

New EU forest strategy for 2030

In July 2021, the European Commission adopted its communication on the new EU forest strategy for 2030, pursuing the biodiversity and climate neutrality objectives enshrined in the European Green Deal and the EU biodiversity strategy for 2030. The strategy aims to improve the quantity and quality of EU multi-functional forests, by reversing negative trends and increasing their resilience against the high uncertainty brought about by climate change. The strategy has sparked heated debate amongst various stakeholders and policy-makers.

A new strategy for EU forests

The work on a new strategy to replace the previous [2013 EU forest strategy](#) began in October 2020 with a roadmap consultation, followed by an open [public consultation](#), which ended in April 2021, incorporating meetings with stakeholders and evidence from the impact [evaluation](#) of the previous strategy.

The 16 July 2021 [new EU forest strategy](#), a flagship element of the [European Green Deal](#) and a key action under the [EU biodiversity strategy for 2030](#), is seen as a strategic component to achieve the EU's biodiversity objectives, as well as its greenhouse gas emission reduction target of at least 55 % by 2030 and subsequent

climate neutrality by 2050. The strategy aims to improve the quantity and quality of EU forests, reversing negative trends and adapting EU forests to the new conditions, weather extremes and high uncertainty brought about by climate change. The strategy includes a set of regulatory, financial and voluntary measures for 2021-2030, with the multi-functional role of forests at its core.

The measures proposed in the strategy, to be reviewed in 2025, include:

- promoting **sustainable forest management** (SFM), including by encouraging the sustainable use of wood-based resources;
- providing **financial incentives** for forest owners and managers to adopt environmentally friendly practices, such as those linked to **carbon storage and sequestration**;
- improving the size and biodiversity of forests, including by planting **3 billion new trees by 2030**;
- promoting **alternative forest industries**, such as ecotourism, as well as non-wood products, such as cork, honey and medicinal plants;
- encouraging the take-up of financial support under the **common agricultural policy (CAP)**, which can help forests and forest-based industries mitigate against climate change;
- providing **education and training** for people working in forest-based industries and making these industries more attractive to young people;
- establishing a **legally binding instrument** for ecosystem restoration, and a new legislative proposal on **EU forest observation, reporting and collection**;
- protecting the EU's remaining **primary and old-growth forests**.

EU Forests – Key facts

- In 2020, forests covered 38 % of total EU land area (159 million hectare (ha)), representing approximately 5 % of the world's forests.
- Forest coverage ranges from 66 % in Finland to 1.5 % in Malta.
- Forest area of the EU has been increasing since 2010, at a pace of 0.3 million ha per year (2010-2015) and then 0.2 million ha per year (2015-2020).
- The [2020 State of Europe's Forests](#) report concluded that, on average, the condition of European forests is deteriorating.
- There are 16 million private and public EU forest owners: 60 % of the forest area is privately owned, and 40 % publicly owned.

Source: [European Commission](#).

Council conclusions

In November 2021, the [Council](#) adopted [conclusions](#) on the strategy, after several rounds of deliberations. Member States welcomed the publication of the strategy and 'its increased ambition for the contribution of forest through their multifunctional role to the European Green Deal and ... 2030 Agenda'. They nevertheless stressed the need to strike a balance between the environmental, social and economic aspects of sustainable forest management, as well as the importance of maintaining the diversity of forests and forest management practices in different Member States and regions, respecting their competences in the area. Moreover, the Member States expressed doubts about the added value of developing national strategic plans for forestry, as envisaged in the Commission's communication, and encouraged the use of existing international monitoring and reporting processes. Finally, ministers recommended that the existing Standing Forestry Committee ([SFC](#)) remain the main forum for discussion, reinforcing its role in the implementation of the strategy.

Advisory Committees

The [European Economic and Social Committee](#) (EESC) adopted its [opinion](#) on the new EU forest strategy in December 2021 (rapporteur Simo Tiainen, Diversity Europe-Group III, Finland). While the Committee acknowledged that the forest strategy addresses economic and social opportunities, it stressed that a more comprehensive approach is necessary, including concrete proposals on how to remunerate the non-commercial ecosystems services provided by forests. The EESC emphasised the need to avoid one-size-fits-all solutions and the importance of making decisions at the right level, in accordance with competences and the principle of subsidiarity. The [European Committee of the Regions](#) (CoR) is preparing an opinion on the strategy, after undertaking a [written stakeholder consultation](#).

Stakeholder positions

The European Forest Owners and Managers, in an October 2021 [statement](#), expressed concern about a strategy it considered not sustained by the realities on the ground, and lacking due consideration of the great diversity of EU forests. They pointed out that 'conserving biodiversity, restoring ecosystems and increasing carbon sinks are the dominant elements within the strategy ..., resulting in lack of coherence with climate and growth objectives'. Furthermore, they noted that, under the new strategy, the European Commission takes responsibility for a number of areas so far managed by Member States, and regretted the fact that forest owners and managers had not been involved in the development of payments for ecosystems services.

[Fern](#), an organisation dedicated to EU forest protection, [welcomed](#) several aspects of the new strategy, such as a new legislative proposal for EU forest monitoring and data collection and a reinforced EU forest governance mechanism. However, when analysing its impact in the context of the whole '[fit for 55](#)' package, Fern concluded that the pressure on forests will likely increase over time. Other environmental non-governmental organisations, such as the World Wide Fund For Nature ([WWF](#)), welcomed the adoption of the strategy and its overall goals, while regretting that some components appear to be weakened in the final version compared to previous drafts, shifting towards voluntary measures and lacking clear safeguards to prevent intensified forest management and harvesting.

Parliament position

In its 2020 resolution on the '[European forest strategy – the way forward](#)', the European Parliament set out its priorities for a revised post-2020 strategy. The Parliament called for an ambitious, independent and self-standing EU forest strategy, aligned with the [European Green Deal](#) and the [biodiversity strategy for 2030](#). It stressed the need to give full political support to the forestry sector, acknowledging the multifunctional role played by forests and ensuring adequate financial instruments combining EU, national and private funding, where the EU strategy should act as a bridge between national policies and broad EU objectives and programmes. The EP called for recognition of the role of forestry, agro-forestry and forest-based industries in the post-2020 CAP, and in the implementation of the European Green Deal. These principles were further reflected in the Parliament's resolution on the '[EU biodiversity strategy for 2030](#)', as well as in its position during the negotiations on the post-2022 CAP, on which EU legislators [reached a deal](#) in 2021.

The European Parliament has decided to draw up an own-initiative report on the new EU forest strategy. For further information, see the EP Legislative Train Schedule page on [The New EU Forest Strategy 2030](#).

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