

Scientists' call

*for the protection
of forests in Europe*

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> Summary of the articles

The signatory scientists:

- Article 1** Mention the international scientific vision in favour of the sustainable management and the preservation of forest ecosystems.
- Article 2** Demand to reduce the threats on European forests' biodiversity, quality and naturalness and to develop efforts to restore past degradations.
- Article 3** Ask for an increase, in the E.U., of the investment into scientific research concerning forest ecology, conservation of biodiversity and naturalness.
- Article 4** Ask for a specific policy to consolidate a network of well protected forests (categories I to IV of the IUCN) that is representative and functional in Europe.
- Article 5** Ask for a specific policy of European governments and the E.U. to strictly protect large old-growth forests, and through this create, conserve or restore several "Yellowstone's for Europe's children".
- Article 6** Ask for a specific effort of the European governments and the E.U. to increase the effectiveness of forest management in protected areas, including the restoration of naturalness in core zones and the conservation of biodiversity in core and support zones.
- Article 7** Ask for a specific policy of the E.U. to help the Accession Candidates countries to protect their forest treasures, especially the last old-growth forests of the continent.
- Article 8** Ask the E.U. to facilitate the creation of new partnerships to provide long term funding for protected areas.

Scientists' call *for the protection of forests in Europe*

> Full text

Bearing in mind that Europe is currently holding ten percent of the world forests, mainly in boreal, temperate and mediterranean ecoregions.

Bearing in mind that this heritage is extraordinarily rich in biodiversity, and hosts several thousands of plant and animal species, a significant part of which are endemic to Europe.

Bearing in mind that European countries have dependent territories containing significant areas of tropical forests. Specifically the present situation of French Guyana tropical forest represents one of the very few remaining large blocks of pristine tropical forest in the Amazonian basin.

Acknowledging that these forests are both a considerable source of riches for European countries and gives to the European Union a strong responsibility for the sustainable management and preservation of biodiversity.

Acknowledging that most E.U. countries committed themselves at the international scale with:

- the forest declaration of the Convention on Biological Diversity adopted in Rio de Janeiro (1992), the assessment of which (Rio+10) had been given in Johannesburg in September 2002,
- the text of the four European ministerial Conferences for the protection of forests (Strasbourg, 1990, Helsinki, 1993, Lisbon, 1998),
- the conventions on climate change (Kyoto protocol, 1997),

which all acknowledged the forest ecosystems' role in the preservation of biodiversity and evolutionary processes, and the preservation of the planet's ecology.

Bearing in mind that European countries and the E.U. have a high responsibility within the priority ecoregions and hotspots for which they are key political actors, like the forests in the Mediterranean ecoregion sensu lato, the mixed forests of mountain ranges, the boreal old-growth forests, the alluvial forests along major rivers such as the Rhine, Danube and Loire, and the humid tropical forests of the Guyanas' plateau, etc.

Noting that in response to these challenges:

- the network of protected areas implemented throughout the years and strictly protected (Category I of the IUCN¹) is insufficient,
- the European network of well protected forests accounts for 6.3% of the forest area (categories I to IV of the IUCN²), but is extremely variable from one country to another (less than 2% in the West, up to 11% in Belarus),
- these protected forest areas (categories I to IV of the IUCN), together with the areas under protective management (grouped under the category V of the IUCN), are still in some countries subjected to an ordinary forest management (logging, road building, even-aged silviculture, etc.).

¹ Categories defined by the IUCN (International Union for the Conservation of Nature) – I=integral reserve; II=national park (core zone); IV=natural reserve; V= landscape park, conservation areas, Natura 2000 etc.

² Sources: United Nations Environment Programme, UNEP, World Conservation Monitoring Centre, WCMC, 2000.

Bearing in mind that the existing protected area network for the European forests:

- has many deficiencies in key ecoregions,
- does not let them totally express their naturalness, for instance the absence of strict reserves, and of (or the great pressure forced onto) some key elements of the ecosystems such as the large herbivores, carnivores and scavenging micro-organisms,
- is not enough to maintain viable populations in some countries of priority protected species at the European level (among them the brown bear, the three-toed woodpecker, the hermit beetle...).

Noting the current initiatives, which significantly contribute to improve the network within a Pan-European or international context, like for instance:

- the consultation for the development of the Natura 2000 network designed by Habitats and Birds directives and the progressive implementation of contractual documents for the management of the sites (protected area of category V of the IUCN in most of the countries),
- the progressive creation of strict small reserves (less than 10 km²) in the forests of western countries,
- the engagement of the government of some countries, like Greece, Poland, Latvia, for the increase of forest protection.

The signatory scientists:

Article 1 Mention the international scientific vision in favour of the sustainable management and the preservation of forest ecosystems.

The sustainable development in the forest field requires a balance between three linked elements:

- the sustainable management of rural areas and productive forests at a landscape level,
- the protection of high conservation value forests and the entire protection of forests with a high degree of conservation (biodiversity and naturalness hotspots) as well as the preservation of a functional relationship between the latter through ecological corridors with reinforced protection,
- the restoration of the degraded forest landscapes and ecosystems as well as the populations which are declining or already extinct.

In the E.U. landscapes, forests account for a major ecosystem which must be managed in a multi-functional, sustainable and validated way (through eco-certification).

As hotspots for biodiversity conservation, forest protected areas represent an absolute necessity. In the E.U., these hotspots only account for 6.3% of the continental forest area (categories I to IV of the IUCN), which remains scientifically insufficient especially considering the geographical variability (decrease of protection from the north-east to the south-west). Moreover, these protected forests are still often traditionally harvested for the production of wood, which sometimes goes against the objectives of the protected area.

A particular effort is highly needed for the strict preservation of old-growth forests (category I of the IUCN). Beyond the functional processes that lead to the expression and evolution of biodiversity, these forests offer many services, such as:

- a living laboratory for scientific research (appreciation of the species' place and role and of the meaning of biological diversity within the functional mechanisms of forest ecosystems). The old-growth forests, especially the larger ones from the East are scientifically the last window and source of knowledge on the functioning of the European forest landscapes without human influence,
- a reference for the constant improvement of forest techniques, which are used daily,
- at a larger scale, these forests represent a great educational and ethical value.

All international research works show that the implementation of a representative, viable and functional network of protected areas is no longer enough to maintain biodiversity in an evolutionary perspective, because of the continually changing human and climatic environments. To this aim, it is important to consider the connectivity between the protected areas through ecological corridors and to respect all forms of wildlife that are part of the natural trophic networks. It is particularly necessary to preserve the species of the highest trophic levels (large carnivores) and the species with a large vital domain (large herbivores and carnivores).

Article 2 Demand to reduce the threats on European forests' biodiversity, quality and naturalness and to develop efforts to restore past degradations.

Consisting notably:

- of the decreased pressure from logging, road building, fragmentation... on the last old-growth or ancient forest landscape, especially in the Eastern countries,
- of the decreased pressure from urbanisation and tourism, especially on the coastal Mediterranean forest ecosystems,
- of reducing the high number of forest species endangering extinction in Europe, especially hundreds of insect species,
- of decreasing the pressure on forest flora and fauna induced by the rapid global climate changes,
- of increasing the connectivity of the protected areas' network, which will allow forest biodiversity conservation in a long run.

Article 3 Ask for an increase, in the E.U., of the investment into scientific research concerning forest ecology, conservation of biodiversity and naturalness.

Due to the previous lack of investment, the scientific vision detailed in article 1 is still only partially available in many E.U. countries and ecosystems. Because of the absence of sufficient knowledge, the traditional forest management in many E.U. countries does not always act in conformity with the precaution principle.

Within the E.U. forest research, the fundamental and applied ecology as well as the sets of themes linked with the conservation of biodiversity are not developed enough compared to the needs that have been identified. The number of research jobs in these forest-related fields has to be significantly increased and better used at the E.U. scale.

The revaluation of the founding naturalist disciplines (plant and animal taxonomy, entomology, mycology) and ecology (ecosystem ecology, functional ecology) is a modern necessity that cannot be ignored if we are to develop better knowledge about forests.

The methodical and rigorous research about the forests which are not disturbed by human activities turned out to be of unparalleled value in terms of education and application for forest management. The research should be encouraged through for instance an E.U. research programme about the conservation of old-growth forests and naturalness. It should be articulated around long-term pilot research sites (connection with the international networks of sites Long Term Ecological Research – LTER), based on the emblematic sites of old-growth forests for the E.U., like the National Park of Bialowieza (Poland), the state reserves of Fontainebleau (France), the natural reserve of Les Nouragues (French Guyana), Oulanka NP (Finland), New-Forest (U.K.), Bavaria/Sumava National Parks (Germany and Czech Republic), etc.

Article 4 Ask for a specific policy to consolidate a network of well protected forests (categories I to IV for the IUCN) that is representative and functional in Europe.

Consisting notably:

- of simplifying the country-based definition of forest protection status in Europe (currently more than 90 different ones, which involve similar names but different realities), taking as a model the IUCN classification recognised world-wide,
- of identifying the criteria and indicators for a periodical assessment of the protection of forests at European level,
- of designing a project for the consolidation of the protected forests' network for IUCN categories I to IV, and prioritising the actions.

Article 5 Ask for a specific policy of European governments and the E.U. to strictly protect large old-growth forests, and through this create, conserve or restore several “Yellowstone’s for Europe’s children”.

Through:

- the constitution of a coherent sub-network of strict forest reserves (category I of the IUCN) or National Park core zones (category II), one of the weaknesses in many regions of Europe,
- the strict protection of a forest area larger than 200 km², area which guarantee the viability and integrity of biodiversity and the whole ecosystem and mitigate the risk of degradation of naturalness by tourism activities,
- especially for the more threatened/less protected ecosystems, such as alluvial forests and the Mediterranean forests, although in many cases the broad term “protection” will mean passive and/or active restoration of forest biodiversity and naturalness,
- the protection forever of a large part of tropical forest of French Guyana, in coherence with the recent and exemplary conservation actions launch by the neighbouring countries (especially Brazil).

Article 6 Ask for a specific effort of the European governments and the E.U. to increase the effectiveness of forest management in protected areas, including the restoration of naturalness in core zones and the conservation of biodiversity in core and support zones.

Through:

- the implementation by Governments of a nation-wide application of the World Commission on Protected Areas (WCPA) Framework for Assessing the Management of Protected Areas, to guide on a regular basis the development of effective management of protected area systems as well as individual protected areas,
- acknowledgement that Strict Reserves, National Park’s core zones and Nature Reserves (IUCN categories I a, b, II and IV) should exclude logging, hunting, and all activities disturbing the conservation of biodiversity and naturalness,
- acknowledgement that IUCN category V of protected areas should actively promote an improved and close-to-nature forest management, and forest species and habitats conservation,
- acknowledgement that Natura 2000 is the first European tool that orientates this improved management and thus should be promoted and properly set up by each government, as defined by the “Habitats” directive. European governments and the E.U. should evaluate its implementation on common criteria at national and European level,
- acknowledgement that other productive forests outside protected areas and all high value conservation forests identified must be managed in a sustainable way and eco-certified by an efficient system,

Article 7 Ask for a specific policy of the E.U. to help the Accession Candidates countries to protect their forest treasures, especially the last old-growth forests of the continent.

Through:

- the effective implementation of Natura 2000 in E.U. Accession Candidates countries,
- the promotion of biological richness, scientific interests and economic potential of old-growth forests, national parks and reserves within the development framework of rural areas of the E.U. Accession Candidates countries,
- the help of Poland to protect Bialowieza forest – the ecological reference for old-growth low-land forest in Europe for many scientists, foresters and nature specialists. The E.U. should help Poland, in order: 1) to implement the enlargement of the core zone of the National Park of Bialowieza, as accepted by Polish government in 1998; in first stage the Park should be enlarged to 20 000 ha – the minimum area required for ecological integrity; 2) to set up the sustainable forest management of the buffer zone; 3) to set up a sustainable development plan of nature-oriented tourism.

Article 8 Ask the E.U. to facilitate the creation of new partnerships to provide long term funding for protected areas.

Through:

- the creation of partnerships involving public, private and NGO resources,
- the creation of the political and financial conditions which are likely to improve the protection of forests in private forest estates,
- the creation of an European Protected Area Fund (to operate in a similar manner to the Global Environment Fund) funded by Government Aid Agencies,
- the recognition of the threats and opportunities posed by tourism and the role which can be played by the tourism industry.

Signatories of the Scientist's call for the protection of forests in Europe

The undersigned declare that they support the scientific grounds and demands of
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