



To: The European Commission

Cc: Permanent Representations of the Member States to the European Union

EUFORGEN welcomes the New *EU Forest Strategy for 2030* and would like to support its implementation, especially in regard to forest genetic resources.

The EUFORGEN steering committee has identified three broad areas in which the programme's mandate and ongoing work could contribute to the new EU Forest Strategy:

- Extending the scope of biodiversity in forest ecosystems to ensure that conservation includes genetic diversity within a species.
- Promoting the use of carefully selected forest reproductive material to enable more rapid and sustainable adaptation to climate change.
- Using information from the characterisation of genetic conservation units to strengthen monitoring of forest responses to perturbation.

Background

The European Forest Genetic Resources Programme (EUFORGEN) is an international collaborative mechanism for the conservation and sustainable management of forest genetic resources in Europe.¹ It represents collective knowledge far beyond that of any single country, and because it is funded by national governments, with National Coordinators nominated by each country's respective ministry, it is grounded in a firm, government-driven consensus.

EUFORGEN developed the current joint forest genetic diversity conservation strategy for European countries², and supports countries in its implementation. In 2021, EUFORGEN launched the *Forest Genetic Resources Strategy for Europe*³, which identifies key elements to improve the conservation and sustainable use of European forest genetic resources.

The recommendations of the *Forest Genetic Resources Strategy for Europe* can contribute to the implementation of the new EU Forest Strategy, which is why we offer our support.

¹ EUFORGEN was established in 1994 to fulfil [Forest Europe Resolution S2](#) and subsequently endorsed by 46 European countries and the European Union in 2015 via the [Madrid Ministerial Resolution M2](#), reinforced in 2021 with the [Bratislava Ministerial Declaration](#).

² Pan-European strategy for genetic conservation of forest trees <http://www.euforgen.org/publications/publication/pan-european-strategy-for-genetic-conservation-of-forest-trees-and-establishment-of-a-core-network-o/>

³ www.euforgen.org/FGRStrategy4Europe

Genetic Resources

Genetic diversity within a species, often called genetic resources, is a crucial level of biological diversity and the foundation for the ability of all species to survive, adapt and evolve in changing environments.

The new EU Forest Strategy commits member countries to conserve biodiversity in forest ecosystems; this must include genetic diversity within species, because forest genetic resources ensure the ecological and economic resilience of forests.

EUFORGEN has coordinated the efforts of European countries to conserve the genetic diversity of forest trees for 25 years, with agreed minimum standards and an established network of dynamic genetic conservation units (GCUs).⁴

The *Forest Genetic Resources Strategy for Europe* commits European countries to establish new Genetic Conservation Units (GCUs) to fill conservation gaps. This network of dynamic conservation units can play a part in the new EU Forest Strategy's intention that forests be managed for biodiversity and can inform necessary efforts to conserve diversity within species.

Forest Reproductive Material

The new EU Forest Strategy notes that the use of well-adapted genetic resources and ecosystem-based approaches to forest management can enhance long term adaptability and forests' capacity to recover. EUFORGEN agrees that this is vitally important; however, it will require expanding sources for planting material.

In many EU countries, a preference for natural regeneration has consolidated over the past half century to the point that artificial regeneration is neglected, if not actually precluded. Scientific evidence, however, indicates that in many places natural regeneration alone may not allow forest ecosystems to adapt to climate change. Carefully selected forest reproductive material (FRM) would provide better options for the urgent adaptation required by rapid climate change.

The new EU Forest Strategy includes a roadmap to implement the Green Deal pledge to plant an additional 3 billion trees in Europe. If these trees are to thrive, they will have to harbour appropriate genetic material, identified using rigorous data. Furthermore, the production of forest reproductive material can in some cases reduce adaptive potential.

In 2021 EUFORGEN published a report on genetic aspects of the production and use of FRM⁵ which explains the need to maintain genetic diversity and how to preserve this diversity along the entire production chain. EUFORGEN is also committed to provide input to the European Commission, contributing to the development of improved and harmonised legislation on the collection and production of FRM. These commitments to the prudent use of selected genetic resources for some afforestation and regeneration, and to actively participate in relevant research, could be important to the New EU Forest Strategy's tree-planting efforts.

⁴ www.euforgen.org/publications/publication/pan-european-strategy-for-genetic-conservation-of-forest-trees-and-establishment-of-a-core-network-o/

⁵ <http://www.euforgen.org/publications/publication/genetic-aspects-linked-to-production-and-use-of-forest-reproductive-material-frm/>

Monitoring Change

Improved monitoring of the effects of climate and perturbations on forests will be part of the Forest Information System for Europe (FISE).⁶ EUFORGEN can contribute to this through its efforts to improve the characterisation of GCUs with field and laboratory analyses and using remote sensing data.

This effort is part of the ongoing Horizon 2020 project FORGENIUS⁷, and data will be made available through an improved European Information System on Forest Genetic Resources (EUFGIS).⁸

EUFGIS, maintained and developed in the EUFORGEN programme, is the only transnational information system on forest genetic resources in Europe and enables accurate reporting on FGR conservation status to regional and global processes.⁹

EUFORGEN is also working to link EUFGIS to the Forest Reproductive Material Information System (FOREMATIS)¹⁰ in order to promote new data sharing options.

In addition, long-term geo-referenced records of FRM use and performance at specific planting sites could improve the sustainable use of forest genetic resources, enhance yields and help to mitigate climate change effects and improve carbon sequestration, all of which are integral to the New EU Forest Strategy.

As indicated above, the EUFORGEN community, through its research and coordination, could support the implementation of the *New EU Forest Strategy for 2030* and stands ready to do so. In particular, we see a role in science-policy-practice dialogue on forest genetic resources, identifying appropriate actions and coordinating discussion among actors.

We reiterate our welcome for the new EU Forest Strategy and look forward to learning how we may be of service in helping to advance this important initiative.

EUFORGEN Steering Committee

March 2022

⁶ <https://forest.eea.europa.eu>

⁷ Improving access to FORest GENetic Resources Information and Services for End-USers - www.forgenius.eu

⁸ <http://portal.eufgis.org>

⁹ These include the Forest Europe report on the [State of Europe's Forests](#), the global FAO [State of the World's FGR](#) and the [Biodiversity Information System for Europe](#).

¹⁰ <https://ec.europa.eu/forematis>

Contacts

Michele Bozzano - EUFORGEN Coordinator

michele.bozzano@efi.int

European Forest Genetic Resources Programme - www.euforgen.org

