



SEGUNDO EJERCICIO. PARTE A

Ministers in Madrid commit to further action to address challenges ahead for European forests

In the last two-and-a-half decades, forest area in Europe has continuously increased. At the same time, progress has also been made on the implementation of sustainable forest management in the region. In short: Nowadays, Europe has more and better-managed forests.

Forests play an essential role in the well-being of European society. More forests, and a wider implementation of sustainable forest management, means more environmental, economic and sociocultural benefits for society. More sustainably managed forests signifies more stable soils, more (and higher quality) water resources, more habitats for forest species, more protection against natural hazards such as floods, landslides and avalanches, as well as more opportunities to supply forest products and create jobs related to forests and the forest sector. In other words: more opportunities for sustainable development.

However, despite the positive news regarding European forests in the last decades, new challenges for forests have emerged during this time, and new opportunities have appeared or become more evident.

Aiming to strengthen the political commitment to address these challenges and opportunities, ministers and high level representatives from 38 European countries and the European Union gathered in Madrid on 20-21 October 2015, on the occasion of the 7th FOREST EUROPE Ministerial Conference and the FOREST EUROPE Extraordinary Ministerial Conference. Delegates from 18 international organisations representing forest owners, the academic and scientific community, intergovernmental processes and other forest stakeholders, also participated at the meetings as observers.

During these two days, attendees at the Conferences highlighted the important role of FOREST EUROPE - the voluntary high-level political process for forests in Europe - to foster action at national and regional levels on forest-related issues on the European continent. As the Spanish Minister of Agriculture, Food and the Environment, Ms Isabel García Tejerina, said today in Madrid, *"FOREST EUROPE has been essential in order to enhance cooperation on forest policies and to implement sustainable forest management across the continent in these 25 years, and so it will be in the future"*.

Protecting forests through sustainable forest management

We are living in a time of exceptional environmental change. Climate change is expected to aggravate damage caused by drought, wildfires, storms, and pests, among other threats to forests. This, together with other long-range environmental changes, such as those caused by increasing pollution, growing human population and land-use changes, puts at risk the long-term capacity of forests to fulfil their essential ecological, economic and social functions.



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In addition to this, the cross-border nature of many of the threats affecting forests makes the need to reinforce international collaboration in the protection of forests more evident than ever. Consequently, ministers responsible for forests in Europe have reaffirmed in Madrid their commitment to strengthen cooperation in this area in the pan-European region.

Acknowledging that sustainably managed forests recover more easily from damage and adapt better to changing conditions, ministers have also committed to enhancing the protection of forests by further strengthening the implementation of sustainable forest management on the continent, both at national and regional levels.

As the Slovak Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development Mr. Lubomír Jahnátek, who is one of the co-chairs of the Conference, said: “*active forest protection can significantly contribute to mitigating negative impacts of threats which our forests are facing today*”.

Placing forests in the centre of a green economy

Ministers in Madrid committed to enhancing the role of sustainable forest management in a green economy. The transition to a green economy offers great opportunities to develop the forest sector even further, as well as to foster the creation of new green jobs.

In this sense, opportunities exist to diversify and develop the forest sector, new market niches, and employment linked to non-wood forest resources and forest services, which are starting to attract more attention and would respect the supply of the goods and services provided by these ecosystems.

Research into new, innovative technologies and products, and identifying new demands from society that could be fulfilled by forest products and services, will be key for the development of the forest sector. Closely related to this, training and education will also be essential to making the forest sector more competitive. Only a competitive sector will assure its profitability.