

The EU Forest Strategy and the support provided under the rural development policy to sustainable forest management

EU FOREST STRATEGY

The EU Forest Strategy¹ adopted in September 2013 aims at establishing a framework for forest-related actions in support of sustainable forest management, based on the coordination of the forest policies of the Member States and EU policies and initiatives relevant to forests and forestry. It acknowledges that while the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union makes no reference to a common EU forest policy, the EU can contribute through its policies to implementing sustainable forest management. The new Forest Strategy, therefore, is based on the principle of subsidiarity and the concept of shared responsibility. The strategy provides a holistic approach to forests addressing also the value chain, and it was prepared in close cooperation with the Member States and Commission services.



The guiding principles of the strategy are (i) sustainable forest management (SFM) and the multifunctional role of forests, (ii) resource efficiency, optimising the contribution of forests and the forest sector to rural development, growth and job creation and (iii) global forest responsibility, promoting sustainable production and consumption of forest products. It also contains a 2020 objective: to ensure and demonstrate that all forests in the EU are managed according to sustainable forest management principles.

The strategy includes 8 interlinked priority areas to contribute to major societal objectives (rural development, competitiveness, climate change and forest protection), to improve the knowledge base (forest information, research and innovation) and to enhance coordination and communication. Each of the priority areas sets strategic orientations and actions to be carried out by the Commission and the Member States. The Strategy also identifies the rural development policy as the main EU instrument for its implementation.

THE RURAL DEVELOPMENT POLICY

Co-financing of forestry and forestry related horizontal measures under the Rural Development Regulation² is the main means of EU-level funding for the implementation of the Strategy (€8.2 billion total public expenditure in 2014-2020). Rural development provides a coherent set of measures in support of sustainable forest management. Relevant measures include support for afforestation, establishment of agroforestry systems, prevention and restoration of damage to forests, investments to enhance the ecological and economic value of

¹ COM(2013) 659 final, https://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/forest/strategy_en

² Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013, OJ L 347, 20.12.2013

forests, knowledge transfer, training and cooperation. Member States can include the forestry measures in their Rural Development Programmes (RDP) according to their specific needs and priorities.

Prevention and restoration of damage to forests from forest fires and natural disasters and catastrophic events³

This sub-measure aims at preventing and restoring (clearing and replanting, natural regeneration) forestry potential after forest fires and other natural disasters including pest and diseases outbreaks and climate change related threats (such as desertification, droughts, storms). The forest area concerned by preventive actions from forest fires should be classified as medium to high forest fire risk according to the forest protection plans.

Main aspects of the measure related to forest fire prevention

Support can be provided for covering specific fire prevention costs: Protective infrastructures, such as forest paths, tracks, access roads, water supply points (including landing zones for aerial means of transport), excluding landing facilities for commercial activities. Operations to maintain protective infrastructure, such as forest paths, tracks, water supply points, firebreaks, cleared and felled areas. Preventive forestry practices, such as repetitive vegetation control, cleaning, thinning, pruning and diversification of vegetation structure (e.g. diversifying and creating vertical and horizontal discontinuities of the cover) and including the use of grazing livestock to decrease the risk of fire.

Facts and Figures

- 80 RDPs of the 118 in 20 Member States programmed support for prevention and/or restoration measures.
- 69 RDPs include prevention operations in 17 Member States with € 1.7 billion, and
- 70 RDPs programmed restoration actions in 19 MS with € 0.7 billion planned total public expenditure.

Best practices

Restoration actions should be in line with the relevant and appropriate level plans and programmes, (national forest program/strategy, forest protection program, climate change adaptation strategy, watershed management program, desertification strategy, etc.). A special attention is to be paid to the selection of areas and species for reforestation.

Reports and studies can be found on the website of EFFIS (European Forest Fire Prevention System): <http://forest.jrc.ec.europa.eu/effis>

More examples can be found in the ENRD website https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/projects-practice_en

³ Article 24 of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013