

FECOF statement:

THE EU FOREST OWNING MUNICIPALITIES AT THE CROSSROAD OF CLIMATE CHANGE

Climate is changing and so the future environmental conditions in Europe will be different than in times past. Storms and droughts will be more common. Insects will find better reproductive conditions. Devastating fires become more likely. These changes have a major impact on forest ecosystems, which is currently reflected by the enormous damage to forests all over Europe. The different conditions will be more appropriate for some species than they may be for others. Nature will adapt. The crucial question rather is, whether the services of nature for the people in Europe will still be available under those changing conditions. Because nature does not need people, but people need the services of nature and of forests in particular.

Clean water, pure air, soil protection, biodiversity, recreation, wood and further raw materials - all this seems to be a matter of course. But it is not. Aggregated, these services are primarily the result of sustainable, multifunctional forest management in Europe in the past century after a long period of non-sustainable, destructive human use. This widely established way of responsible forest management applies especially to the forest in the possession of municipalities, as their committees are close to the people and obligated to a responsible approach to their communal forest.

Due to climate change, forest owners in the EU are facing the challenge to preserve those balanced functions of their forests by adapting them effectively and rapidly to changing environmental conditions. However, in view of the current crisis in forestry, this is an extremely difficult task. In this respect, forest owning municipalities must ask themselves if and how they will deal with their forests in the future. The interest in multifunctional oriented management of the forest threatens to suffocate in the face of the financial burden. At the moment, many forest owning municipalities in the EU are standing at the crossroad of climate change.

Against this background, FECOF generally appreciates:

- The EU's commitment to climate protection, represented in its ambitious goals and the active support of climate change mitigation and adaptation on the EU-level and worldwide.
- The Commission's current efforts to protect and restore the world's forest, also with regard to the pioneering actions of the past.
- The EU's commitment to sustainable forest management (SFM), stated in the European Forest Strategy (EFS) and pursued through the Forest Europe political process.
- The EU's active support of multifunctional, sustainable forest management in the context of rural development, bioeconomy, biodiversity and forest-related research.
- The possibilities of information and discussion in the context of forest-related EU policies, especially in relation to the Civil Dialog Group Forestry and Cork.
- The Commission's efforts of developing the social discourse on forests and SFM, represented the event 'Our Forests, Our Future'.

To continue the successful path of multifunctional, sustainable forest management in the EU, FECOF considers the following actions necessary:

- Strengthening and further development of forest-related research, international research networks and overarching knowledge transfer as a fundament of forest ownership consulting and support, leading to effective climate change adaption of forest ecosystems.

This applies inter alia to:

- Forest insects and disease management
 - Preventing and fighting forest fires
 - Tree species selection and silvicultural adaption of forest ecosystems to droughts
 - Forest tree breeding
 - Effectiveness of forest-related policies and forest governance
- Strengthening, further development and increasing the efficiency of supporting multifunctional, sustainable forest management as well as the bioeconomy sector through EU funds and national co-financing. This implies especially the continuation, extension and simplification of the forest-related funding measures of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), as the pivotal funding instrument for SFM, including the improvement of the framework for financial compensation of Natura 2000 measures.

From a macrosocial point of view, the future health of forests at the European level and globally is of systemic relevance. Given the current situation of transnational crisis, a holistic support for the forest-related sector is of crucial importance. Here, the upcoming revisions of the EFS and the CAP represent great opportunities. In addition to convincing society of the highest possible social benefit of multifunctional forest management, it will be of key importance for preserving the manifold functions of forests in the EU to enable the European forest owners implementing the necessary measures of sustainable adaption to climate change. Therefore, it is up to political decision-makers of all levels to create the necessary framework conditions. FECOF tends to support and accompany this process in the best possible way with regard to the communal forest in Europe.

FECOF - European Federation of Municipal Forest Owners