

European forest strategy – The way forward

Forests and woods cover nearly half of the land surface of the EU. They play a vital role as they have the potential to mitigate the effects of climate change, provide many ecosystem services, contribute to the development of the circular bio-economy and provide employment for some 2.6 million people, in particular in rural areas. The European Parliament is expected to vote during its October I plenary session on an own-initiative report emphasising the need for an ambitious and strong EU forest strategy beyond 2020, aligned with the European Green Deal and the 2030 biodiversity strategy, and coordinated with the Farm to Fork strategy.

Background

There is no common EU policy for forests and the forestry sector, which fall within Member State competence. In the context of a complex and fragmented policy environment, the EU launched a new [EU forest strategy](#) in 2013 as a framework to ensure coherence of national and EU forest-related policies. Its guiding principles were sustainable management, the multifunctional role of forests, resource efficiency and global forest responsibility. Since 2013, the global policy environment has changed significantly, and the EU has committed to new ambitious climate, energy and environmental objectives, to which forests and the forestry sector can make a significant contribution. While forests are highly sensitive to climate change, they are also part of the solution as they absorb and stock carbon as biomass. They can mitigate the impact of extreme weather events by moderating temperatures, and decreasing wind speed and water run-off. They provide many ecosystem services, regulating the water cycle, sheltering biodiversity, and controlling erosion. By providing a renewable source of raw materials, they can play a major role in the circular bio-economy, while the forest-based sector is an important source of employment and diversification in the EU's rural areas.

European Commission

The 'new EU forest strategy', which the Commission is expected to publish in early 2021, is one of the many actions planned under the [European Green Deal](#). In the context of growing pressure on forest ecosystems as a result of climate change, the strategy will promote effective afforestation, forest preservation and restoration as ways to increase the potential of forests to absorb and store CO₂, improve their resilience, promote the circular bio-economy and protect biodiversity. The strategy will be coherent with the [2030 biodiversity strategy](#). It will cover the whole forest cycle and promote the numerous ecological and socio-economic services which forests provide.

European Parliament position

On 7 September 2020, Parliament's Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development (AGRI) adopted an [own-initiative report](#) on the 'European Forest Strategy – the way forward'. The report emphasises the crucial role of forests and forestry in achieving the goals of the European Green Deal. It calls for an ambitious and independent post-2020 EU forest strategy, building on a holistic approach of sustainable forest management and acting as a bridge between national forest policies and EU objectives relating to forests. It points out the crucial importance of the Common Agricultural Policy, which finances forestry measures. The report is expected to be debated during the October I plenary session.

Own-initiative report: [2019/2157\(INI\)](#); Committee responsible: AGRI; Rapporteur: Petri Sarvamaa (EPP, Finland).

