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TEXTS ADOPTED

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New EU forest strategy for 2030 – Sustainable Forest Management in Europe

European Parliament resolution of 13 September 2022 on a new EU Forest Strategy for 2030 – Sustainable Forest Management in Europe (2022/2016(INI))

The European Parliament,

– having regard to the Commission communication of 16 July 2021 entitled 'New EU Forest Strategy for 2030' (COM(2021)0572),

– having regard to its resolution of 8 October 2020 on the European Forest Strategy – The Way Forward[1],

– having regard to its resolution of 28 April 2015 on 'A new EU Forest Strategy: for forests and the forest-based sector'[2],

– having regard to the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU), in particular Article 4 thereof,

– having regard to the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals,

– having regard to the Agreement adopted at the 21st Conference of the Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP21) in Paris on 12 December 2015 (the Paris Agreement),

– having regard to the Commission communication of 11 December 2019 on the European Green Deal (COM(2019)0640), and the ensuing political guidelines from Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and the Commission,

– having regard to Regulation (EU) 2021/1119 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 30 June 2021 establishing the framework for achieving climate neutrality and amending Regulations (EC) No 401/2009 and (EU) 2018/1999 (European Climate Law)[3],

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1 OJ C 395, 29.9.2021, p. 37.
2 OJ C 346, 21.9.2016, p. 17.
3 OJ L 243, 9.7.2021, p. 1.

– having regard to Regulation (EU) 2018/841 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 30 May 2018 on the inclusion of greenhouse gas emissions and removals from land use, land use change and forestry in the 2030 climate and energy framework, and amending Regulation (EU) No 525/2013 and Decision No 529/2013/EU[1],

– having regard to Directive (EU) 2018/2001 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 December 2018 on the promotion of the use of energy from renewable sources[2] (Renewable Energy Directive),

– having regard to Council Directive 92/43/EEC of 21 May 1992 on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora (the Habitats Directive)[3],

– having regard to Commission Delegated Regulation (EU) 2021/268 of 28 October 2020 amending Annex IV to Regulation (EU) 2018/841 of the European Parliament and of the Council as regards the forest reference levels to be applied by the Member States for the period 2021-2025[4],

– having regard to the Commission communication of 20 May 2020 entitled 'EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 – Bringing nature back into our lives' (COM(2020)0380),

– having regard to the Commission communication of 10 March 2020 entitled 'A New Industrial Strategy for Europe' (COM(2020)0102),

– having regard to the Commission communication of 30 June 2021 entitled 'A long-term Vision for the EU's Rural Areas – Towards stronger, connected, resilient and prosperous rural areas by 2040' (COM(2021)0345),

– having regard to the Commission communication of 14 October 2020 entitled 'A Renovation Wave for Europe – greening our buildings, creating jobs, improving lives' (COM(2020)0662),

– having regard to the Commission communication of 11 October 2018 entitled 'A sustainable Bioeconomy for Europe: Strengthening the connection between economy, society and the environment' (COM(2018)0673),

– having regard to the Commission Communication of 23 March 2022 on safeguarding food security and reinforcing the resilience of food systems (COM(2022)0133),

– having regard to the New European Bauhaus Initiative,

– having regard to the draft Commission regulation declaring certain categories of aid in the agricultural and forestry sectors and in rural areas compatible with the internal market in application of Articles 107 and 108 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union and repealing Commission Regulation (EU) No 702/2014[5],

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1 OJ L 156, 19.6.2018, p. 1.
2 OJ L 328, 21.12.2018, p. 82.
3 OJ L 206, 22.7.1992, p. 7.
4 OJ L 60, 22.2.2021, p. 21.
5 OJ L 189, 10.5.2022, p. 1.

– having regard to the Council conclusions of 5 November 2021 on the new EU Forest Strategy for 2030,

– having regard to the opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee of 8 December 2021 on the Commission communication entitled 'New EU Forest Strategy for 2030'[1],

– having regard to the opinion of the European Committee of the Regions of 28 April 2022 on the Commission communication entitled 'New EU Forest Strategy for 2030',

– having regard to the responsibilities of the Member States under the UN Convention to Combat Desertification,

– having regard to the European Court of Auditors report of 2021 entitled 'Special Report 21/2021 – EU funding for biodiversity and climate change in EU forests: positive but limited results',

– having regard to the Commission publication of 2018 entitled 'Guidance on cascading use of biomass with selected good practice examples on woody biomass',

– having regard to the 2020 report of the Commission's Joint Research Centre entitled 'Mapping and Assessment of Ecosystems and their Services: An EU ecosystem assessment',

– having regard to the European Environmental Agency report of 2020 entitled 'State of nature in the EU – Results from reporting under the nature directives 2013-2018',

– having regard to the Forest Europe report of 2020 entitled 'State of Europe's Forests 2020',

– having regard to the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) global assessment report on biodiversity and ecosystem services,

– having regard to the Kunming Declaration –'Ecological Civilization: Building a Shared Future for All Life on Earth',

– having regard to the report of Working Group II of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) entitled 'Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability',

– having regard to the IPCC special report on climate change, desertification, land degradation, sustainable land management, food security, and greenhouse gas fluxes in terrestrial ecosystems,

– having regard to the judgment of the Court of Justice of the European Union of 17 April 2018 in Case C-441/17 *European Commission* v *Republic of Poland*[2],

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1 OJ C 152, 6.4.2022, p. 169.

2 Judgment of the Court of Justice of 17 April 2018, *European Commission v Republic of Poland,* C-441/17, ECLI:EU:C:2018:255 (Failure of a Member State to fulfil

– having regard to the projects and practices for coordinating forest information in Europe (the European National Forest Inventory Network (ENFIN), the FutMon project, the Diabolo project, the European Atlas of Forest Tree Species, and the Mapping and Assessment of Ecosystems and their Services (MAES) programme),

– having regard to the IPBES-IPCC co-sponsored workshop report on biodiversity and climate change of 10 June 2021,

– having regard to Rule 54 of its Rules of Procedure,

– having regard to the opinions of the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety and the Committee on Development,

– having regard to the report of the Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development (A9-0225/2022),

A. whereas the EU has set the binding targets of reducing greenhouse gas emissions by at least 55 % by 2030 and of reaching climate neutrality by 2050[1] at the latest; whereas the EU is committed to the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including SDG 15 which is to protect, restore and promote the sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss, and to the Paris Agreement and the pledges made at the 2021 UN Climate Change Conference (COP26); whereas forests and forest-based industries and services, as well as owners and workers, will play a major and irreplaceable role in achieving the SDGs and the Paris Agreement targets, while forest ecosystems and their carbon pools are essential for climate mitigation and adaptation, since they absorb and store around 10 % of Europe's greenhouse gas emissions[2] and are major hosts of biodiversity;

B. whereas Article 4 TFEU provides for shared competences and responsibility with regard to forests, particularly within the framework of EU environmental policy, while making no reference to a common EU forest policy and thus maintaining forest policy as a Member State competence; whereas due to the high diversity of the EU's forests with regard to biogeography, structure, size, biodiversity, ownership patterns and existing policies, where environmental, climate and other relevant policies touch upon forests, it is necessary to duly apply the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality in the development and implementation of the new EU Forest Strategy (the strategy) and relevant EU legislation; whereas details related to forest management need to be

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obligations – Environment – Directive 92/43/EEC – Conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora – Article 6(1) and (3) – Article 12(1) – Directive2009/147/EC – Conservation of wild birds – Articles 4 and 5 – 'Puszcza Białowieska' Natura 2000 site – Amendment of the forest management plan – Increase in the volume of harvestable timber – Plan or project not directly necessary to the management of the site that is likely to have a significant effect on it – Appropriate assessment of the implications for the site – Adverse effect on the integrity of the site – Actual implementation of the conservation measures – Effects on the breeding sites and resting places of the protected species).

1 Regulation (EU) 2021/1119 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 30 June 2021 establishing the framework for achieving climate neutrality.

2 European Environment Agency Report No 5/2016 entitled 'European forest ecosystems – State and trends'.

adjusted at national and regional level, taking a bottom-up approach; whereas further EU-level coordination is necessary to better achieve the objectives of the European Green Deal and to be able to calculate potential emission reductions and forest use limits more precisely in view of the important role of forests in achieving European climate objectives;

C. whereas the principle of the European Green Deal as a cross-cutting approach to tackle the climate and environmental challenges, ensuring that nature and biodiversity can be appropriately protected, in a way that creates sustainable growth and jobs in a resource-efficient, carbon-neutral and fully circular and competitive economy within planetary boundaries, should guide the implementation of the strategy in managing trade-offs, creating synergies and finding the right balance between the multiple functions of forests, including the socioeconomic, environmental and climate functions; whereas an 'ecosystem' is a physical environment made up of living and non-living components that interact with one another; whereas from these interactions, ecosystems create a flow of benefits to people and the economy called 'ecosystem services'; whereas climate change and the loss of biodiversity and the associated ecosystem services pose a systemic threat to society; whereas forests provide a wide array of ecosystem services, such as the provision of wood, non-wood products and food, carbon sequestration, shelter for biodiversity, clean air and water, benefits for the local climate, and protection against natural hazards such as avalanches, flooding, drought and rockfall, as well as providing recreational, cultural and historic value; whereas the aim of sustainable forest management is to ensure the balanced provision of the various ecosystem services and to support climate change adaptation and mitigation efforts;

D. whereas wood-based products contribute to climate change mitigation by storing carbon and substituting products with a large carbon footprint, including building- and packaging materials, textiles, chemicals and fuels; whereas wood-based products are renewable and to a large extent recyclable, and as such have huge potential to support a circular bioeconomy; whereas this makes the forestry sector and the forest-based industries key actors in a green economy;

E. whereas as part of the 'Fit for 55' package and the target of aligning climate policy with the Paris Agreement, the Renewable Energy Directive and the Regulation on the Inclusion of Greenhouse Gas Emissions from Land Use, Land Use Change and Forestry[1] are under revision; whereas the Commission has proposed a regulation on deforestation-free products; whereas in the light of the European concept of multifunctional forests, these initiatives must be coherent with the high-level political targets of the Green Deal, the Bioeconomy Action Plan, the Circular Economy Strategy, the Forest Strategy, the Biodiversity Strategy and the Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas;

F. whereas forest ownership across Europe is diverse in terms of size and ownership structure, leading to a great diversity of management models; whereas about 60 % of the

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[1] Regulation (EU) 2018/841 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 30 May 2018 on the inclusion of greenhouse gas emissions and removals from land use, land use change and forestry in the 2030 climate and energy framework (OJ L 156, 19.6.2018, p. 1).

EU's forests are owned by 16 million private forest owners[1], of whom a significant share are small-holders[2], while approximately 40 % of the EU's forests are under different forms of public ownership; whereas a small number of forest owners own a significant share of the total forest area, some of whom own the main EU wood processing plants; whereas involving, supporting and encouraging, before resorting to penalising, these owners through a comprehensive policy and legislative framework that provides legal certainty, and that is based on recognition of their property rights, their experience as managers, the importance of the revenue generated through forest management and specific challenges, will be key to achieving the strategy's targets, including the provision of climate and other ecosystem services; whereas it is important, in this regard, to ensure that this framework is clear and transparent and to avoid an excessive administrative burden on all actors;

G. whereas the EU is home to approximately 5 % of the world's total forest area, with forests accounting for 43 % of the EU's land area, a slightly higher proportion than the area of land used for agriculture, and containing 80 % of its terrestrial biodiversity[3]; whereas, according to the European Environment Agency report entitled 'The European environment – state and outlook 2020: knowledge for transition to a sustainable Europe'[4], Europe has experienced a massive decline in biodiversity; whereas almost 23 % of European forests are to be found in Natura 2000 sites, with the share in some Member States exceeding 50 %; whereas almost half the natural habitats in Natura 2000 areas are forests;

H. whereas the most recent data gathered under Article 17 of the Habitats Directive indicates that the habitat parameter condition shows that only 49 % of forest habitats are in good condition[5], while the status of 29,6 % of habitats is unknown and 21,1 % are in poor condition and need to be improved; whereas focusing solely on aggregated data might be insufficient to identify and address key information on the most urgent issues and it is therefore necessary to consult more specific indicators on trends in condition and pressures and to ensure that missing data is available in the future; whereas these indicators do not support an overall negative assessment of the state of the EU's forests,

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1 Commission communication of 16 July 2021 on the new EU Forest Strategy for 2030 (COM(2021)0572).

2 In Europe as a whole, the majority of private holdings are 10 ha or less – Forest Europe, *State of Europe's Forests 2020*, 2020; in Germany, 50 % of privately owned forest holdings are smaller than 20 ha, https://www.bmel.de/SharedDocs/Downloads/DE/Broschueren/bundeswaldinventur3.pdf;jsessionid=972A5297B9463D98948E787D1AA78F19.live921?__blob=publicationFile&v=3; in France, about two thirds of private owners have less than 1 ha, https://franceboisforet.fr/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Brochure_chiffresClesForetPrivee_2021_PageApage_BD.pdf; in Finland, about 45 % of owners have less than 10 ha, https://www.luke.fi/en/statistics/ownership-of-forest-land; in Latvia, 50 % of owners have less than 5 ha, https://www.zm.gov.lv/public/ck/files/MAF_parskats_Silava_privat_meza_apsaimn_monitorings.pdf

3 Science for Environment Policy, *European Forests for biodiversity, climate change mitigation and adaptation*, Future Brief 25, Science Communication Unit, UWE Bristol, 2021, https://ec.europa.eu/environment/integration/research/newsalert/

4 European Environment Agency, *The European environment — state and outlook 2020: knowledge for transition to a sustainable Europe*, 11 May 2020, p. 83, https://www.eea.europa.eu/soer-2020/

5 Commission communication of 16 July 2021 on the new EU Forest Strategy for 2030 (COM(2021)0572).

but show both positive and negative trends[1] that require nuanced case-by-case responses; whereas forests are increasingly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, in particular the increasing prevalence of forest fires; whereas quantifying the effects of such disturbances on forests' resilience and productivity on a large scale is still a major challenge;

I. whereas a greater understanding of potential climate-driven natural disturbances of European forests should further support guidance on forest management and inform adaptation policies aimed at addressing these vulnerabilities;

J. whereas the collection and maintenance of transparent and reliable high-quality data, the exchange of knowledge and best practices, and adequately funded and well-coordinated research are of central importance in meeting the challenges and yielding opportunities and in delivering on the multiple functions of forests, including the various benefits provided by the products of forest-based industries, in an increasingly complex environment; whereas the data on forests available at EU level is incomplete and of varying quality, which hampers EU and Member State coordination of forest management and conservation; whereas, in particular, there is a need for better monitoring of forest ecosystem status, as well as of the impacts of forestry measures on biodiversity and the climate;

K. whereas at international level, the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) is the main forum for the development of internationally agreed definitions in the field of forests and forestry; whereas the FAO collects and provides data on forests and forestry; whereas the Commission and the Member States contribute to the work of the FAO;

L. whereas the provision of the various forest ecosystem services through the forestry sector and forest-based industries is an important pillar of income and employment, particularly in rural areas, but also in urban areas through the downstream use of such services; whereas the implementation of the strategy should pay due attention to the development of income and employment, but also to the attractiveness of employment in the sector through quality jobs, social protection, health and safety standards, the continuous development of skills partnerships involving stakeholders, and adequate training opportunities for managers and workers; whereas employment in European forestry dropped by a third between 2000 and 2015 – primarily owing to increased mechanisation in the wood and paper industry[2]; whereas the improved design of forestry machinery can add to worker protection and reduce the impact on soil and water; whereas logging and the wood industry are among the most dangerous industrial sectors and have high levels of accidents at work, occupational disease and early retirement;

M. whereas the area and biomass volume of European forests are increasing[3], in contrast to the worrying trends of deforestation globally; whereas the EU can play an important

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1 Joint Research Centre, *Mapping and Assessment of Ecosystems and their Services: An EU ecosystem assessment*, 2020; for trends in condition, see also Forest Europe, *State of Europe's Forests 2020*, 2020.

2 Forest Europe report of 2020 entitled 'State of Europe's Forests 2020'.

3 Joint Research Centre, *Mapping and Assessment of Ecosystems and their Services: An EU ecosystem assessment*, 2020; for trends in condition, see also Forest Europe, *State of Europe's Forests 2020*, 2020.

role in addressing global deforestation, which is underlined by the Commission's proposal for a regulation for deforestation-free products; whereas beyond regulating imports, a European Forest Strategy that showcases best practices for economically viable sustainable forest management could contribute to improving forest management globally;

N. whereas global voluntary certification schemes for sustainable forest management are currently in place; whereas certification schemes are an essential tool to meet EU Timber Regulation[1] requirements for due diligence[2];

O. whereas the process of sustainable forest management in Europe should ensure that the right balance is achieved between the three pillars of sustainability – namely environmental protection, social development and economic development;

P. whereas criteria and indicators to define sustainable forest management commonly used in the EU are based on pan-European cooperation within the Forest Europe process of which all Member States and the Commission are signatories; whereas as part of its ongoing work programme, Forest Europe has initiated a reassessment of the definition of sustainable forest management; whereas Forest Europe collects and provides information on the status of and trends in forests and forestry on the basis of the criteria for sustainable forest management; whereas there is a need to ensure that indicators and thresholds are evidence based and to work in close cooperation with the Member States in this respect; whereas new transparent indicators and thresholds could improve the sustainability of the sector, given its importance in terms of environmental, economic and social values; whereas the sustainable forest management framework will have to be clearly defined, in particular as regards the criteria, indicators and thresholds relating to ecosystem health, biodiversity and climate change, if it is to become a more detailed and useful screening tool for determining and comparing different management approaches, their impact and the overall status and conservation of European forests; whereas sustainable forest management should go hand in hand with promoting the multifunctional role of forests so as to ensure that it is completely in tune with the diversity of forests and the specific characteristics of each region;

Q. whereas agroforestry, defined as land use systems in which trees are grown in combination with agriculture on the same land unit, is a suite of land management systems which can boost overall productivity, generate more biomass, maintain and restore soils, combat desertification and provide a number of valuable ecosystem services; whereas there are two main types of agroforestry in the EU: silvo-pastoral agroforestry (animals grazing or animal fodder produced under trees) and silvo-arable agroforestry (crops grown under trees, with row spacing allowing for tractor traffic); whereas the majority of existing agroforestry systems in the EU are silvo-pastoral

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1 Regulation (EU) No 995/2010 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 October 2010 laying down the obligations of operators who place timber and timber products on the market (OJ L 295, 12.11.2010, p. 23).

2 European Commission, Directorate-General for Environment, *Study on certification and verification schemes in the forest sector and for wood-based products*, Publications Office of the European Union, 2021, https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/afa5e0df-fb19-11eb-b520-01aa75ed71a1/language-en

systems and scaling up agroforestry can bring multiple benefits in the light of environmental pressures;

R. whereas the EU's Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 aims to 'define, map, monitor and strictly protect all the EU's remaining primary and old-growth forests'; whereas protecting forests, including all remaining EU primary and old-growth forests, is crucial for preserving biodiversity and mitigating climate change; whereas according to a 2021 Joint Research Centre report[1], only 4,9 million hectares of Europe's primary and ancient forests remain, representing only 3 % of the Union's total forest area and 1,2 % of the its land mass; whereas primary and old-growth forests play a key role in biodiversity conservation; whereas they are often highly biodiverse compared with other forests in the same ecological region, are species-rich and host specialised flora and fauna; whereas primary and old-growth forests also provide a wide array of other critical ecosystem services; whereas an operational definition of primary and old-growth forests is necessary for proper policy design, implementation and monitoring;

S. whereas the Integrate Network is a platform of representatives of different European countries, initiated by several Member State governments and supported by the Commission's Standing Forestry Committee, which provides scientific advice and has served to date as an important driver of identifying means to integrate nature conservation into sustainable forest management; whereas the platform's work has played an important role in the exchange of experiences and best practices;

T. whereas the Horizon 2020-funded Alterfor project considered the potential to optimise forest management methods currently in use and presented alternative forest management models, with opportunities and challenges listed for each alternative;

U. whereas the Horizon 2020-funded SINCERE project developed novel policies and new business models by connecting knowledge and expertise from practice, science and policy, across Europe and beyond, aiming to explore new means to enhance forest ecosystem services in ways that benefit forest owners, as well as serving broad societal needs;

V. whereas the war in Ukraine will have a major impact on imports of timber, particularly birchwood, of which Russia accounts for 80 % of global production, and on Europe's wood-processing industry and exports of processed products; whereas the legitimate sanctions imposed on Russia raise the question of the EU's dependency on timber imports from Russia; whereas the EU sources about 80 % of its demand for timber domestically, and imports from Russia only account for about 2 % of total consumption; whereas Finland and Sweden are the EU's major importers of unprocessed roundwood from Russia and will be affected by trade bans[2];

W. whereas illegal logging, including logging in protected areas such as Natura 2000 areas, is an ongoing and unresolved problem in a number of Member States;

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1 Joint Research Centre, *Mapping and assessment of primary and old-growth forests in Europe*, 2021.

2 https://www.wur.nl/en/research-results/research-institutes/environmental-research/show-wenr/does-the-eu-depend-on-russia-for-its-wood.htm

X. whereas forests are essential for people's physical and mental health and wellbeing, drive the transition towards a fossil-free economy and play an important role in the lives of local communities, especially in rural areas where they contribute in an important way to local livelihoods;

1. Welcomes the new EU Forest Strategy and its ambition to increase the balanced contribution of multifunctional forests to the targets of the Green Deal and its EU 2030 Biodiversity Strategy, particularly the goals of creating sustainable green growth and green jobs, and of achieving a carbon-neutral, environmentally sustainable and fully circular economy within planetary boundaries and climate neutrality by 2050 at the latest; highlights the importance of a solid science-based strategy, considering the environmental, social and economic dimensions of sustainability in an integrated and balanced way, given that, in addition to contributing to climate and biodiversity goals, including through the protection of soils and water, forests provide economic and social benefits and a wide range of services, from a means of livelihood to recreation;

2. Regrets that the new EU Forest Strategy was not properly developed together with the European Parliament, Member States and stakeholders and that the positions of the co-legislators were not adequately taken into account; stresses the importance of strengthening cooperation as regards implementing the new EU Forest Strategy for 2030;

3. Recognises that, in line with sustainable forest management and to increase the quality and diversity of forest ecosystems, the maintenance, protection, strengthening, restoration and sustainable use of healthy and resilient forests are fundamental goals of the EU Forest Strategy and of all actors in forestry and the forest-based value chain, using timber as a versatile, renewable raw material to maximise self-sufficiency in the EU; notes, moreover, that these goals are in line with societal expectations and demands and with the key priorities of people in the EU; highlights that close-to-nature forestry and sustainable forest management have the potential to bring similar or better economic benefits, while preserving and promoting the integrity and resilience of ecosystems, and increasing forests' potential as carbon sinks and biodiversity refuges and for biodiversity recovery;

4. Recognises the vital role played by forests, their biodiversity and their unique ecosystems in contributing to the health of the environment, climate mitigation measures, the provision of clean air, water and soil stability, and fertility, while providing diverse habitats and micro-habitats to many species, thereby supporting rich biodiversity; highlights the essential role of forests in human health and wellbeing, including urban and peri-urban woodlands which are accessible to those most lacking contact with nature, as well as in providing educational and tourist services; emphasises the need to promote the 'One Health' approach, which recognises the intrinsic connection between human health, animal health and healthy nature; stresses that the sound management of Natura 2000 sites is essential for maintaining and enhancing European biodiversity and ecosystems and the services they provide;

5. Stresses the essential role of forest ecosystems in mitigating and adapting to climate change and contributing to the EU objective of achieving climate neutrality by 2050 at the latest; recognises that climate change is altering the growth capacity of forests in some areas, increasing the frequency and seriousness of drought, floods and fires, and fostering the spread of new pests and diseases which affect forests; notes that intact

ecosystems have a greater capacity to overcome environmental stressors, including changes to the climate, than degraded ones as they have inherent properties that enable them to maximise their adaptive capacities; stresses that climate change will have an even greater negative impact on European forests in the coming years, and that this will particularly affect areas with monospecific and contemporaneous forest stands; underlines, in this context, the need to strengthen the resilience of European forests, notably by increasing their structural, functional and compositional diversity; insists that structurally rich, mixed forests displaying a broad ecological amplitude have a higher resilience and increased capacity to adapt in this context; points out that in certain conditions stable mixed forest may naturally contain a limited number of species; underlines that forestland, with its respective carbon pools of living trees and dead wood, is a crucial factor in limiting global warming, contributing to the EU's climate neutrality targets and enhancing biodiversity; considers that the promotion of biologically diverse forests is the most effective insurance against climate change and biodiversity loss;

6. Highlights the continuously growing cover and volume[1] of forests in the EU, despite a slowdown in recent years, which is in contrast to the global deforestation trend[2]; acknowledges the efforts of all the actors across the forest-based value chain who have contributed to this development; is concerned by the increasing pressure on the EU's forests and their habitats, which has been exacerbated by the impact of climate change, and stresses the urgent need to protect and increase forest and ecosystem resilience, including through measures to increase the capacity to adapt to climate change, and to reduce pressures where feasible, while taking into account the characteristics of the forest; notes with concern that the vulnerability of forests in the EU to invasive pests and pathogens seems to have increased and that outbreaks are a threat to sequestered carbon[3], biodiversity and wood quality;

7. Calls on the Member States to ensure that their legislation provides forests with the best possible protection against pollution and damage; points, in particular, to protection against contamination, such as by lead munitions or pesticides, extreme soil compression due to inappropriate use of machinery, and protection against damaging browsing by game or damage caused by too large a cloven-hoofed game population;

8. Highlights the specific and diverse characteristics of forestry sectors in the Member States and emphasises that the EU's forests are characterised by diverse natural conditions, such as biogeography, size, structure and biodiversity, as well as ownership patterns, forms of governance, challenges and opportunities, and that most of them have been shaped by centuries of human interaction, intervention and management and are thus a form of cultural heritage; recalls also that primary and old-growth forests are areas that have developed with little to no human intervention and management; stresses that in order to ensure that the strategy can be implemented in all types of forests and situations, adapted approaches in terms of forest management and the delivery of ecosystem services are needed in some cases;

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1 https://www.eca.europa.eu/Lists/ECADocuments/SR21_21/SR_Forestry_EN.pdf

2 Forest Europe, *State of Europe's Forests 2020*, 2020.

3 Science for Environment Policy, European Forests for biodiversity, climate change mitigation and adaptation, Future Brief 25, Science Communication Unit, UWE Bristol, 2021, https://ec.europa.eu/environment/integration/research/newsalert/

9. Acknowledges that forest management is site-specific and that varying forest conditions and forest types may require different management approaches based on different ecological needs and forestland characteristics and take into account the rights and interests of forest sector workers, owners and other concerned actors;

10. Highlights the contribution to date of forest owners and actors across the forest-based value chain to the efforts to achieve a sustainable and climate neutral economy by 2050 and to the value of generational and historical knowledge and expertise in forestry and sustainable forest management;

11. Recognises the complexity of assessing the state of forests, as well as the uneven availability, diversity and quality of data, and therefore stresses the need for continuous policy and scientific dialogue and increased financing at all levels, starting from consultations with Member States, and in particular with forest managers and owners, to improve data collection on the state of forests and, where appropriate, data harmonisation; stresses the need to also take into account financial means and human resources, in particular to be able to identify resource-efficient forest uses and forest usage limits at an early stage;

12. Underlines that, although focusing on forests in the EU, the strategy and its implementation must be coherent with the work undertaken at pan-European level by Forest Europe and international organisations such as the FAO, and must take into account the views of expert groups and the work undertaken at Member State level; stresses that the strategy and its implementation should avoid duplicating work and increasing the administrative burden; further believes that, given the EU's strong commitment to protecting biodiversity and carbon sinks, and promoting the sustainable sourcing, production and use of resources globally, as underlined by the Commission's proposal for a regulation on deforestation-free products, the strategy should be implemented in such a way as to serve as a model of best practices, recognising the variety of starting situations, while serving to encourage similar approaches in other regions;

13. Stresses that to deliver on its various objectives, the implementation of the strategy must be fit-for-purpose at the regional and local levels, with consideration for the socioeconomic impact it can generate, including by adapting the implementation to local conditions and experiences and traditional knowledge and uses, taking into account current scientific understanding, and by providing stakeholders with the necessary skills; notes that it must be based on the full recognition of property rights, an economically, environmentally and socially viable forestry sector, and the polluter pays principle, as key elements in the provision of the various forest services and in improving resilience;

14. Calls on the Commission to provide a comprehensive impact assessment of the strategy to identify the implications for market conditions, rural areas and the various funding needs, including for research and innovation, skills development, infrastructure, climate change mitigation and adaptation, and biodiversity enhancement;

Fostering a balanced multifunctionality

15. Recognises the key role of forests and the entire forest-based value chain in protecting the climate and biodiversity, and in mitigating climate change to contribute to the

achievement, by 2050 at the latest, of a sustainable and climate-neutral economy; underlines that the multifunctional role of forests comprises multiple ecosystem services and socioeconomic functions, such as the conservation and enhancement of biodiversity and soils, climate change mitigation, the sequestration and storage of carbon from the atmosphere, the prevention of land degradation, the provision of renewable and nature based raw materials and medical, edible and culinary products, and non-extractive economic activities, including sustainable eco-tourism, all of which lead to jobs and economic growth in rural and urban areas, counteract rural depopulation, contribute to the provision of clean water and air, protection against natural hazards, and offer recreational, health, aesthetic and cultural benefits; stresses that the implementation of the strategy must ensure the balanced provision of all services and maintain and enhance competitiveness and innovation; underlines that the successful provision of services requires sustainable active management;

16. Believes that the key principle of balancing multiple forest functions and of defining goals and measures towards the provision of all ecosystem services should be to seek to maximise synergies and minimise trade-offs on the basis of evidence-based information;

17. Stresses that forests contribute to climate change mitigation via carbon sequestration, carbon storage and the sustainable substitution of wood and wood products for fossil fuels, fossil-based products, materials, energy sources and other products with high environmental and carbon footprints; emphasises that wood is the only significant natural renewable resource that has the potential to replace some very energy-intensive materials, such as cement and plastics, and will be in greater demand in the future; notes that the strategy has a particular focus on storage in the construction sector and believes that its implementation should clearly support a broader use of different options for wood-based substitutes and be based on science-based and robust life-cycle assessments, in line with EU environmental objectives and the goals of the bioeconomy and the industrial strategy, in order to unlock the full potential of forest-based products to strengthen the circular economy and in the fight against climate change and to achieve a post-fossil fuel economy; emphasises the role of research on the substitution of fossil-based materials and fossil fuels; stresses the need to reduce the EU's consumption in general and welcomes the establishment of a methodology to quantify the climate benefits of wood construction;

18. Emphasises that the considerable importance of healthy and fertile forest soil should not be overlooked, as it is mandatory for sustaining life, increasing forest productivity[1], storing carbon and protecting the vital underground fungal network that enables trees to share resources, such as nutrients and water, and defence signals, granting increased

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1 Commission communication of 17 November 2021 entitled 'EU Soil Strategy for 2030 – Reaping the benefits of healthy soils for people, food, nature and climate' (COM(2021)0699).

resistance to pests, diseases, and even drought and extreme weather events[1, 2, 3], which are likely to increase in intensity and frequency as a result of climate change;

19. Highlights that for wood-based products to contribute optimally to climate change mitigation and a circular economy requires that they are used in the most efficient and sustainable way; believes that timber removals must be restricted by sustainability limits and that the principles in the cascading guidance[4] are a good standard for efficient use, but only if not used as a static approach, and must therefore be adjusted regularly to reflect innovative uses such as in construction, textiles, biochemicals, medical applications and battery materials; stresses that wood-based resources must be used as efficiently as possible, with economic and operational decisions taking into account national specificities, and stresses that a well-functioning, undistorted market can incentivise the efficient and sustainable use of wood-based resources in conjunction with adequate measures to ensure the protection of the environment;

20. Underlines the importance of a reliable and sustainable supply of wood, wood-based products and forest-based biomass in achieving the EU's sustainability goals, including the 2050 carbon neutrality objective and the green growth and jobs goal of the Green Deal; notes that demand is expected to continue to grow[5] and that the use of locally and sustainably produced wood should be encouraged in order to meet this demand; believes that a large part of the EU's forestry sector provides highly sustainably sourced raw materials; calls on the Commission to consider the leakage effects and substitution effects of fossil fuels and non-renewable materials, as well as the effects on the competitiveness of the forestry sector and forest-based industries, and to monitor any effects on the availability of wood following the implementation of measures under the strategy;

21. Points out that the increasing demand for wood as a raw material, especially wood for use as an energy source, poses major challenges in the context of political crises, such as the war in Ukraine, and requires continuous monitoring of domestic forest resources to assess potential shortages; calls on the Commission and the Member States to assess dependencies on imports of timber from Russia in the light of the legitimate sanctions following the Russian invasion of Ukraine and to develop sustainable strategies to mitigate disruptions where necessary, while avoiding at EU level the conversion of agricultural land suitable for food production; highlights the crucial importance of the EU's security of supply and own raw material production, in the broader context of the

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1 Pickles, B. J. and Simard, S. W., 'Mycorrhizal Networks and Forest Resilience to Drought', *Mycorrhizal Mediation of Soil – Fertility, Structure, and Carbon Storage*, Elsevier, Amsterdam, 2017, pp. 319-339.

2 Gorzelak, M. A. et al., 'Inter-plant communication through mycorrhizal networks mediates complex adaptive behaviour in plant communities', *AoB Plants*, 2015.

3 Usman, M. et al., 'Mycorrhizal Symbiosis for Better Adaptation of Trees to Abiotic Stress Caused by Climate Change in Temperate and Boreal Forests', *Frontiers in Forests and Global Change*, 2021.

4 European Commission, Directorate-General for Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs, *Guidance on cascading use of biomass with selected good practice examples on woody biomass*, Publications Office, 2019.

5 Hetemäki, L., Palahí, M. and Nasi, R., *Seeing the wood in the forests. Knowledge to Action 1*, European Forest Institute, 2020; see also WWF Living Forests Report, Chapter 5, https://wwf.panda.org/discover/our_focus/forests_practice/forest_publications_news_and_reports/living_forests_report/

Green Deal objectives; stresses that, in certain circumstances, neglecting forests may lead to the loss of employment in rural areas and increased dependency on imports of forest-based products from parts of the world where forest management is less sustainable;

22. Recalls that 2,1 million people work in the forest-based sector, while the extended forest-based value chain supports 4 million jobs in the green economy, not accounting for retail activities and non-wood activities such as forest-related leisure activities and scientific work on forests; notes that employment in the forestry sector declined by 33 % between 2000 and 2015, mainly owing to increasing mechanisation at a time when wood extraction was also increasing; highlights the important role that forests play in the creation of green jobs in rural and mountainous areas; notes that non-wood forest products, such as various nature-based foods, medicines and solutions for basic materials, play an important role as a source of income, with an estimated value of around EUR 4 billion in 2015[1], and are deeply rooted in regional traditions; calls on the Commission and the Member States to assess the economic impacts of a closer-to-nature approach, including on direct and indirect employment;

23. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to monitor and assess the effects of a shift in the balance of forest functions on the overall employment situation and profitability of the local timber sector, especially in rural and mountainous areas, as well as in downstream parts of the wood-processing industries, and highlights the need to maintain or improve the attractiveness of employment in the sector, as well as workplace safety, when considering changes in management practices;

24. Recognises that there are several co-benefits associated with reforestation and afforestation, such as water filtration, increased water availability, drought mitigation, flood control, avoided sedimentation, the creation of wildlife habitats, an increase in soil fauna, enhanced soil fertility and air filtration; welcomes the reforestation and afforestation roadmap for planting at least 3 billion additional trees in the EU by 2030; emphasises that such initiatives should be carried out in compliance with clear ecological principles and be fully compatible with the biodiversity objective, prioritising the restoration of forest ecosystems; recalls that planting trees is dependent on support from local stakeholders and regional planning; calls on the Commission and the Member States to pay special attention to planting suitable trees in areas with degraded land and those affected by desertification, and reiterates the importance of protecting primary and old-growth forests; points out that increasing the area of afforested land can make an effective contribution to combating climate change and to the natural regeneration of degraded forest systems, with the medium- and long-term effect of economic and social development and the creation of new jobs; calls on the Commission to include in its additionality principles the trees planted under the new common agricultural policy (CAP) eco-schemes and the environmental, climate-related and other management commitments, as well as those under the National Recovery and Resilience Plans, since both the new CAP and the Recovery and Resilience Facility will have been implemented after the adoption of the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030; stresses that since land is a finite resource, planting trees in existing forests, on marginal land and in urban areas should be prioritised over converting productive agricultural land, especially in the new geopolitical circumstances, as well as over the conversion of pastures and natural grasslands, since it does not lead to significant changes in soil

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1 In the Forest Europe area; see Forest Europe, *State of Europe's Forests 2020*, 2020.

organic carbon[1]; notes the opportunity for urban forest development in this area; recalls, however, that reforestation and afforestation may also involve trade-offs for biodiversity, e.g. on biodiverse grasslands;

Protection, restoration, reforestation and afforestation, and sustainable management

25. Underlines the multifaceted role of forests and the importance of healthy, ecologically resilient forest ecosystems that provide a multitude of services to society, such as the conservation of biodiversity and the provision of renewable raw materials, helping to create jobs and boost economic growth in rural areas; stresses that policies that enhance the protection and restoration of biodiversity will help tackle climate change; calls for sustainable forest management in the implementation of climate goals, as it is key to reducing deforestation and forest degradation, and insists that biodiversity preservation and habitat protection and conservation should be encompassed within sustainable forest management;

26. Emphasises the importance of the EU promoting preservation, conservation and restoration of forest ecosystems, taking into account the upcoming EU Nature Restoration Law and improving their resilience, while supporting the development of an economically viable, vibrant forest sector and local communities; calls for a long-term vision for the protection and restoration of Europe's forests;

27. Takes note of the Commission's announcement on developing additional indicators and threshold values for sustainable forest management, which remain voluntary for Member States to implement at national and regional level; believes that these indicators and thresholds should improve the understanding of whether or not a forest is being managed sustainably at forest stand level, or at least at landscape level, and to determine which restoration efforts have been successful; calls on the Commission to develop evidence-based indicators and thresholds to complement the sustainable forest management framework, in particular as regards the development of clear criteria relating to ecosystem health, biodiversity and climate change, aimed at making them an efficient tool for improving the sustainability of EU forests and ensuring that forest management contributes to the EU's climate and biodiversity objectives; considers these additional indicators and thresholds to be crucial tools for biodiversity protection and restoration and for climate mitigation and adaptation in the forest sector; highlights the fact that a definition of sustainable forest management was agreed as part of the pan-European Forest Europe process and has been incorporated into national legislation and voluntary systems, such as forest certifications, in the Member States; therefore underlines the need to ensure coherence between the Commission's work and that of Forest Europe and the FAO and to avoid any duplication of efforts or disproportional increase in the administrative burden, as well as to engage with national and regional competent authorities, public and private forest managers and forest owners, and other relevant stakeholders to ensure that indicators and value ranges are fit for application at local and regional level under specific biogeographical conditions; points out that Forest Europe has begun work to revisit the definition of sustainable forest management and its tools; calls on the Member States to continue their efforts to properly implement national strategies and legislation related to sustainable forest management, and to adapt them to their national, regional and local circumstances; calls on the Member States to

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[1] Commission staff working document of 16 July 2021 entitled 'The 3 Billion Tree Planting Pledge for 2030' (SWD(2021)0651).

adequately transpose and implement the EU legislation and binding objectives on forests, and calls on the Commission and the Member States to ensure the implementation and enforcement of the Birds and Habitats Directives, including Natura 2000;

28. Highlights that pressure on forests from pests, diseases and parasites, natural disasters, an altered water balance, increased average temperatures and other disturbances is being increasingly intensified by climate change, and that strengthening forests' ecosystem adaptation and resilience through sustainable active management is a matter of urgency; notes the economic impact of these disturbances on the forestry sector as a whole; notes that a greater deployment of sustainable innovative technologies and management practices in restoration, afforestation and reforestation can help to strengthen resilience and enhance biodiversity; calls on the Commission to collect and disseminate knowledge among Member States about how to adapt forests to current and expected climate change, in line with the new EU Adaptation Strategy and Biodiversity Strategy; notes that sustainable forest management, as a dynamic concept, consists of a broad array of actions and adaptive practices, many of which can play a key role in the climate mitigation potential of forests, and offers measures to introduce better adapted European species and improved provenances, strengthen the contribution of forests to the water cycle, carry out felling to contain pests, pathogens and invasive species, prevent forest fires and maintain protective functions, among others, while underpinning the multifunctional roles of forests; highlights that growing larger, resilient and diverse forestland also requires access to genetic resources; stresses the importance of supporting national seedling genepools in order to provide local and regional reforestation and afforestation initiatives with a sufficient number of native tree species; points to the important role of natural regeneration for the future of forests, as it can foster undisturbed root development, better tree vitality and stability, and lower planting costs, while noting that natural regeneration is not always possible owing to specific forest conditions; underlines that the EU's diverse forests and climate conditions require differentiated sustainable forest management practices, which should be further developed nationally, regionally and locally, working from a strong common basis;

29. Notes with great concern that large-scale and more intense wildfires are an increasing challenge across the European Union and, in particular, that the 2021 fire season in the EU was unprecedented, as some 0,5 million ha were destroyed by fire, notably in the regions of Europe facing the highest average temperature rises, such as the Mediterranean; underlines that 'megafires' are increasing in intensity and frequency globally; recalls that a diverse landscape with diverse forests provides a greater bulwark or natural barrier against large-scale and uncontrollable forest fires; stresses that the restoration of diverse forests would assist with fire prevention and containment; underlines the need for more resources for and the development of science-based fire management and capacity-building support through advisory services to tackle the effects of climate change in forests; calls on the Commission and the Member States to better promote and make use of the integrated fire management concept and notes that this may require better regulatory capacity in the Member States, the strengthening of public services, and dedicated support and increased cooperation for disaster prevention, preparedness and response; highlights the importance of further developing and making full use of the EU Civil Protection Mechanism in relation to forest fires and other natural disasters; calls on the Commission to collect and disseminate knowledge among the Member States on how to adapt forests to current and expected climate change, in line with the new EU adaptation strategy; invites the Commission to create

forest fire risk assessments and maps, on the basis of improved Copernicus products, artificial intelligence and other remote-sensing data, to support preventive action;

30. Underlines that different levels of protection are part of the sustainable forest management toolbox; emphasises that in many cases, even forest protection still requires certain forms of intervention, for instance to address natural hazards or adaptation needs; notes that multi-age, multi-species forests with continuous cover are more resilient to climate impacts such as fire, drought and unseasonal weather events, including as part of sustainable forest management, and as such are an important investment for the future; insists that monocultures, which are less resilient to pests and diseases, as well as to drought, wind, storms and fire, should not be supported by EU funds;

31. Acknowledges that not all management practices contribute to carbon sequestration in forests, but stresses that practices and practitioners can adapt and modernise in order to best balance trade-offs, optimise their approach to achieving multiple objectives, and create synergies with climate change mitigation and adaptation goals and the multiple other functions of forests; points out, in this connection, that there are trade-offs and synergies to consider between demand for wood and the expectation that forests will act as carbon sinks and provide habitats for flora and fauna; calls on the Commission and its services, in this regard, to work strategically to ensure coherence in any forestry-related work and enhance the sustainable management of forests, with full respect for the subsidiarity principle; highlights that certain management practices, notably including voluntary set-asides, can help to restore forests and have a positive impact on carbon sequestration, biodiversity and ecological status; notes that forests can have very diverse levels of biodiversity and carbon sequestration and storage capacity depending on management, the machinery used, the intensity and frequency of cutting, the state of the soil, parasite and illness intensity, the age of forest stands etc.; points out that some forests are now releasing more carbon than they are absorbing; notes that forests should not be considered exclusively as CO_2 sinks and as a solution for the lack of emission reductions from other sectors;

32. Welcomes the Commission's and the Member States' ongoing cooperation on voluntary 'closer-to-nature' forestry guidelines by the Working Group on Forests and Nature; believes that to ensure added value, guidelines on this concept should fully respect the subsidiarity principle and should incorporate a broad range of results-oriented, scientifically proven sustainable tools and forest management practices, particularly taking into account local-level and regional-level needs, to give forest owners and managers the tools and relevant financial incentives to improve connections and cooperation so as to better integrate biodiversity protection into improved management practices that at the same time aim to provide other ecosystem services and products, as demonstrated by the Integrate Network; highlights that forests do have very different characteristics within the Union and that there is therefore a strong need for different policy and management approaches, working from a strong common basis;

33. Highlights the importance of primary and old-growth forests, which contain rich biodiversity and provide a high variety of microhabitats essential for sustaining high biodiversity levels, and their key role for biodiversity protection, carbon sequestration and storage, and fresh water provision; reiterates the call for all remaining old-growth and primary forests to be strictly protected, in line with the EU's Biodiversity Strategy for 2030; insists that protection must also be provided to the buffer zones adjacent to

primary and old-growth forests to support the development of old-growth forest attributes; stresses that expanding appropriate protection to buffer zones will improve the connectivity of habitats of high ecological value, which will significantly contribute to conservation and mitigate the negative impacts of fragmentation; recognises that almost all primary forests have been lost and expresses concern at illegal logging in some Member States in the EU; notes the various definitions of primary and old-growth forests established at international level and stresses that, before any further designation efforts are made, a set of definitions of what constitutes primary and old-growth forests that builds upon the existing ones must be commonly agreed between Member States, forest owners and managers, and other stakeholders; regrets that the guidelines on the definition of old-growth and primary forests were not adopted by the Commission in 2021 as indicated in the EU's Biodiversity Strategy for 2030, but welcomes the ongoing work on these definitions by the Working Group on Forests and Nature; underlines the need to consider a diverse and comprehensive set of attributes, ensure flexibility to account for specific conditions in biogeographical regions and forest types, and duly distinguish between old-growth forests and older forest stands managed for long rotation; stresses that such definitions must be agreed as a matter of urgency, must be based on ecological principles and must take account of the diversity of European forests, owners, management traditions, nature types and shifting climatic zones, as well as avoiding disproportionate management requirements for adjacent forests and woodland and allowing for management measures related to issues such as disaster prevention; points to the role of financial incentives in the voluntary development of certain old-age forest on set-aside land in the future; highlights that the distribution of primary and old-growth forests in the EU is uneven, 90 % of them being located in just four Member States[1];

34. Welcomes the fact that the Commission guidance on new protected areas acknowledges the need for certain ongoing activities, for example ungulate management through hunting to protect a wide range of forest habitat types;

35. Recalls the significant deficit in the mapping of primary and old-growth forests and highlights the urgent need to complete the framework to ensure comprehensive and harmonised mapping, based on clear operational criteria and definitions; calls on the Commission to acknowledge the work done so far to identify, map and assess these forests in some Member States and to encourage the exchange of best practices and knowledge sharing; reiterates its call for the Commission and the Member States to harmonise existing data, to fill in the gaps regarding the location of primary and old-growth forests and to create a database of all potential sites fulfilling the criteria for old-growth and primary forests; in this context, calls on the Commission and the Member States to create a transparent and easy-to-access database of all potential sites fulfilling the criteria to be classified as old-growth and primary forests;

36. Takes note of the work of the Commission on developing guidelines on biodiversity-friendly afforestation and reforestation; stresses that a particular focus should be placed on those Member States whose forest cover is low and, where appropriate and not detrimental to biodiversity goals, on marginal and other land that is not suitable for food production, close to urban and peri-urban areas, and in mountainous areas, and on supporting the development of forests that are resilient, mixed and healthy; stresses that

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1 Joint Research Centre, Mapping and assessment of primary and old-growth forests in Europe, 2021.

definitions and guidelines on biodiversity-friendly afforestation must be science-based, take account of the diversity of European forests, types of ownership, management traditions and nature types, as well as shifting climatic zones, and be set in close cooperation with Member States and relevant stakeholders; insists, furthermore, that no undrained wetlands or peatlands should be drained for afforestation and, in the case of historically drained land, no further or additional drainage should be allowed; points out, in addition, that particular care needs to be taken to avoid erosion in forests situated in mountainous areas;

Enabling forests and forest managers to deliver on multiple goals

37. Notes that the CAP and the European agricultural fund for rural development (EAFRD) are the main sources of support for forestry measures, accounting for 90 % of EU's total finance for forestry; outlines that the Commission's 2017 evaluation of forestry measures concluded that rural development support for forests generally had a positive effect and could contribute significantly to delivering economic, environmental and social benefits[1]; notes that between 2014 and 2020, the Member States only spent 49 % of the available funds, that the Commission has identified administrative burden, insufficient attractiveness of the premiums and a lack of advisory services as reasons for this low usage and that this should be taken into account when adapting the new CAP strategic plans; calls on the Member States to eliminate the administrative burden in order to make the use of the EAFRD for forestry measures more efficient; welcomes the Commission's goal of increasing the uptake of available funds and underlines the need to ensure that funding and subsidies do not support operations that undermine the balanced provision of the various ecosystem services; highlights the need to include measures which are concrete and sufficiently attractive to ensure take-up of interventions and measures to enhance sustainable forest management and the multifunctional role of forests in the EU in the CAP strategic plans, to ensure that support is provided for initiatives related to forest ecosystems in particular so as to reduce biodiversity loss in forests, to promote the planting of appropriate native species of trees where suited to the specific environment, to improve forest management and to ensure that funds are used in line with relevant policy goals; regrets the fact that the Commission does not track forestry expenditure under other rural development measures; underlines that support for voluntary nature conservation measures is in line with ownership rights and the subsidiarity principle;

38. Calls on the Commission to find new ways to make the combination of different funds more attractive and easily implementable, reflecting and leveraging on the multifunctional character of forests and forest ecosystem services, and to better promote other EU financing sources such as the LIFE programme, Horizon Europe, the European Regional Development Fund, the Cohesion Fund and the European Investment Bank's Natural Capital Financing Facility; calls on the Commission to assess the consistency of different funding instruments under the Union budget and the EU Recovery Instrument, including the national CAP Strategic Plans, with the commitments and targets set out in the EU Forest Strategy and the EU Biodiversity Strategy; calls on the Commission to also consider eligible under the aid for forest-environmental and climate services and forest conservation the commitments relating to the protection and strict protection of forests stemming from the EU Biodiversity

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1 https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Forests,_forestry_and_logging#Employment_and_apparent_labour_productivity_in_forestry_and_logging

Strategy for 2030 and the New EU Forest Strategy for 2030; calls on the Commission to prolong these commitments for periods longer than seven years, especially in the case of strictly protected forest areas;

39. Points out that the forestry sector operates primarily, and more so than the agricultural sector, as a market-based sector without a distinct dependency on subsidies, while also noting that CAP funding must mainly remain targeted to food production and ensuring food security in the Union; stresses that putting a stronger emphasis on other ecosystem services should not lead to a disproportionate dependency, and supports the Commission and Member States in further pursuing the development of voluntary market-based payment for ecosystem services schemes, such as for carbon sequestration, the promotion of biodiversity, soil protection, water management, data collection and monitoring; underlines the importance of applying the principle of additionality and of designing programmes in a way that fully recognises the work of front-runners and other participants, while motivating a broad range of forest owners; further underlines that the specific requirements of programmes need to take into account the wide variety of forests and their diverse challenges and opportunities; notes that the availability of reliable data on ecosystem services is essential for any payment scheme; welcomes the Commission communication on carbon farming[1], which aims to incentivise new business models from public and private sources by rewarding management practices focusing on increasing sequestration in living biomass and soils in line with ecological principles; emphasises the need for initiatives on carbon farming based on a robust scientific methodology, including the possibility for non-intervention approaches in line with the Biodiversity Strategy; highlights, in the light of this initiative, that active sustainable forest management can contribute to both increasing carbon stocks and forest growth; stresses that carbon removal through forestry should focus on incentives for forest owners and managers to invest in active sustainable forest management and protection where needed, promoting regeneration and increased growth; welcomes the Commission's plan to propose a binding EU regulatory framework for the certification of carbon removal by the end of 2022 in order to correctly quantify, report and certify carbon removal efforts and avoid the risk of misrepresentation and greenwashing;

40. Acknowledges the important role of existing market-driven certification schemes and their contribution to the further uptake of sustainable forest management; notes that most of these schemes have proven to be credible and effective tools in driving sustainable forest management practices across Europe; welcomes the continuing scrutiny by the EU institutions as an aid to continuous improvement; welcomes the Commission's announcement on developing a voluntary, 'closer-to-nature' certification scheme; calls on the Commission to ensure that these initiatives improve forest ecosystems, protect biodiversity and ensure added value through nature-friendly forest management practices; encourages the Commission to cooperate with and learn from existing and proven certification schemes, and to support efforts to improve the existing schemes, including with regard to transparency for consumers and taking into account consumer demand; believes that to create added value, the voluntary 'closer-to-nature' certification must be based on a clear mandatory framework and must offer forest owners a sufficient price premium for the provision of ecosystem services, e.g. by establishing an EU quality label with locally adapted guidelines on closer-to-nature

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1 Commission communication of 15 December 2021 on sustainable carbon cycles (COM(2021)0800).

forestry in order to promote the most biodiversity-friendly management practices; calls on the Commission, after concluding the work on the 'closer-to-nature' definition, to assess both the added value and the costs for forest owners of such a certification scheme; notes that voluntary certification is only one of the steps needed towards the development of more sustainable forest management in the EU;

41. Welcomes the Commission decision of 4 June 2021 on the licensing of the Natura 2000 logo[1]; notes that the Natura 2000 labelling scheme should promote the strictest EU ecological standards for the protection of the most vulnerable habitat types and species on land; recalls that Natura 2000 covers around 18 % of the EU's land area; highlights that the Member States should ensure that no activities occur that cause damage to or disturb species in Natura 2000-designated habitats; calls for ambitious targets under the EU Forest Strategy to maintain and restore the ecological value of the designated sites, taking into account the social and cultural requirements and the regional and local characteristics of the area; notes that conservation efforts in Natura 2000 sites should be fully in line with the Habitats and Birds Directives and the EU's Biodiversity Strategy for 2030; notes that Natura 2000 sites provide valuable ecosystem services to the public; highlights that the Natura 2000 logo placed on any goods or services should mean that those goods and services are contributing to the conservation objectives of the Natura 2000 site from which they are derived;

42. Welcomes the Strategic EU Ecolabel Work Plan 2020-2024 published by the Commission; recalls that the EU ecolabel is a voluntary label of environmental excellence; notes that the ecolabel scheme promotes the EU circular economy and contributes to sustainable consumption and production practices; calls for strict standards and monitoring, as well as the promotion of the increased use of the ecolabel in the EU forest sector; stresses the importance of extending the scope of the ecolabel for wood products to include the sustainability level of these products; calls on the Member States to encourage producers to increase the use of the Natura 2000 label for non-wood forest products;

43. Highlights that to fulfil biodiversity objectives and unlock the full potential of forests to contribute to the climate and circular economy targets of the EU, further research, innovation and development are required and should be incentivised in the fields of sustainable forest management, in particular adaptation to climate change, and bio-based alternatives to fossil-based products and other products with a large carbon footprint; encourages continued support for sustainable innovation related to wood, such as wood-based textiles that have a high potential as a substitute for synthetic textile fibres and cotton, and other wood-based materials that have received a positive environmental and climate life-cycle assessment; stresses that in order to be competitive, such bio-based alternatives must offer consumers products at affordable prices; notes that development cycles in the sector may last 10 years or longer and underlines that a predictable and stable regulatory environment is a precondition for attracting investments; highlights that many innovations in the sector have high added value and provide high-quality employment in rural areas, as well as in the forest sector value chain and related bio-based industries, and underlines the role of small and medium-sized enterprises in this context;

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1 OJ C 229, 15.6.2021, p. 6.

44. Believes that to improve the coordinated provision of environmental, social, societal and economic forest services, relevant EU framework programmes, including Horizon Europe, the LIFE programme, the agricultural European Innovation Partnership (EIP-AGRI), the LEADER programme and the European Institute of Innovation and Technology, must be better aligned; welcomes the Commission proposal to enhance EU cooperation by proposing a research and innovation partnership on forestry and calls on the Commission to develop comprehensive forest-focused programmes involving different functions and parts of the forest-sector value chain and including living labs to test and demonstrate solutions to key challenges, building on existing and proven platforms such as the Integrate Network, the Forest-based Sector Technology Platform and the European Forest Institute, and including pan-European and international partners;

45. Recalls that 60 % of EU forests are privately owned and a significant share of forest owners are small-holders; stresses that in order to achieve the strategy's goals, its implementation must focus on enabling all types of forest owners and managers, and in particular small-holders, to deliver on the multiple functions of forests; acknowledges that forest owners and managers need a large amount of flexibility in their forest management practices, working from a strong common basis, so that they can provide all the required ecosystem services, and calls on the Commission and the Member States to ensure that support programmes, voluntary payment-for-ecosystem-services schemes and research funding are attractive, understandable and easily accessible to small-holders;

46. Underlines that the availability of advisory services is an important driver of the dissemination of sustainable forest management practices; encourages Member States to ensure the availability of advisory services, paying particular attention to small-holders;

47. Notes that about 40 % of the EU's forests are publicly owned by municipalities and regional or national governments, while in some Member States public ownership of forests is much higher, reaching an average of 90 % in South East Europe; emphasises that public forests can play a key role in preserving forest ecosystems, ensuring biodiversity protection, mitigating climate change, enhancing rural development and supplying timber and non-wood goods and services, and that state forestry agencies can play an important role in providing private forest owners with much-needed expertise regarding close-to-nature forestry and adaptation to the effects of climate change; calls for increased human and financial resources for state forestry agencies where necessary; calls, in this context, on the Member States to set an example for sustainable forest management in their publicly owned forests for the public good, in particular with regard to environmental, economic and social aspects;

48. Welcomes the Commission communication entitled 'A long-term Vision for the EU's Rural Areas – Towards stronger, connected, resilient and prosperous rural areas by 2040' and the acknowledgement of the role of forests and of sustainable forest management in safeguarding decent work and livelihoods in rural areas; underlines the importance of the forestry sector and the wood-based industries as a provider of jobs in rural communities, as well as in urban areas through downstream uses; points out the importance of boosting non-wood, forest-based economic activities in order to diversify local economies and jobs and reverse the depopulation trends of rural and remote areas; notes with great concern the steady decline in employment in the forestry and logging

sector, which according to Eurostat fell by 7 % between 2000 and 2019[1], and the high number of accidents in the sector[2]; calls on the Commission and the Member States to monitor the effects of the measures taken under the strategy on employment and work safety in the light of changing management practices, considering that the options discussed often go hand in hand with higher (physical) labour intensity, which also brings different risks for workers and requires high-quality vocational training, as well as upskilling and reskilling opportunities; highlights the importance of making this type of employment attractive, as well as the opportunities of more sustainable forest management to this end; stresses the need, in this regard, for measures to increase work safety and adequately train workers and to support the modernisation of forestry equipment and tools; calls on the Member States to assess their advisory services in this respect and re-enforce them where necessary, and to prioritise continuing high-quality vocational training in eco-construction and timber-related trades; reiterates its call for the Commission to take initiatives, in concert with manufacturers of forestry machinery, to improve the environmental design of forestry machinery in order to reconcile a high level of protection for workers with a minimum impact on the soil and water in forests;

49. Stresses the importance of attracting young people and female entrepreneurs to the sector, especially in the context of the digital and green transitions of forest-based activities; points out, however, that poor working conditions in the forestry sector in some parts of Europe do not currently make it an attractive career choice; underlines the need for investments in the sector and throughout the value chain, and for a favourable environment in rural areas, including digital, transport and community infrastructure; welcomes the Commission's proposals to promote the establishment of a skills partnership under the Pact for Skills and make use of the European Social Fund Plus to work together to increase the number of upskilling and reskilling opportunities in forestry, create quality jobs and provide workers with opportunities and adequate working conditions in the wood-based bioeconomy, thereby making it a more attractive career choice;

Monitoring, reporting and data collection

50. Stresses the importance of accurate, integrated, qualitative, timely, comparable and up-to-date data on Europe's forests and takes note of the initiative for a legislative proposal for a framework on forest observation, reporting and data collection, with full respect for the subsidiarity principle; recalls the importance of verified data, particularly that collected at local level, as many forest characteristics can only be verified on the ground; underlines that the broad availability, high quality, transparency, completeness and harmonisation of data and reporting are essential for meeting the goals of the strategy and believes that to deliver real added value, the framework must build on existing mechanisms and processes, such as the national forest inventories, the Forest Information System for Europe, the ENFIN network, Forest Europe and the FAO, through a bottom-up approach to best use the expertise and experience present in the Member States, and must be developed according to internationally agreed commitments and related Member State competences, while avoiding the duplication of work, an excessive administrative burden and excessive costs; underlines that the framework should include mechanisms to avoid errors such as double counting; calls on

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1 https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Forests,_forestry_and_logging#Employment_and_apparent_labour_productivity_in_forestry_and_logging

2 Forest Europe, *State of Europe's Forests 2020*, 2020.

the Commission and the Member States to ensure adequate funding and human resources for operational support for the framework;

51. Believes that in order to ensure the availability of reliable, transparent and high-quality data, new innovative approaches such as remote sensing technologies must be proof checked and combined with data acquired by ground-based monitoring and must be interpreted in close cooperation with scientists, as well as independent and local experts, including competent authorities and forest managers; believes that these approaches can also play a role in helping to balance the multifunctionality of forests and to develop and share new approaches and practices, and should encompass the financial means required to gain access to data and contribute to its acquisition; believes that the synergy and complementarity between satellite imagery and positioning and location data can become key enablers for forestry managers and governmental bodies; stresses the importance of Copernicus in allowing for the remote monitoring and health assessment of forest inventories, as well as the detection of issues such as illegal logging and deforestation; welcomes the fact that, as part of the Forest Information System for Europe, the existing monitoring of climate effects and other natural or human-induced disturbances of forests will be strengthened; underlines the crucial role that analysis data plays in supporting sustainable forest management and the protection of forests, including in preventing illegal logging and in anticipating and mitigating the impacts of natural disturbances such as storms, wildfires and pests;

52. Considers that Copernicus data should be used as evidence in law enforcement and policymaking through the certification of the data and its derived information products, and calls for the certification of Copernicus data to be achieved in the context of the upcoming legislative proposal for a framework on forest observation, reporting and data collection; stresses that such certified data could play a key role in monitoring diverse phenomena (such as forest land coverage, illegal logging, forest health, tree characterisation, growth patterns and the impact of forest fires) as well as in compliance monitoring;

53. Takes note of the idea to introduce strategic plans for forests under the framework on forest observation, reporting and data collection; further notes that several Member States already have national strategies for forests in place, which cannot be assessed in a uniform manner by the Commission, and that these should be established or further developed in a way that supports the objectives of the EU Forest Strategy; underlines that this proposal should avoid an excessive increase in the administrative burden and costs; highlights that the exact purpose and need for such plans should be clarified and emphasises the obligation to respect Member State competence in forest matters; calls on the Commission to ensure that the legislative proposal fully respects existing national strategies at Member State level and, where relevant, at local level, emphasising that strategic planning at EU level should dovetail with and avoid contradicting or duplicating the existing national strategies; calls on the Commission to assess how this tool could be used to support, in particular, those Member States that do not yet have national strategies in place;

Governance and implementation

54. Believes that due to the multifunctional contribution of forests to various EU goals and the different administrative levels and stakeholder groups involved, the cornerstones of the strategy’s implementation must be close cooperation and the exchange of best

practices with national and regional experts, stakeholders, notably private and public forest owners and managers, scientists, certification schemes and civil society, including an adequate representation of the indigenous peoples of Europe and respecting the principle of subsidiarity; underlines that governance must take into account EU and Member State engagement with Forest Europe and at international level, including with the FAO, and that the implementation of the strategy should seek to create synergies with the contribution to international commitments and cooperation, including on the continuous development of terminology and definitions; recalls the importance of cross-border cooperation in ensuring the long-term survival of Europe's most valuable and threatened species and habitats; urges environmental and forestry stakeholders to reach out to broader segments of the population through various educational tools and programmes;

55. Highlights the importance of the Standing Forestry Committee as a forum for providing comprehensive forestry expertise and discussing activities under the strategy and other EU policies that impact the forestry sector; believes that to achieve policy coherence, the Commission should increase dialogue between the Standing Forestry Committee and other expert groups such as the Working Group on Forests and Nature, the Civil Dialogue Group on Forestry and Cork, which plays an important role in properly involving stakeholders in the development and implementation of EU forest policies, the Coordination Group on Biodiversity and Nature's sub-working group on forest and nature, and the Expert Group on Forest-based Industries;

56. Acknowledges that the implementation of the strategy may lead to significant systemic changes for the forestry sector, through a shift from primarily timber-based revenue streams towards more complex ones, increasingly building on the provisions of other ecosystem services, and highlights the need to monitor and understand its consequences; notes that the extensive and sometimes contradictory overlap among policies and legislation, and in some cases conflicting objectives, impacts forests and the forestry sector and could cause legislative fragmentation; stresses the importance of ensuring their coherence; calls on the Commission and the Member States to continuously assess the cumulative effects of the different initiatives under the strategy, combined with other relevant EU legislation and policies to ensure coherence in any forestry-related work and enhance the sustainable management of forests, with full respect for the subsidiarity principle; highlights that, as part of these assessments, the impact of the protection regime for primary and old-growth forests on local communities must be thoroughly evaluated in cooperation with local actors, with 90 % of them being located in just four Member States[1]; calls on the Commission to report on this as part of its implementation report;

57. Expresses serious concern about reports of illegal logging and land use change in some Member States, including in state forests and protected areas, and about the related ongoing infringement procedures[2]; underlines that illegal logging may have effects that are difficult or impossible to reverse, can contribute to biodiversity loss, the acceleration of climate change and the loss of natural resources from forests that forest communities rely on, and can lead to human rights violations; voices deep sorrow with regard to and

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1 Joint Research Centre, Mapping and assessment of primary and old-growth forests in Europe, 2021.

2 Five ongoing infringement procedures against four Member States (cases 2016/2072, 2018/2208, 2018/4076, 2020/2033 and 2021/4029).

firmly condemns the murders of and violence against forestry personnel, journalists and activists as a consequence of illegal logging and expects Member States to hold the perpetrators accountable and end the oppression of rangers; calls on the Commission and the Member States to fully and effectively implement relevant national and EU legislation, in particular by defining illegal logging, increasing close monitoring, spending on enforcement where necessary, fighting corruption, and improving forest and land governance; stresses the importance of increasing the role of the Member States' competent authorities in combating illegal logging, drawing on the lessons learnt from the implementation and enforcement of the EU Timber Regulation; notes that logging in violation of nature protection measures, including Natura 2000 management plans and the Birds and Habitats Directives, can also constitute illegal logging; stresses that illegal logging has major negative economic, social and environmental impacts and generates revenue losses for local communities; notes the connection between illegal logging and poor living conditions; deplores the length of time taken by the Commission in pursuing infringement cases, which carries the considerable risk that illegal logging will continue and that it will be too late to reverse and repair the huge damage it causes; calls on the Commission and the Member States to take urgent action to stop illegal logging and to tighten the control of illegal timber trading, through the close monitoring and enforcement of existing regulations and the use of geo-spatial and remote-sensing technologies;

58. Calls on the Commission to promote EU standards and ambitions for protecting forests at an international level;

59. Calls on the Commission to restart the negotiations for an international legally binding forest convention that would contribute to the management, conservation and sustainable development of forests and provide for their multiple and complementary functions and uses, including action towards reforestation, afforestation and forest conservation, while taking into account the social, economic, ecological, cultural and spiritual needs of present and future generations, recognising the vital role of all types of forests in maintaining ecological processes and balance, and supporting the identity, culture and rights of indigenous people, their communities and other communities and forest dwellers;

60. Calls on the Union to comply with the principle of policy coherence for development and to ensure consistency between its development, trade, agriculture, energy and climate policies; recognises the positive economic, societal and environmental contribution of the forest industry and asks for further investment in research, innovation and technological advancement;

61. Calls on the Commission to promote mirror clauses in international bio-economy markets and to make use of pan-European and international partnerships and foreign trade agreements to promote the EU's climate ambition and the sustainability of forest use outside the EU;

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62. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council and the Commission.