

Can forests support EU goals on climate, health and livelihoods?

Summary of event held in European Parliament, Thursday 2nd July 2026

Host MEPs

Dávid, Dóra – EPP, Hungary
Mihal Wiezik – Renew, Slovakia
Lynn Boyland – The Left, Ireland

Panel

Mihal Wiezik – MEP Renew, Slovakia
Caroline Celis - Sonian Forest Foundation
Kelsey Perlman – FERN
Zoltan Kun – PFPI
Stefanie Schmidt – EC, DG Envi

Scientific presentation

Alessandro Cescatti – EC, JRC

Policy take-aways

Forests are facing a crisis, which will lead to more deaths from flooding, heatwaves, etc. But we have solutions:

Public forests

- Are 40% of our forests and could demonstrate leadership
- We can meet **LULUCF carbon sink targets**. In fact, public forests may be able to meet them by themselves!

Closer to nature forest management (CFM)

- Around 86% of tree mortality is caused by harvesting, so we have a lot of influence on our forests. We can improve the resilience of forestry, and provide more high skilled jobs throughout the value chain (e.g. through increasing uptake of CFM)

We must protect primary and old-growth forests immediately - they are the genetic resource for the resilience of all forests

We must reconfigure policies and subsidies that reward wasteful use of wood (such as bioenergy and pulp and paper). Subsidies should be directed to ensuring a more sustainable forestry sector and delivering targets on protected areas.

More cross-party discussions

Introduction by Tom Chambers, Partnership for Policy Integrity

We need to look after forests so they can look after us. But forests face challenges. They are also unevenly spread around the EU. All EU citizens depend on forests, and all EU citizens should have access to their services (from flood regulation to cooling, to recreation, jobs, etc). As this applies to everyone, it must be a cross-party issue. So, we are very grateful to our three sponsoring MEPs, from across political groups. Just as trees in a forest are interconnected in order to survive, so must we be.

Opening remarks from Dávid Dóra (MEP, EPP, Hungary)

The previous Hungarian government did not protect forests, but the environment is one of the new government's priorities. We need healthy forests, so now the government created a new Ministry for the Living Environment, which launched several initiatives including: a moratorium on clear-cutting in protected areas, and restructuring of the management of public forests. New strategies will be developed on forests and also climate change.

Presentation by Alessandro Cescatti – EC Joint Research Centre

Slides are available [here](#).

EU forests are 41% of EU land and 76% of its natural and semi-natural areas, but forests are in crisis: forest resilience is declining and carbon sinks are collapsing. But crises give us the opportunity to change things for the better. Impacts on forests from climate change are increasing, but 86% of tree removals are because of harvesting, so there is much within our power. There is a strong link between diversity and resilience. The most vulnerable forests are monoculture plantations. Forestry must learn from the resilience of natural systems (due to biodiversity & uneven-aged structure), and investment is needed for transition. We must protect all remaining primary and old-growth forests – they are irreplaceable capital.

Panel discussion

Q1. How should we use our forests?

- As well as protected areas, we need to manage our forestry areas to be healthy forests – through more CFM
- Many of the solutions are in the New Forest Strategy for 2030 – such as targets on protected areas and supporting the closer to nature forest management sector (CFM).
- We must make resilience a business-case, throughout the value chain (more resilient forestry, PES, nature credits, etc)
- We must increase strictly protected areas (our commitments to the Convention on Biological Diversity). Nature Restoration Plans are an opportunity.
- We need to rethink how wood is used. A huge problem is giving billions in subsidies to wasteful uses such woody biomass for bioenergy. CAP funds have also been going to monoculture plantations. A key solution is to redirect subsidies to help the forestry sector transition to high value forestry and wood uses.¹

¹ <https://www.fern.org/publications-insight/article/funding-resilient-forests-rethinking-eu-and-state-aid/>

- We must improve how we manage forests. The vast majority are even-aged forests, managed simplistically. We manage forests as though they are kindergartens (only very young trees). CFM is a solution that needs rolling out by redirecting funds and supporting foresters to train in CFM.
- Political will is preponderant to let real forest grow.
- Our relationship to forests has changed, people now have far less dependence on wood for home heating. E.g. forests in Bratislava have changed their emphasis from wood production to recreation and everyone is happy.

Q2. Can we address declining forest carbon sinks?

- Public forest is a key lever for delivering LULUCF and biodiversity targets - their management answers to the public, and they have less complicated ownership.² Public forests, by themselves, may even be able to meet today's LULUCF targets (40% of forests are public). There is hope for positive change in Hungary's public forests.
- We need to re-evaluate the economic equation of forestry. Current approaches actually contribute little to employment (and the numbers get worse). We need investment in higher value forestry based on more CFM and high-skilled jobs, as well as the economic sector of recreation.
- We must make sure there are different species at different ages in our forests. This creates higher quality, more valuable timber that keeps carbon out of the atmosphere much longer. We need more older trees – they store a lot of carbon, still sequester a lot, and they support younger trees (e.g. in drought).
- **There must be an immediate moratorium on logging primary and old-growth forests in the Carpathians and Fennoscandia** – as per EC Guidelines. In Slovakia there has been progress, but in many countries not. We need to tackle the damage being done to Ukraine's. People exaggerate the difficulty of protecting old-growth forests – relative to other EU measures this would be very cheap. This is low-hanging fruit.
- Our relationship to forests has changed, people now have far less dependence on wood for home heating. E.g. forests in Bratislava have changed their emphasis from wood production to recreation and everyone is happy.
- A political umbrella would help – e.g. a Nature Fund. We also need funds to incentivise the management of forests for carbon sinks and biodiversity, not just wood harvests.
- There is a common misconception that we must work to correct - the idea that old forests are a barrier to adapting to climate change. This is far from true.
- We have a solution: implementation of the framework of the Nature Restoration Law.
- The EC is working and has published the integrated wildfire risk management³ and a series of capacity building guidelines on Payment for Ecosystem Services.⁴

Q3. How can there be more collaboration across political parties and EU institutions?

- Discussions and decisions about forest must be evidence-based, and not driven by ideology or individual interests. The mindsets must be focussed on understanding, not protecting a myopic status-quo.
- There's an old-fashioned idea in parts of the right that environmental issues are a left-wing agenda. This needs to change.

² https://www.fern.org/fileadmin/uploads/fern/Documents/2026/Letter_A_better_use_of_wood_and_public_funds.pdf & https://forestdefenders.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/03/FDA_Public-forest_position-paper-v1-March-30-2026.pdf

³ https://ec.europa.eu/echo/files/civil_protection/communication_on_integrated_wildfire_risk_management.pdf

⁴ https://environment.ec.europa.eu/news/green-deal-new-guidelines-sustainable-forest-management-and-payment-schemes-forest-ecosystem-2023-07-27_en

- The EUDR was postponed, there are threats to the Nature Directives, LULUCF targets and Nature Restoration Regulation. They must be defended.
- We tried to strengthen the evidence-base via the FML, but talks failed fairly early (without logical reasons). We can still improve forest monitoring – e.g. working on NRR indicators.
- We need a fora for cross-party discussion (like today!). Expert groups are another way we try to get a balance of stakeholder input.
- *Comment from floor (Carbon Market Watch)*: Expert groups are imbalanced and CRCF methodologies are not succeeding – e.g. it is possible to clear-cut a forest after 40 years and sell the wood for bioenergy and still receive credits. Today's fora are not adequate, e.g. the main forest certifications don't go beyond the status quo. But foresters want to be trained in CFM.
- We should collaborate on protecting old-growth forests. At EU scale, there aren't many to protect, it would not be a big effort. We should compensate for any lost income, but really this should be a low-hanging fruit. This is our responsibility to the world, we cannot talk about the Amazon if we are not doing this in the EU.
- We must be positive. The need for resilience in forests is becoming accepted as a common denominator; something has to happen.
- The only way is persistence. Some have been choosing not to look at evidence. Social media is more influential than the peer reviewed literature. There is a crisis coming – are we prepared?
- Another way, is a bottom-up approach – show leadership in the real, physical world, and within Member States.
- Yes, we need regional forest plans with funding & PES payments. We need to work with foresters, meet them where they are. E.g. foresters inherit land and need training. There will be more cross-party alignment as realities become harder to ignore.
- The solution is to have a diversification of funds and programmes to work towards foresters' needs.
- We must all defend our systems from attack, at EU level and MS. E.g. in Slovakia, the leadership wanted to weaken national parks, but checks and balances led to a U-turn and *increasing* the area of non-intervention.
- Churchill said, never let a good crisis go to waste. We have a crisis on forests, but it's an opportunity to change our forests to something better. Now we should solve our differences and have a convergence of interests. This isn't *environmental protection*, it's *investment protection*.
- We need to improve understanding of issues & showcase good work (e.g. German climate smart forestry programme, Finland's set-aside programme (Metsä), ensure findings from Pathfinder/Horizon inform policymaking), and examples of transitioning to CFM to reassure those who worry that it's risky.
- We need to build understanding. There are misconceptions, such as that the NRR opposes climate change adaptation, or that we want to bring forests back to the stone-age. That's why we publish guidelines on how the Nature Directives should be implemented, on climate change adaptation in Natura 2000 sites, on an integrated approach to wildfire, on the protection of old-growth forests, etc.

Closing remarks from Lynn Boylan (MEP, The Left, Ireland)

The current heatwave illustrates the importance of forests – the Forêt de Soigne has been 20°C cooler than the centre of Brussels. Happily, today's discussion has been mostly solutions-based.

We have the answers. I would be glad to organise an MEP trip to see one of the answers – **Closer to Nature Forest Management** in the Forêt de Soignes. **On Public forests** - I can report the Irish government has shown some leadership, increasing native species and reducing clear-cuts.

But there have been political failures. The **Renewable Energy Directive** has an impact by incentivising burning wood. There is huge demand on forests for the “bioeconomy”. There are potentially eviscerating threats to “simplify” the Nature Directives, Nature Restoration Regulation and Water Framework Directive.

We must have a bottom-up approach, as populists do not wish to find accurate information. Let’s bring together political groups to discuss sensibly, including in the upcoming TRIO presidencies: Ireland, Lithuania and Greece.

Contact information:

Erich de Castro: erich.castro@caneurope.org

Tom Chambers: tchambers@pfpi.net