



WILD EUROPE

Summary proposal for a forest support network

Last European Ancient Forests (LEAF)

**Aiming to secure appropriate protection,
restoration and management for old
growth/primary forest in Europe**

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Background – a concerted approach

The next few months will determine the future of large areas of Europe's old growth/primary forest.

The 2030 EU Biodiversity Strategy, with its key target to strictly protect all old growth/primary forests, and the EU Forest Strategy are both being determined. There is heavy lobbying from land user and forest bioenergy interests.

Much can be done to support a more coordinated approach by NGOs, academics, activists and supportive landholders to help ensure appropriate outcomes.

It is proposed that a network be established, dedicated to conserving these forests, dubbed "*LEAF*" *Last European Ancient Forest: a support network for protection and restoration of old growth/primary forests.*

The initiative will coordinate closely with other networks, such as *Forest Defenders Alliance* which focuses primarily on the challenge of forest bioenergy, and link to the *EC Working Group on Forests and Nature* currently inputting to implementation of the EU Biodiversity Strategy.

LEAF was originally devised for the 2017 Brussels conference as the basis for monitoring of protection, and incorporated into the subsequent Protection Strategy.

Short-term objectives

LEAF will support existing representation to the EC, JRC, European Parliament and other institutions. It can aim to reinforce a series of objectives, including:

- The right definition for remaining old growth/primary forest, with appropriate identification and mapping
- Strict protection to mean non-intervention

- Such protection to also apply for sufficiently large areas around these remaining areas: for consolidation, adequate ecological functioning, buffering and connectivity
- Appropriate updating of the 2015 EU guidelines for forests and in the Natura 2000 network
- Restoration to be based on an ecological not economic basis

Further objectives can be discussed, including those relevant to the forthcoming Restoration Law, RED II reform and updated EU Forest Strategy.

Developing the network

To align with available resources, the LEAF initiative can be developed in stages.

Initial action will involve a dedicated website, providing a common reference point with supportive content:

- A listing of those involved
- Information on who is doing what where
- Major threats and opportunities
- Key campaign aspects: definitions, targets, science-based explanations
- Indexed listing of key references/reports
- Close links to partner sites

Coupled with regular communications, this can provide the basis for an active European movement. A Coordinator role will be established, initially part time, to service the website and communications.

As resources permit, with further fund-raising, the role would facilitate additional opportunities for joint action: petitions, papers, specific protection actions.

Further stage to be developed: Early Warning System

It would be for participants to decide which further activities need prioritising. Once the fund-raising networking is in place, together with a mapping function within the EU Biodiversity Strategy, a ground-based

network could be established, to report threats to their old growth/primary forest area.

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

An expanded Secretariat could act as a central coordination point, 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.

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

Other roles for the network

Linking with other organisations, consideration could be given to sharing best practice and training within the local partner network eg for:

- representation and media management
- calculating and profiling non-extractive value for promoting protection (the Payment for Ecosystem Services agenda)
- using the socio-economic agenda to gain local community and landholder support

A positive, inclusive approach

Although starting with conservation entities, there is intention to include all parties in this initiative where possible - 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.