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First panel

“Sustainable Forest Management: Unlocking Forest Biodiversity’s Potential”

Changing societal demands, including growing attention to biodiversity protection, disrupt the balance between components of sustainable forest management refined over the last decades. Such changes cause not only challenges for foresters and forest managers but also tensions in the society and at a political level.

Moreover, recent weather extremes show us that we must adapt management of our forests to the ongoing climate change. That means increasing their resilience, stability and, at the same time, balancing forest biodiversity with production of wood, carbon sequestration but also recreational and other functions of forests demanded by the society. Such integrative forest management should focus at continuity of existence of forest resources and improving their quality through promoting un-even aged structure, vertical, horizontal and species diversity – the principles that have already been outlined in the Pan-European Operational-level Guidelines for Sustainable Forest Management. Implementation of these principles should be carefully monitored and reported as a coherent part of assessing the State of Europe’s Forests.

There are numerous practical examples demonstrating that multifunctional, sustainably managed and close-to-nature forests can achieve synergies between those different forest functions. Specifically, in close-to-nature forest management, the focus is on integrating biodiversity aspects and forest resilience with sustainable timber production.

In these forests, continuation of their active management that maintain or restore their close-to-nature structure should be encouraged and supported. Restricting active management and multifunctionality of forests is not an option, specifically under ongoing climate change. We need to bear in mind that forest biodiversity is not the issue for strictly protected areas only. Other way round. Depending on priority of forest functions at the site, we need to practically apply biodiversity friendly management approaches in different forests, to various extent and case-by-case, as an integral part of sustainable forest management.