”** (i.e. allowing degraded forests to age naturally, thereby recovering their biodiversity, drawing down carbon from the atmosphere and achieving their full carbon carrying capacity) **and for maximizing natural regeneration** (allowing forests to grow back naturally where they have been cleared).
- **Strengthen coordination in international policy venues, including in particular the UNFCCC, CBD and SDGs.**
- **Achieve better integration between the climate and biodiversity.**

The Summit will generate four key outcomes:

- **Provide best practice technical briefings on natural and old growth/primary forests, including:**
 - The critical importance of forest carbon stocks, the irreplaceability of primary forests for biodiversity and links between biodiversity and climate mitigation / adaptation.

- The forest “conservation hierarchy” i.e. first protect old growth/primary forests, then restore degraded forests, then allow for natural regeneration of cleared forests, then actively restore previously forested lands where forests cannot regenerate on their own. (These should in fact occur concurrently – the hierarchy highlights the mitigation value of each).
 - The importance of definitions for old growth/primary forests and its strict protection, and progress towards mapping.
 - The need to protecting all old-growth/primary forests at scale wherever possible, but also in small patches as focal areas for ecological restoration efforts.
 - Activating the PES agenda, to provide a strong non-extractive economic argument
 - Debunking false solutions: why certified logging, harvested wood products, BECCS etc. are not mitigation solutions.
- **Reinstating Europe as an icon for international good practice. Summarize the latest policy developments with respect to old growth/primary forests in the European Union, CBD and UNFCCC, reaching consensus on entry points for leveraging changes in international policy and funding.**
- **Working from a draft strategy, generate through a collaborative process a multi-pronged campaign plan, to be implemented by expert campaigning organizations, speaking with one voice on old growth/primary forest protection. Focal areas will include:**
- Generate consensus on old growth/primary forest policy outcomes.
 - Develop blueprints for communications materials on the importance of old growth/primary forests and biodiversity/ecosystem integrity – mitigation/adaptation linkages.
 - Map out participation and assign responsibilities for UN meetings and other conferences in 2020 to ensure IntAct’s messages are delivered.
 - Ensure IntAct signatories meet regularly at key UN meetings to coordinate and strategize.
- **Publicize a clear and bold Primary Forest Action Summit platform, including:**
- A call for **prioritizing** old growth/primary forests in international policy and funding,
 - A call for **maximizing ecological restoration**, including:
 - **“Proforestation”** i.e. allowing degraded natural forests to recover and age.
 - **Scale (for Europe!) – include areas around in strict protection:** buffer, consolidate, link maximise ecological functioning. 15% not 4% of total forest cover
 - **Natural regeneration**, i.e. allowing forests to regenerate on their own as much as possible before engaging in active restoration