

# Strategic Framework for Forest Communication in Europe

12-09-2011

This Strategic Framework aims to help achieving better informed decision making on matters relevant to forests and forestry by closing the gap between perception and facts on forests and forestry in the wider European region.

For the purposes of this framework, 'forests' are ecosystems as well as the raw material inputs for forestry and related industry activities incorporating the economic, the environmental and the socio-cultural dimensions of sustainable forest management.

The framework was developed by the UNECE-FAO Forest Communicators Network (FCN)<sup>1</sup>, at the request of the UNECE Timber Committee and the FAO European Forestry Commission, and is based on best practices and latest research.

The framework provides communication objectives, common key messages and approaches, which are designed to be used by governments, public and private sector institutions and organisations and stakeholders at all levels, when formulating individual forest communication programs and strategies.

Geographically the framework addresses the European part of the UNECE region. Out of the 56 Member States of the UNECE, experts from 36 countries<sup>2</sup> and from 21 organisations<sup>3</sup> participate in the Forest Communicators Network and were involved in some form in the elaboration of this framework.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> <http://live.unece.org/forests/information/fcn.html>

*Forest Communicators Network*



<sup>2</sup> Albania, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, France, FYR Macedonia, Greece, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Russian Federation, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, Ukraine, United Kingdom.

<sup>3</sup> Biostrategia, CEI-Bois, EPF, CEPF, CEPI, UNECE, European Commission, EUSTAFOR, EFI, FAO, IUFRO, FOREST EUROPE, PEFC, Probos Foundation, UEF, BDF, UNFFS, USSE, WBCSD, woodScape, WWF.

<sup>4</sup> In order to increase coherence among different efforts for enhancing forest communication in Europe the FCN worked closely with the Standing Forestry Committee of the European Union as well as with the Liaison Unit Oslo of the FOREST EUROPE Process. Therefore the EU Forest Communication Strategy (ANNEX III) and the FOREST EUROPE Communication Strategy although differing in content and scope are fully coherent and complementary with this Strategic Framework.

**Content:**

- A) Why the European region needs strategic forest communication
- B) Communication Objectives
- C) Key Messages
- D) Dialogue Partners
- E) General communication approach
- F) How to deliver the messages
- G) Implementation, Evaluation and Review

**ANNEXES**

- I. Background and Rationale of the Strategic Framework for Forest Communication in Europe
- II. Reference Documents
- III. EU Forest Communication Strategy

## **A) Why the European region needs strategic forest communication**

- Forests mean different things to different people and this can create conflicts of interest resulting in mixed and confusing messages.
- Forests are more and more affected by policies designed for a wide range of purposes. To foster coherence, it is essential to engage stakeholders at all levels in an open dialogue on forests.
- There are significant gaps between the reality and public perception concerning forests. For example, people worry about deforestation in Europe, even though forest area in the European region continues to grow.
- People have a strong emotional attachment to forests, but a lack of understanding of sustainable forest management may have perverse effects on society's ability to fully benefit from forests. It also may mean forests may never reach their full potential to mitigate climate change.
- There are numerous institutions and organisations in the forest sector. There is no common message, no common voice.

These are significant challenges. For the wider European region to fully benefit from its forests, the sector needs to maintain and build upon broad support and trust. This will require clear, systematic and concerted communication on forests. We need to make messages on forests timely, effective, clear, and relevant; update them regularly; and use the broadest range of communication channels.

## **B) Communication Objectives**

1. To increase understanding that forests are vital to life on Earth and must be managed sustainably.
2. To promote understanding that sustainably managed forests provide a multitude of goods and services.
3. To raise awareness of the positive state of European forests and also of the threats and challenges they face.
4. To increase the use of sustainably produced wood and other forest products as climate friendly materials and renewable energy sources.

## **C) Key Messages**

In many respects such as ecological conditions, ownership structures and threats, the forest conditions in Europe are rather diverse. However, the region shares the same communication objectives and should use the following common messages and where needed adapt them to different contexts:

**1. Forests are vital to maintaining life on Earth. Action needs to be taken to halt global deforestation and contribute to forest restoration.**

*Forests balance our climate, sequester carbon and provide us with vital oxygen.*

*The forest area in Europe continues to expand but many areas of the world need help to halt deforestation and forest degradation.*

*The lessons we are learning and practices we are developing in Europe in sustainable forest management, legal harvesting and certification can be put to good use in other parts of the world.*

**2. When managed wisely and sustainably, forests provide an endless renewable supply of materials and energy, as well as other environmental and social benefits.**

*Sustainably managed forests provide more environmental, economic and social benefits than any other land use.*

*Environment: Wise and sustainable management of Europe's forests means that they provide us with clean air and water, stabilize soils and help prevent flooding. They absorb billions of tons of carbon to help tackle climate change and they provide safe homes for a vast range of species.*

*Economic: Wise and sustainable management of Europe's forests provides us with endlessly renewable supplies of environmentally friendly materials, products and services such as timber and wood, food, energy and fuel, and tourism.*

*Social: Wise and sustainable management means European forests provide jobs, places to enjoy ourselves, to relax, play, revive our spirits, improve our health, learn, and protect our cultural heritage and traditions.*

**3. Europe's forests are sustainably managed, growing in size and substance, are generally in good health, but need further help to counter increasing threats – largely from climate change, storms, fire, pests, and disease.**

*Forests cover 44 % of the land area of Europe, including the Russian Federation, which constitutes 25 % of the world's forests, and continue to expand. They have increased by just over 11 million ha in the past 15 years, mainly due to planting and natural expansion of forests onto former agricultural land.*

*There is x hectare of forest for every/ person in Europe- that's yy football fields/person or zzz trees.*

*In the last 20 years, Europe experienced a 35 percent rise in its forest area designated for the conservation of biodiversity. Sustainable Forest Management conserves and maintains biodiversity.*

*Wood volume in European forests is at a record high and still increasing. The amount of wood in Europe's forests is growing by around 360 million cubic*

*metres per year. In Europe only harvest half of the amount of wood is harvested that could be use without harming the forest.*

*Sustainable forest management helps to reduce the impact of threats such as fire, pests and disease.*

#### **4. Europe's environmental footprint can be reduced by using sustainably produced wood and other forest derived products.**

*In our changing climate our oldest renewable source of material and energy, wood, is still the smart choice in the 21st century.*

*Growing forests remove carbon from the atmosphere. Wood products store carbon and provide us with smart substitutes for energy intensive products and fuels.*

*Wood and cork are renewable, durable, reliable and versatile materials. They help to bring nature into our homes.*

*Many of Europe's forests have independent certification that guarantees they are sustainably managed to international standards. Anyone seeking reassurance that they are taking positive environmental action in buying forest derived products can look for a label of certification.*

*Using sustainably produced wood and cork reduces our ecological footprint and helps safeguard forests for the future.*

### **D) Dialogue Partners**

Dialogue partners, the priority people and groups we need to communicate with, should be selected carefully and identified specifically for each communication activity. The following list gives some indication of what target groups might be considered for activities at the local, national, regional or international levels:

- decision makers from various sectors relevant to forests, like climate change, energy providers, agriculture, forest-based industries, construction industry, environment, tourism
- opinion formers, like journalists, bloggers, teachers and celebrities
- forest-related stakeholders
- stakeholders from other sectors
- young people
- civil society organisations

### **E) General communication approach**

It is vital that the communications approach is relevant to, and supports, other people's agenda. Communication is not just information providing; it is engaging systematically in two way information processes, which includes active listening to others.

The messages must be understandable, credible and supportable. The forest sector may not be well known to some key target groups, or they might have strong preconceived ideas about the sector. Therefore, it may take time to gain the trust and respect of others. Reliability, accountability, honesty, openness and transparency, are key principles required to achieve this.

It is important to put communication into business planning systems at the outset of activities and ensure adequate resources.

There are well tested skills, methods, tools and tactics available. It is recommended to look for best practices and to share yours. It is advisable to consult FCN materials, such as Best Practices in Forest Communication and the Forestry PR Tool Kit, at <http://www.unece.org/timber/pr/publist/publist.htm>. It is also recommended to consult the EU Forest Communication Strategy (ANNEX III) for aspects of communication approaches and on how to localise messages.

## **F) How to deliver the messages**

It is important that organisations and institutions understand the role they play for delivering the messages and internalise them. To make this effective there is a need to

- translate the strategic framework into different languages and cultural contexts
- build communication activities around the key messages
- seek strategic co-operations and partnerships
- form groups for adapting the framework and its implementation to sub-regional needs (such as the Mediterranean, Alpine, and Boreal sub-regions)
- capitalise on existing international days related to forests and support efforts to formally recognise a UN International Day of Forests
- Seize the opportunity to create dialogue and reach diverse groups through different forms of media, such as facebook, twitter, blogs and other social media
- build communication capacities in the forest sector, including by integrating communication into forestry education curricula
- consider mechanisms for funding communication activities
- raise the profile of forests and forestry in school programs, including through forest pedagogic activities
- consider establishing a regular collaborative communication campaign throughout Europe with time wise and message wise concerted actions at all levels

- ensure coherent and complementary implementation of different forest-related communication strategies and programs, such as the forest communication strategies of FOREST EUROPE and the EU

### **G) Implementation, Evaluation and Review**

The UNECE Timber Committee and the FAO Forestry Commission for Europe oversee the implementation of the framework, and will manage regular evaluation, review and update. UNECE and FAO will provide a forum for countries and stakeholders to discuss ways for best implementing the Strategic Framework, for financing and building capacity, for sharing best practices and exchange of information.

---

## **ANNEX I**

### **Background and Rationale of the Strategic Framework for Forest Communication in Europe**

The UNECE/FAO Team of Specialists *FOREST COMMUNICATORS NETWORK* (FCN) was established by the Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) and the UN's Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) as a forum for international interaction and cooperation in forest related communications and for developing and introducing state of the art communication approaches in the ECE region. The ECE region consists of 56 countries, covering the whole European continent and including the US and Canada. At present the Network involves some 130 experts from governmental, non governmental and private sector organizations from 36 countries and 21 multilateral organizations.

The Mandate 2008 to 2013 of the Forest Communicators Network expects as major outputs:

- a European forest communication strategy
- contributions to the EU Forest Action Plan, in particular on forest related environmental education (forest pedagogic) and on a EU forest communication strategy
- PR advice to the MCPFE (in the meantime FOREST EUROPE) Liaison Unit Oslo upon request

The FCN established a Task Force on Strategic Aspects of Forest Communication in Europe, which carried out the groundwork, analysing the most substantive topics and generating a comprehensive overview on issues and data relevant for a European forest communication strategy. The FCN utilised several meetings and workshops to take the issue forward, including a workshop in Pardubice/Czech Republic in 2009, and FCN meetings in Gothenburg/Sweden 2010 and in Budapest/Hungary 2011.

For practical reasons the FCN decided to focus this work on the European part of the UNECE region. Out of the 56 Member States of the UNECE experts from 36 countries<sup>5</sup> and from 21 organisations<sup>6</sup> that participate in the Forest Communicators Network were involved in some form in the elaboration of this framework. Not all of these experts could participate in meetings, but all were given opportunity to provide inputs and comments in writing.

With a view to several existing communication strategies in the region the FCN decided to develop a framework, which adds value by identifying shared overall communication objectives and key

---

<sup>5</sup> Albania, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, France, FYR Macedonia, Greece, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Russian Federation, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, Ukraine, United Kingdom.

<sup>6</sup> Biostrategia, CEI-Bois, EPF, CEPF, CEPI, UNECE, European Commission, EUSTAFOR, EFI, FAO, IUFRO, FOREST EUROPE, PEFC, Probos Foundation, UEF, BDF, UNFFS, USSE, WBCSD, woodScape, WWF.

messages. The framework should also help to build a wide, efficient communications network throughout the region and to establish a continuous dialogue among relevant groups.

The framework serves as information source and stimulus for various relevant European entities, in particular the European Union, the FOREST EUROPE Ministerial Conference, the UNECE Timber Committee and the FAO European Forestry Commission. It also provides a reference point for institutions and organisations at country and local level to help putting their forest related communication activities into a European context.

In order to increase coherence among different efforts for enhancing forest communication in Europe the FCN worked closely with the Standing Forestry Committee of the European Union as well as with the Liaison Unit Oslo of the FOREST EUROPE Process. Therefore the EU Forest Communication Strategy (ANNEX III) and the FOREST EUROPE Communication Strategy although differing in content and scope are fully coherent and complementary with this Strategic Framework. While the EU strategy involves the EU Member States and institutions, the Strategic Framework is set up for a much wider region. The FOREST EUROPE strategy is specifically designed to support the FOREST EUROPE Ministerial process, whereas the Strategic Framework has a more comprehensive approach and is set out to facilitate all forest-related stakeholders.

## **ANNEX II**

### **Reference documents**

- SHAPING FOREST COMMUNICATION IN THE EUROPEAN UNION: PUBLIC PERCEPTIONS OF FORESTS AND FORESTRY, Tender no. AGRI-2008-EVAL-10 Under the Framework Contract No. 30-CE-0101908/00-50 Final Report  
Client: European Commission – DG Agriculture and Rural Development  
ECORYS, Rotterdam, September 2009
- 'EUROPEANS AND WOOD – What Europeans think about Wood and its uses', Ewald Rametsteiner, Roland Oberwimmer, Ingwald Gschwandtl, - released by MCPFE and FCN, Warsaw 2007
- 'EUROPEANS AND THEIR FORESTS – What do Europeans think about Forests and SFM - A Review of Representative Public Opinion Surveys in Europe', Ewald Rametsteiner and Florian Kraxner, - released by MCPFE, FCN and ECE, Warsaw 2003
- The FOREST EUROPE Communication Strategy
- 'STATE OF EUROPE'S FORESTS 2007 – the MCPFE Report on Sustainable Forest Management in Europe', jointly prepared by the MCPFE Liaison Unit Warsaw, UNECE and FAO, Warsaw 2007
- 'STATE OF EUROPE'S FORESTS 2011 – Preliminary findings', jointly prepared by the FOREST EUROPE Liaison Unit Oslo, UNECE and FAO, Geneva, 28 March 2011

## **ANNEX III**

### **EU Forest Communication Strategy**

At no point in the history of humankind have our forests been so necessary for our survival and yet so much in need of our attention. They support all terrestrial life, help stabilise our climate, provide us with smart natural and sustainable materials and energy. Yet they are under threat from fire, pests, flood and disease – dangers exacerbated by climate change brought about, in part, by forest loss and degradation in an ironic vicious circle. Humans pose as big a threat as long as we fail to protect our forests and continue to clear them for our own purposes regardless of the global problems we create.

The value of forests to life on Earth, and the potential benefits and solutions they promise to bring to our increasingly damaged world, are enormous.

However, in the EU studies of public perception ([Annex 1](#)) reveal that the issues are not well understood outside our small forestry community and suggest that there is a significant gap between public understanding and reality. For example, deforestation is a key concern for the majority of European people. Most perceive the total forest area in the EU, as well as the level of biodiversity, to be decreasing. In reality, total forested area in Europe has increased over the past two decades and the loss of biodiversity has at least slowed down due to recent policy measures. While most EU citizens support more active management, harvesting and management are seen as being some of the biggest threats to our forests. Worryingly, there is no reason to believe that the perception of forests and forestry among key decision makers outside of, but relevant to, our sector is any better.

It is clear that we must do more to explain the facts and why forests are so relevant to modern life, and we need to do this globally, regionally, nationally and locally.

The UNECE/FAO Forest Communicators Network and the education focussed Forest Pedagogics provide support for cross-sector communications and platforms for improved coordination of activity. Successful initiatives, such as European Forest Week: 2008, underline that planned, coordinated and sustained communications is possible across our sector and can be very effective.

The EU Forest Action Plan (2007 – 2011) aims to establish better co-ordination on forest-related issues at EU level. It includes a framework for more efficient cooperation and more structured implementation of the EU Forestry Strategy. Within the framework key action 18 details activities for further development of forest communications, and proposed the formulation of this strategy.

The strategy outlines some important steps at EU, Member State and relevant stakeholder level to improve communication on forestry in the Community. It has been prepared in broad terms - specific issues may need specific strategies. Goals, communications objectives, priority target groups, messages, and tactics based on best practice are defined. Much of this is based upon current understanding of public perceptions of forestry and the forest sector and brief analysis ([Annex 2](#)) of the current operating environment. Proposals build on work carried out by the UNECE/FAO Forest Communicators Network, in particular the communication objectives and the core messages, which are relevant beyond the EU.

The strategy was prepared by a working group of the Standing Forestry Committee. It benefits from the input of a wide range of stakeholders. It provides a framework for the development of communications strategies at national or local level. However, it also proposes focusing co-ordinated and concerted effort on key priority audiences such as decision makers and influencers.

A communication strategy will never be "finished": it must be an iterative and evolving document, changing in the light of new developments and improving understanding of our audiences' and customers' needs.

#### **Purpose**

The strategy has two main business aims:

- To help close the gap between perception and the facts regarding forests and forestry in the EU; and
- To achieve better informed decisions on matters relevant to forests and forestry.

## Scope

The strategy identifies issues and elements of specific relevance for forestry within the EU. However, such an EU forest communication strategy must be seen in the context of the overall pan-EU forest policy and communication architecture. Geographically and politically Europe is a diverse region with many different bodies relevant to forests and to forest communication.

The European Union does not have specific legislation or communication strategies on forests but many aspects of its legislation, policies and international agreements to which it is party relate to forests. The EU and all EU member states are parties to the pan-European FOREST EUROPE (Ministerial Conference on the Protection of Forests in Europe) forest policy process. The European Forestry Commission of the FAO involves more European countries and the Forestry and Timber Section of the UN ECE encompasses, in addition to the pan-European region, the United States and Canada. There is also a broad range of other stakeholders with a prime interest in forestry.

There are several forest communication strategies and campaigns of EU relevance currently in place or under development. These include the FOREST EUROPE Communications Strategy ([provide link](#)) which covers all EU member countries and the EU, and the European Forest Communication Strategy being prepared by the [UNECE/FAO Forest Communicators Network](#). This strategy does not seek to replace or duplicate any of these initiatives. Based on the recommendations and guidelines provided by the EU Forest Action Plan, it aims to add value by identifying some shared communication objectives and key messages that are relevant to member states and other bodies in pursuit of our shared aims. So coherence, alignment and co-ordination between the various initiatives are needed to ensure this synergy and avoid duplication.

The strategy addresses 'forests' in a broad meaning, incorporating all three dimensions of sustainable forest management, namely the economic, the environmental and the socio-cultural aspects of forests. It understands forests as ecosystems, but also as basis for forestry and related industry activities.

## Who will use this strategy?

The strategy has been prepared as a contribution to implementation of the EU Forest Action Plan - in particular key action 18. The European Commission, EU Member States and other stakeholders are encouraged, as actors, to adopt and help implement it and, where possible, to tailor it to suit local circumstances.

## Strategic communication objectives

The following strategic communication objectives are aimed at supporting the implementation of the EU Forestry Strategy:

1. To increase understanding within key target audiences that forests are vital to life on Earth and must be managed sustainably when utilised.
2. To help people understand that sustainably managed forests provide oxygen, sequester carbon, preserve biodiversity, wood and cork and other forest products, energy, jobs and beautiful environments for living and recreation and many other goods and services.
3. To raise awareness of the positive state of European forests and also of the threats and challenges they face.
4. To increase the use of sustainably produced wood and other forest products as climate friendly materials and renewable energy sources.

## **Whose attitudes and behaviours are we trying to influence?**

Member states, NGOs and others within the wider forest sector are best placed to communicate with the public and will have specific messages that meet their needs and resonate with their target groups. Much communication with the public already goes on and this is important for gathering support for the sector's activities and indeed maintaining a social licence to operate. Certain outputs from this strategy will facilitate this. Some of the target audiences may be relatively new to us and outside our usual sphere of operation so in planning approaches we must carefully consider their current level of understanding, what their current concerns are, what drives them, why forests may be relevant to their operations, and how we can best make an effective connection.

The strategy provides flexible framework for general communication at all levels. Target audiences include multipliers such as relevant civil organizations, opinion leaders, policy makers and key media people at national and regional or local level and general public.

However, priority should be given to communicating with key priority audiences - government, institutional and market decision makers, gatekeepers and influencers – given that we have limited resources this is where we can make the greatest impact. These include:

1. EU bodies (EP, EC, Council, European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions);
2. National, regional and local politicians, ministers and policymakers;
3. NGO's from various sectors relevant to forestry;
4. Decision makers within related industries: energy; agriculture; renewables; construction;
5. Education system – teachers and children;
6. Governments and organisations outside the EU; and
7. Relevant journalists and other commentators - who hold views and form other people's views.

## **What do we want them to do?**

We want them to:

- fully understand the role and importance of forests, of sustainable forestry, and of the whole downstream forest sector;
- see how forests can help them achieve their own goals;
- consider forests in policymaking and business planning; and
- themselves promote forests and the use of legally and sustainably produced timber and forest products to others.

## **Messages**

There are four key messages; each linked to the specific communication objectives. They are listed with supporting, or sub messages. Messages should not be used too literally (translation might not allow this in any case); it is the substance of the message that is important.

The messages rebalance misperception of forest management and underline the benefits that sustainably managed forests provide to society.

Objective 1: Increase understanding within key target audiences that forests are vital to life on Earth. Their management must be sustainable.

**Message 1: Forests are vital to maintaining life on Earth. The EU will play its part in halting global deforestation and contribute to restoring much of the world's forest that has been lost.**

*Forests balance our climate, sequester carbon and provide us with vital oxygen.*

The forest area in Europe continues to expand but many areas of the world need help to halt deforestation and forest degradation.

The lessons we are learning and practices we are developing in Europe in sustainable forest management, legal harvesting and certification can be put to good use in other parts of the world.

Objective 2: To help people understand that sustainably managed forests provide oxygen, sequester carbon, preserve biodiversity, wood, energy, jobs and beautiful environments for living and recreation and many other goods and services.

**Message 2: If we manage forests wisely and sustainably they provide an endlessly renewable supply of materials and products, environmental and social benefits for all of us.**

Sustainably managed forests provide more environmental, economic and social benefits than any other land use.

*Environment: Wise and sustainable management of Europe's forests means that they provide us with clean air and water, stabilize soils and help prevent flooding. They absorb billions of tons of carbon to help tackle climate change and they provide safe homes for a vast range of species.*

*Economic: Wise and sustainable management of Europe's forests provides us with endlessly renewable supplies of environmentally friendly materials, products and services such as timber, food, energy and fuel, and tourism.*

*Social: Wise and sustainable management means European forests provide jobs, places to enjoy ourselves, to relax, play, revive our spirits, improve our health, learn, and protect our cultural heritage and traditions.*

Objective 3: Raise awareness of the general positive state of European forests and also of the threats they face.

**Message 3: Thanks to sustainable management, Europe's forests are growing and generally in good health. However, they need help from us to counter increasing threats (largely from storms, pests, disease, fire and desertification).**

*Europe's forests cover 42% of total land area and continue to expand. Over the past 20 years forest cover has increased by an area equivalent to the size of Hungary.*

*The volume of timber in EU forests – is at its highest level since records began and continues to increase.*

*We use much less timber than we might. We only harvest two thirds of the annual growth of EU forests."*

*Sustainable forest management helps to reduce the impact of threats such as fire, pests and disease.*

Objective 4: Increase the use of sustainably produced wood and other forest products as climate friendly materials and renewable energy sources.

**Message 4: We can reduce our environmental footprint by using sustainably produced wood and other forest derived products.**

*In our changing climate our oldest renewable source of material and energy is still the smart choice in the 21st century.*

*Growing forests remove carbon from the atmosphere. Wood products store carbon and provide us with smart substitutes for energy intensive products and fuels.*

*Wood products\* are renewable, durable, reliable and versatile materials. They help to bring nature into our homes.*

*Many of Europe's forests have independent certification that guarantees they are sustainably managed to international standards. Anyone seeking reassurance that they are taking positive environmental action in buying forest derived products can look for a label of certification.*

*Using sustainably produced wood\* reduces our ecological footprint and helps safeguard forests for the future.*

These messages might need to be localised to suit particular situation. For example, to include the protective function of forests in mountainous regions. They should also be adapted to the characteristics of the specific audiences.

\*In some circumstances the term "wood" might be better substituted with "wood, cork and other forest derived products".

### **Recommended approach**

It is vital that our communications approach is relevant to, and supports, other people's agenda. Our messages must be understandable, credible and supportable. We may not be well known to some key target groups, or they might have strong preconceived ideas about our sector, so we may have to build trust and respect from a low base.

In our approach we should:

- a) Be accessible - use language that is appropriate for the specific audience, avoiding for non specialist audiences the jargon and acronyms that are so prevalent in forestry circles, science community and international relations.
- b) Avoid propaganda - be honest at all times and prepared to say when there is doubt, or where we don't yet have all the answers.
- c) Employ sound evidence - where relevant, we must use our scientists and their research results to back up our case and to explain these in language that connects with the audience. To maintain credibility we must only use facts and figures that are traceable and derived from reliable sources. Reports such as the [State of Europe's Forests](#) Report or the [Global Forest Resources Assessment](#) provide valuable data.
- d) Be transparent – we have nothing to hide so allow access to information, to research, data, reports etc.
- e) We have a good story to tell - be positive and constructive, not defensive, in telling it.
- f) Positive imagery is important and can help to make important emotional links to messages.
- g) Be consistently consistent - to avoid confusion and 'off message' communications we must use clear and, where possible, consistent messages, consistent explanations, consistent language, consistent tone of voice.

- h) Make ourselves relevant - the forestry sector has long had a problem in communicating with the new partners and stakeholders, particularly in making forests and forestry relevant outside our own sector. Rather than engaging with stakeholder groups on our own agenda we must tailor our approach so that we make ourselves relevant and valuable to theirs. This requires careful analysis of the problems faced by others, and a solution, rather than issue or problem, based approach.
- i) Listen, as well as talk - dialogue will always prove to be more effective than monologue so we need to listen to the needs and concerns of others, to encourage conversation and debate.
- j) Localise stories and messages, use local and simple examples to illustrate them. See [Annex 4](#)
- k) Be active – change won't happen by information provision alone. The level of perception shift required will call for a highly concerted, pro-active and sustained approach.
- l) Form partnerships for promotion – working with others, using common messages – makes for more powerful communication.
- m) Link key messages with actions and decisions to be taken.
- n) Communication tools should be selected for their ability to convey messages effectively and efficiently to identified targets groups; a special emphasis is needed in engaging in dialogue and "going local" strategies
- o) Remember that we have diverse communication tools. For example: forests, trees, trucks, signage.
- p) Don't add on communications at the end of a process, effective communication must be incorporated into policy and planning from the outset.
- q) Build professional capacity for effective communication recognizing the complexity of modern communication channels and techniques.
- r) Create mechanism for shared promotion.
- s) All actors should capitalise on International Year of Forests 2011 to create interest and promote these messages. FCN produced list of suggested actions across the wider forestry community (see annex 3).
- t) Share best practices within the forestry sector: what works, what does not, what lessons were learnt (reference to [FCN Best Practices in Forest Communication, 2008](#)).
- u) To allow sharing of information and communication the European Commission could develop a forestry site on the Europe website to facilitate information publishing and sharing of techniques and best practices as an EU wide promotional tool.
- v) Share knowledge and experience through the existing ECE wide Forest Communicators Network – what works, what doesn't, and why.
- w) Be active in challenging the common myths and misperceptions where they occur.

## Research

There is much good research on public attitudes, social marketing and current trends in understanding available to us, especially at national or regional level. We must share this effectively. We must also agree what continuation or extension of the pan-European public opinion research - possibly through the Euro-barometer survey - is required to update our knowledge and provide a better idea of what underlies some of the basic misconceptions.

## Evaluation and review

This strategy needs periodic evaluation to assess its impact on opinions and decisions and to help it adjust to changing circumstances. The EU Standing Forestry Committee oversees the implementation of the strategy, and manages evaluation and review. The higher levels of the strategy will be reviewed when the FAP is revised. Messages, sub messages and supporting facts should be kept under

constant review. The public perceptions survey carried out throughout the EU-region in 2009 informed our thinking in formulating this strategy. Repetition of the survey will help us reassess direction and serve as a valuable baseline to measure outcomes of our communications activity.

**Annexes**

[1 – Summary of public opinion research](#)

[2 – SWOT analysis on forest communication in Europe](#)

[3 – FCN Paper - Capitalising on the International Year of Forests: 2011 to boost forest communications across the wider forestry community.](#)

[4 – Localising delivery of the strategy.](#)

## Annex 1

**Overview on public opinions concerning forests and forestry in Europe**

A study on “Shaping forest communication in the European Union: public perceptions of forests and forestry” was commissioned by the Commission and carried out by a consortium led by *COWI Belgium* from January 2009 to September 2009 as part of the implementation of the EU Forest Action Plan, Key action 18: information exchange and communication. This study provides the latest EU 27 level information on public opinion of about forests and forestry.

The purpose of this study was to get an in-depth knowledge about the public opinion on forests and forestry in the EU and, based on this knowledge, to identify the key areas where public awareness of the role of forests and forestry could be improved.

**Short summary of the study**

Over the last few decades crucial changes have taken place in the way society views forests, and in the demands it places on them. These changes have profound effects on the forest sector, including forest policy makers, forest owners and managers, and the forest industry. These groups experience the need for increased communication and for improved marketing and public relations skills to meet the new demands. First and foremost, however, it requires an increased understanding of public opinion and an effort to listen to society - both consumers and the public at large. The purpose of this study was thus to investigate trends in public perception of forests and forestry based on a review of existing studies and the implementation of a new representative survey across the EU-27.

**Meta-analysis of previous surveys**

First, a meta-analysis of previous surveys was carried out to establish the current state of knowledge on the topic. The materials used for the meta-analysis include a total of 26 surveys published from 2003 onwards, originating from 14 different countries and covering the public opinion on forests and forestry in 21 European countries (including Turkey).

**Survey of key stakeholders**

Next, a survey was conducted aimed at collecting feedback from key stakeholders (forestry experts, government officials, NGOs, forest owners, etc.) involved in the forest sector across Europe as regards their ideas about the public’s perception on various forest-related issues.

**Public opinion survey across the EU-27**

The findings and feedback received from the key stakeholders was then used as input for developing the public opinion survey. This representative survey of the general public across the EU-27 aimed to shed light on the latest developments of public perception on forests and forestry. Conducted via computer assisted telephone interviews, this representative survey was carried out across the EU-27 surveying 11000 randomly selected citizens. Quotas were set to ensure the sample was fully representational across countries, gender and age groups.

**Summary of the main findings**

Based on these three channels (meta-analysis, stakeholder survey and public survey), information was collected and analysed regarding the way the public perceives various issues related to forest and forestry. The questions asked concerned the forests in the interviewees’ own country.

**People perceive protection / prevention of deforestation as the key concern regarding forests.**

Both survey tools, as well as the desk research of previous studies, confirmed this to be the key concern for the large majority of Europeans. Furthermore, all information tools indicate an increasing importance and greater public awareness on the issue of climate change and how it relates to forests.

**People perceive the general condition of European forests to be worse than it actually is.** As predicted by experts and previous studies, the wide majority of European citizens perceived the

total forest area as well as the level of biodiversity to be decreasing. In reality, total forested area in Europe has been increasing over the past two decades (approx. 0.8% per year) and the loss of biodiversity has at least slowed down due to recent policy measures.

**Some key threats and damages to forests (storms, diseases, pests and invasive species) are not well known.** Forest fires are perceived as the most pressing threat followed by harvesting/management damages. At the same time, citizens do not have a strong opinion about threats from wild animals, invasive species, pests and diseases, as predicted by the experts. Contrary to the high media attention given to forest fires, other very important threats to forest health are much less exposed to the public. As a consequence, the European public currently underestimates the damage caused by insects, diseases, invasive species and storms.

**The European public places a higher value on forest conservation and the protective functions of forests than on forest utilisation.** In line with previous studies and expert expectations, the preservation of biodiversity is perceived as one of the most important functions of forests. Furthermore, the expectations of experts that an increasing importance is being placed on the value of forests for protecting against climate change and natural disasters was confirmed by the public survey.

**Public perception of the preferred management style for various forest uses/benefits varies widely.** The overall perception of Europeans of the quality of forest management is rather positive. The clear majority of EU citizens stated they would favour more active management (multifunctional and sustainable management) to better address all three forest functions. This was contrary to expert expectations, which were divided about the likely opinion of EU citizens about management for protecting biodiversity, for protecting against climate change and for providing recreational opportunities.

**People are interested in the links between forests and climate change and the majority believes forests can help in one way or another to tackle climate change.** A clear finding of this study is that people are more and more concerned with, and interested in learning more about, the interplay between forests and climate change. Despite a common perception of the overall importance and urgency of this topic, the public is currently divided as to what types of forest management measures (wood as renewable material, wood for bioenergy, afforestation) could best help address climate change.

#### **New status quo of public perception on forests and forestry in the EU-27**

The conclusions of this study highlight the main parameters of the latest state of public perception (June 2009) of forests and forestry. They can serve as a basic starting point and context for any improvements of forest communication.

**Shift in viewpoint from a traditional commodity-based and recreational management perspective to a demand for greater protection and management of forests for ecosystem services.** As various parts of the public survey have demonstrated, the European public has clearly shifted its expectations as regards forests and forestry from a traditional commodity and recreational perspective to a demand for greater protection and management for ecosystem services (i.e. emphasis on forest services and benefits centred on protection). Corresponding to this general desire to shift away from focussing on utilisation functions of forests, an important finding of the public survey is that the clear majority of EU citizens would favour more active management (multifunctional and sustainable forest management) as the preferred management style to enable such a shift towards a greater emphasis on forest services and benefits centred on protection. This is a vital outcome of this report as it helps set the tone for future forest communication.

**The public perception of European forests is based on diverse sets of information, including communication on worldwide forest and forestry issues.** Partially, this shift in the public's basic perception of now viewing European forests from a protection perspective rather than a more traditional use perspective can be attributed to the fact that the European public receives information from all types of media outlets with a rather global coverage of the issue. Europeans no longer view the state and functions of European forests in isolation. Rather, their perception of the state of forests, forest health and damages, biodiversity levels, and their key issues of concern

regarding forests is based on their assessment of the global situation and a diverse set of information.

### **Implications for future forest communication**

The study formulates recommendations on how national and EU-wide communication on the role of forests and forestry in addressing new challenges (e.g. climate change, the increasing demand for bio-energy, and balancing forest use with nature protection and biodiversity conservation) in European society may be improved. The outcomes of the public survey confirmed expert predictions on the two most requested topics for further information: sustainable forest management and the interplay between forests and climate change. Overall, forest communication faces the challenge to reach out to the public on topics that are currently not high up on the communication agenda.

### **This leads to the definition of three key areas for improving future forest communication across Europe:**

**The need for a clear and sufficiently detailed message presented in a neutral manner that allows the public to make appropriate distinctions depending on the relevant specific issues and challenges, including forest area, biodiversity and damages, for various geographic contexts (i.e. local forests, European forests, forests worldwide).** A future forest communication campaign with a clear message could help further clarify this global perception on forests and sensitise the public toward making appropriate distinctions depending on the relevant specific issues and challenges for the various geographic contexts.

**The need for stressing the important role of forests and wood in tackling climate change.** The public survey has shown that the majority of Europeans believes that forests can play an important role in tackling climate change. However, most people do not feel well informed about complementary measures (e.g. wood as a renewable material, wood for bioenergy, afforestation) and their impacts. Future forest communication ought to be aware of the fact that the public is taking a strong interest in climate change related topics.

**The need for addressing specific audiences.** On a regional level, the South East region of the EU is the most interested in learning more about forests. Additionally, future forest communication could put emphasis on communicating with the more disinterested public, i.e. the young people. Another potential target group lending itself for further assessment are women. Compared to men, women on average place an even higher importance on the amenity functions of forests and are more concerned about forest health and damages. Finally, future forest communication should acknowledge that rural society is largely not discernible from the urban population in terms of public perception, and thus no differentiated communication strategy for urban versus rural areas is needed.

### **Eurobarometer questions for future follow-up of results and recommendations**

Lastly, questions for inclusion in future Eurobarometer surveys have been developed (annexed to the study). These questions are similar to the ones used in this study in order to allow results to be compared. This way the Eurobarometer questions can serve as a follow-up to this study, both in terms of changes in public opinion and in terms of measuring how improved forest communication has influenced these changes.

## Annex 2

## SWOT analysis on forest communication in Europe

<p><b>Strengths</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Forestry in Europe has a good story to tell</li> <li>• There is good evidence to back it up</li> <li>• Public already has a positive attitude towards forests and wood</li> <li>• There is increasing political attention on forests</li> <li>• FOREST EUROPE has started implementing a pan-European forest communication strategy</li> </ul>	<p><b>Weaknesses</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Languages and culture in the region are diverse</li> <li>• There is no mass media with EU wide reach, international media do not equal with EU media</li> <li>• The forest sector is not homogeneous</li> <li>• There is no communications strategy, no common forestry voice, at EU level</li> <li>• There is no cross-cutting financial support for forest communication</li> <li>• Forest issues are complex</li> <li>• The public has low understanding of forest issues</li> </ul>
<p><b>Opportunities</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The forest resource as such can be used for communicating</li> <li>• There is increasing interest in climate change, biodiversity and environment and the role of forests</li> <li>• People are emotionally attached to forests</li> <li>• A combined and concerted approach would be more effective than individual efforts</li> </ul>	<p><b>Threats</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Other 'hot' topics detract attention</li> <li>• People like forests and wood, but dislike timber harvesting</li> <li>• Other sectors compete for the market, funds and attention</li> <li>• The financial crisis creates additional burdens for new initiatives</li> </ul>

### **Annex 3**

#### **Capitalising on the International Year of Forests: 2011 to boost forest communications across the wider forestry community**

Considering the aims and objectives of International Year of Forests: 2011 the Forest Communicators Network offers the following suggestions for activity within the wider European/ECE region.

##### **All actors could:**

Build activities around the key messages;

Use the logo – events, websites, press releases, stationery, cars, events, signage, t-shirts, websites, emails, etc;

Use the IYF website to promote activities;

Seek media opportunities;

Use social media; and

Seek commercial sponsorships and partnerships.

##### **The EC could:**

Conduct an electronic communication campaign on SFM, as done for Int Year of Biodiversity;

Set up an information package on relevant EU forest issues;

Host special events of groups and committees relevant to forestry; and

Adopt forests as a topic or theme for Green Week in Brussels.

##### **The EU Presidency (Hungary, Poland)**

Work with the EC, the Parliament and other partners on launching and implementing the IYF in Europe.

##### **The European Parliament could:**

Launch IYF in Europe;

Formulate a resolution or other type of communication on issues related to IYF;

Organise a series of topical lectures with compelling and authoritative speakers – these could be webcast and podcasts to increase participation; and

Host forest related (possibly interactive) exhibitions of art, architecture, wooden objects or music concerts.

##### **Economic and Social Committee and Committee of the Regions could:**

Organise thematic events, in particular, cross sector events.

##### **FOREST EUROPE could:**

Make the Oslo Ministerial Conference the political highlight of IYF in Europe with a special segment (and possibly side events) dedicated to the IYF.

Prepare an information package for launch of IYF.

**UNECE/FAO could:**

Provide a platform for information exchange on IYF issues and events in Europe (calendar of events, links to national sites, etc). This should complement the UNFF website; and

Organise an interactive event with different sectors relevant to forests.

**National government departments and agencies could:**

Initiate, encourage and co-ordinate national and local activities; and

Translate and localise key messages.

**Forest sector organisations and NGOs could:**

Use their own networks to encourage IYF campaigns and enhance co-operation with regional authorities and educational organisations;

Join forces and form partnerships to deliver messages more effectively (joint campaigns and events);

Use IYF logo in their marketing campaigns etc;

Use existing scheduled events such as Paper Week;

Broaden outreach by: organising art exhibitions, competitions, concerts, factory visits, open days, education activities (eg forest pedagogy); and

Establish a European Forester of the Year Award.

## Annex 4

### Localising delivery of the strategy

Some suggestions:

#### Messages

Make the messages suit local circumstances. Consider language, cultural issues, local examples.

Use national and international level forestry events and stories to promote and underline local messages.

Back up your approach with sound facts and figures. Make sure these are presented in ways people can understand.

When appropriate, compare national figures with EU or global figures to underline national successes.

Use analogies and examples to communicate complex or difficult issues - what everyday analogy would your targets accept as logical and persuasive?

Identify successful local projects which help to get messages across. For example good community projects or heating plants which use wood from forests that people also go to recreate etc.

#### Audience

Be clear about who you need to target and make your approach relevant to their agenda.

Choose people or organisations with influence – who can change things, who can multiply your message, people who make decisions.

Engage key stakeholders in dialogue through briefings and conferences at national/regional/local level.

Understand the key ground from which they draw their beliefs, goals, their facts and their logic.

Consider what benefits they might get from agreeing with us and doing what we want. Why is it important to them?

When dealing with officials, remember they are also people – they have private interests and views.

#### Channels

Consider the widest range of channels available and use what works best for your audience and fits your budget. For example:

- Advertising
- Advocacy
- Banners
- Blogs
- Business cards
- Calendars
- Conference Bags
- Direct mailing

E-mails  
Exhibitions  
Factsheets  
Internet/Intranet  
Letters  
Meetings  
Network  
News media  
Publications – booklets, leaflets  
Presentations  
Poster  
Podcasts  
Photography  
Signs  
Social media  
Text messaging  
Vehicles  
Video  
Workshops

And finally:

Consult the [PR Toolkit and Best Practice](#) studies produced by the UN/ECE Forest Communicators' Network for further advice and guidance.