

MEETING REPORT

8th Meeting of the Carpathian Convention Working Groups on Sustainable Forest Management 10-12 October 2022, Levice, Slovakia

1. Opening of the meeting by the Secretariat and welcome remarks by the WG Forest Chair – Slovakia

The 8th meeting of the Carpathian Convention Working Group on Sustainable Forest Management (WG Forest) was opened by the State Secretary of the Ministry of Environment of the Slovak Republic, Mr. Michal Kiča, who in this opening remarks underlined the importance of cooperation on sustainable forest management in the Carpathians and ensured about Slovakia commitment to its role as the Chair of the WG Forest. In this respect, Mr. Kiča encouraged the WG Forest to further implementation of the Forest Protocol¹ and its Strategic Action Plan², stressing at the same time the need for starting a discussion on revising the current SAP which will expire in 2026.

The Head of the UNEP Vienna Programme Office – Secretariat of the Carpathian Convention, Mr. Harald Egerer, welcomed the participants of the 8th WG Forest meeting and thanked the host of the meeting and the Chair of the WG Forest – the Ministry of the Environment of the Slovak Republic, as well as the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development of the Slovak Republic that was supporting the meeting.

The meeting was chaired jointly by Ms. Csontos Šimoňáková Zlatica the Ministry of the Environment of the Slovak Republic and Mr. Boris Greguška, Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development of the Slovak Republic.

2. Adoption of the Agenda

The Meeting Agenda was adopted without any changes.

3. Short introduction round

The Chair of the WG SARD meeting, invited all participants to introduce themselves and mention their role WG Forest.

Note: There were no official representatives of Hungary, Romania and Serbia to this meeting.

4. Ukrainian forest and forestry – status and urgent needs for development

Ms. Liubov Poliakova, State Forest Resources Agency of Ukraine, delivered an online intervention on behalf of Ukraine addressing the status and urgent needs for development of Ukrainian forest and Forestry. Ms. Poliakova presented general aspects and achievements of the forest management in Ukraine, including approved Strategy of forest sector development and progress on National Forest Inventory, which were confronted with military activities due to the war in Ukraine. As the main challenges of forest rehabilitation are considered mines and forest fires, destroyed properties and equipment, destroyed forest biodiversity, strict legislation and reality of war time, necessary new forest management planning, resources for restoration of forest and biodiversity. Ms. Poliakova appealed to the WG Forest for support in addressing the challenges the Ukrainian forest is facing.

[Related presentation is available on the Carpathian Convention website](#)

5. Report on status of ratification of the Protocol on Sustainable Forest Management

¹ [Carpathian Convention Forest Protocol](#) (2011)

² [Strategic Action Plan to the Forest Protocol](#) (2014)

The Secretariat reported that the Carpathian Convention Protocol on Sustainable Forest Management (Forest Protocol) is in force for all the Parties but Poland, and invited Poland to ratify the Forest Protocol, particularly still within the ongoing Polish Presidency of the Carpathian Convention.

6. Review of the COP6 Decision related to the sustainable forest management (DECISION COP6/13) and the Strategic Action Plan

The Secretariat gave a short overview of the WG Forest structure and its work, particularly with reference to the Forest Protocol and its Strategic Action Plan and the COP6 Decision related to the sustainable forest management (DECISION COP6/13) that are giving the WG Forest direction for further work, such as:

- emphasizing the role of multifunctional and sustainable forest management in ensuring forest ecosystems resilience
- encouraging the WG Forest to continue its work on identification and protection of natural and virgin forests, on promotion of close to nature forestry, and on forestry and climate change in order to implement the respective objectives of the Strategic Action Plan, undertake relevant actions and propose concrete activities in this respect, with the support of the Secretariat and relevant partners.
- inviting the WG Forest, EEA, the European Topic Centre on Urban, Land, and Soil Systems (ETC-ULS), as well as other relevant actors, to continue cooperation and knowledge sharing with the Carpathian Convention and the WG Forest to achieve the implementation of Article 10 of the Forest Protocol with reference to the finalization of the Inventory of Virgin Forests of the Carpathians,
- welcoming the proposal of the Czech Republic and the support offered by Slovakia to organize a workshop on close-to-nature forest management for the Carpathian countries,
- requesting the WG Forest and partners to support the development of the assessment of the impacts of climate change on the Carpathian forests and their ecosystem services,
- requesting exchange information and coordinate efforts to address the problem on illegal logging taking into account already existing mechanisms and platforms, as appropriate.

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7. Updates from the Parties on the implementation of the Forest Protocol to the Carpathian Convention and its Strategic Action Plan

The Chair invited the official representatives of the Parties to provide information on activities supporting implementation of the Forest Protocol in respective country since the last meeting of the WG Forest in 2019.

Czech Republic, represented by Ms. Tereza Toulová, Forest Management Institute, informed about the ongoing initiative preparing a film about close to nature forest management in the Carpathians. The film production is financed by the Ministry of Agriculture of the Czech Republic and intends to support the implementation of the Forest Protocol in frame the Carpathian Convention. Although the film will be shot in the Czech Republic, the aim of the film is to promote close to nature forest management within the Carpathian forests. This initiative shall be complementary to the idea of organizing a seminar on close to nature forest management that was supposed to be organized by the Czech Republic and Slovakia, however postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Romania provided written submission, as per the following: In order to realize something, you must know what you want, the start and the final point. Then, you need tenacity, technical knowledge and determination to eliminate the obstacles.

This is how the Catalogue of virgin and quasi-virgin forests in Romania began. First, the criteria and indicators for identifying these forests, adapted to the situation of our country, were established. They were approved by Ministerial Order no. 3397/2012, which is available at the link <https://legislatie.just.ro/Public/DetaliuDocumentAfis/141475>. The full protection regime of virgin and quasi-virgin forests was also established through this order.

Then, in 2016, also by a ministerial order, the procedure for drawing up identification studies, verification and introducing the forests that meet the criteria and indicators into the Catalogue was adopted. A first form of the order turned out to have some technical problems during its application, so the methodology was revised, being approved by the Ministerial Order no. 2525/2016 (link <https://legislatie.just.ro/Public/DetaliuDocument/186018>).

While working with the order, we noticed that the legal provisions were not fully understood, so that some drafters had their own vision of drawing up the studies. Also, during the verification in the field, done by the territorial authorities, there were observed different approaches. These caused tensions. In order to avoid this kind of situations, a good **practice guide** was drawn up, together with the territorial authorities, the developers and other NGOs (link <http://www.mmediu.ro/articol/ghidul-de-bune-practici-privind-prepararea-verificarea-studiilor-pentru-identificarea-forestelor-virgin-quasi-virgin/3237>).

Another issue risen was the rhythm of identification of the forests which fulfil the criteria, in order to be listed in the Catalogue. In order to identify these forests as quickly as possible, the ministry allocated funds for the preparation of a general study, at the national level, which was intended to be launched in 2019. Unfortunately, no one apply for the realisation of this study, probably due to the large volume of work, which exceeded the capacity of any company. Under these conditions, the initial study was divided into 7 smaller studies and in 2021 these studies were carried out.

The evolution of the areas of virgin and quasi-virgin forests registered in the Catalogue increased constantly from 2016 – when we had about 13000 hectares to 2022 – when we have more than 71000 hectares. The shapes and other identification data of the forests included in the Catalogue are public data and can be found on the web page of the Ministry, at the link <http://www.mmediu.ro/articol/catalogul-padurilor-virgine-si-cvasivirgine-din-romania/5550>.

specifications	area inscribed in the Catalogue (ha) in year						
	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022, aug
Virgin forests	2569,03	5898,92	5898,92	6665,46	7401,98	8579,8	8579,8
Cvasi-virgin forests	10557,84	12397,84	15192,6	23481,97	36421,38	61489,23	62497,64
total	13126,87	18296,76	21091,52	30147,43	43823,36	70069,03	71077,44

Romania don't have a final term for finishing the Catalogue, but we can say that most of the work was done and we don't expect to identify in the future many other surfaces which can fulfil the criteria of virgin and qvasi-virgin forests. At this moment, the Catalogue includes over 1% of Romania's forests and represents the basic pillar, to which other new categories of protected areas will be added.

Finally, Romania approved the National Forestry Strategy 2030, which aligns with the European Forestry Strategy.

Ukraine, represented by Mr. Volodymyr Korzhov, Ukrainian Research Institute for Mountain Forestry, deliver a presentation on ways for fulfilling the Forest Protocol and its Action Plan, including:

- the official administrative regulation of the State Forest Resources Agency of Ukraine obligating the subordinate enterprises to: draw up a plan of measures for the implementation of the SAP and provide annual reporting;
- strengthening international cooperation by implementing projects such as: 1.) HUSKROUA ENI CBC Project "Roads to Healthy Forests: Resilient, Adaptive, Diverse and Sustainable Forests in Cross-border Region of Ukraine and Slovakia and 2.) Qualified foresters - the best forests" (2016-2018) and "Classification of the state of the catchment - the transfer of experience of the US Forest Service to Ukraine" (2019-2021), 3.) "Promote deadwood for resilient forests in the Romanian-Ukrainian cross- border region (RESFOR)"
- enlarging forest cover by developing the State target program "Large-scale afforestation of Ukraine" that includes all the Carpathian area in Ukraine
- approving State strategy forest management of Ukraine until 2035"
- preparing information about virgin forests and quasi-virgin forests, that are available in the state forest enterprises of the Ukrainian Carpathians, subordinated to the State Forestry Agency of Ukraine

Mr. Korzhov stressed the importance of cooperation and exchange on topic of forest transport infrastructure in the Carpathians.

Furthermore, Mr. Korzhov, on behalf of the foresters of Ukraine, I expressed my sincere gratitude for the very great help that the governments and peoples of the countries of the Carpathian Convention are currently providing to Ukraine. He mentioned further that holding of the "Forests of Europe" Ministerial Meeting in August of this year and the upcoming Ministerial Conference of the Carpathian Convention (November 2022), which relate to the restoration and further development of the forest sector of Ukraine, is a strong example of support. And that it is necessary to conduct joint research and projects aimed at solving the tasks of the Carpathian Convention, in which it is advisable to involve Ukrainian forest scientists and specialists of forest management organizations. This will help preserve the scientific potential of the forest sector of Ukraine.

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8. Presentation of the S4C Research Agenda 2022 – 2030 and the S4C recommendations for the WG Forest

Mr. William Keeton from Vermont University, and the Executive Committee Member of the Science for the Carpathians presented the Science for the Carpathians recommendations for the WG Forest, as well as the relevant elements of the new S4C Research Agenda 2022 – 2030. Within the main recommended topics for consideration and further work of the WG Forest have been listed:

- Natural disturbance dynamic, including alteration of disturbance regimes and implication for habitat and ecosystem services
- Ecological silviculture, including but not limited to close-to-nature forestry
- Forest hydrology and relationships to flood regimes and risks
- Improving the region's forest road network, design and engineering

Mr. Keeton focused his further intervention on the problem of forest roads giving various examples of unsustainable forest roads in the Carpathians and beyond and underlining to need for science inputs for projecting and improving the forest roads, particularly understating the impact of forest and skid roads on conservation of forest biodiversity and its ecosystem services. Furthermore, Mr. Keeton informed about the workshop on Science Communication in forest sector that was TMU Workshop on Science Communication organized at the University of Vermont in Burlington, July 25 – 31, 2022, which gathered a number of forest experts, scientist and policy experts to discuss better communication strategy to inform policy on the latest research findings on forests.

It was further recommended to consider exchanging information and technical exchange on forest roads and skid trails within the future work of the WG Forest.

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9. Natural disturbance regimes as a guide for sustainable forest management in Europe & workshop on science communication in forests sector

Mr. William Keeton, Vermont University, Science for the Carpathians, presented the paper on [Natural disturbance regimes as a guide for sustainable forest management in Europe](#). In Europe, forest management has controlled forest dynamics to sustain commodity production over multiple centuries, which resulted in diminishing resilience to environmental stress as well as threatening biodiversity, leading to increasing forest susceptibility to an array of disturbances. These trends have stimulated interest in alternative management systems, including natural dynamics silviculture. In this respect the paper provides the following conclusions:

- High variability of natural disturbances - Natural disturbances are highly variable in size, frequency, and severity, but European forest management fails to encompass this complexity
- Even-aged systems dominate - Silviculture is skewed towards even-aged systems in Europe (73% of management); clearcutting most common regeneration method (52%)

- Significance of residual structure - Residual structure proved crucial in the comparisons, highlighting key difference between forest management and natural disturbances
- Uneven-aged management is closest - Uneven-aged silvicultural systems have the highest Comparability Index values, but constitute only 10% of management in Europe

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10. Seeing the Forest through the Trees: Innovation and More

Ms. Linda Hnatová ClimateGoal, deliver a presentation on innovation to address problems and opportunities in Carpathian forest ecosystems, including innovative for air quality and measurement and management, and use of artificial intelligence technology in forest management.

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11. Wild game effects: a major obstacle to transition from even-aged forestry to nature-based forest management

Mr. Tibor Standovár, Eötvös Loránd University delivered a presentation on high game pressure as one of major obstacle to transition from even-aged forestry to nature-based forest management. Mr. Standovár presented results of the Forest state assessment methodology as well that was supported by the Swiss Contribution project.

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12. Upscaling forest restoration - SUBERB project

Mr. Martin Mikoláš, Czech University of Life Sciences Prague, presented the Horizon SUPERB project that aims to restore forest landscapes across Europe by creating an enabling environment for the implementation of forward-looking forest restoration at different scales. The project has large-scale demo areas in 12 countries, representing diverse stressors (drought, bark beetle, intense harvesting, climate change) on European forests and a wide range of necessary restoration actions. The project aim is to demonstrate best practices and collect practical and scientific knowledge on successful forest restoration and synthesise it for action. One on the demo sites is located in the Carpathians, Fagaras Mountains in Romania. The activities in Fagaras mountains focuses on connecting and enlarging old growth remnants by protecting and connecting old growth forest fragments, establishing buffer zones for primary forest, application of ecological forestry in special areas to increase the structural diversity and a transfer to a non-destructive economy and restoration of the upper timber line and alder galleries.

Mr. Mikoláš, stressed in his presentation that many primary forests are still not mapped and are not protected, and that conservation of only primary forests stands is insufficient, conservation targets should be also the natural forests, valley systems, secondary old growth forests and habitats of protected species if biodiversity conservation and carbon sequestration is the objective. And finally, that ecological forestry approach can be used to restore degraded habitats.

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13. Finalization of the Inventory of the virgin forest in the Carpathians

Ms. Ana Marín Guerrero representing the collaboration between the European Environment Agency, the European Topic Centres and the Carpathian Convention with regard to the development of the Inventory of the virgin forest in the Carpathians, reminded the meeting participants the legal background for conducting the work on Inventory referring to the obligation under the Carpathian Convention to preserve the richness and ensure sustainable use of the Carpathian forests, and

specifically the art. 10 of the Forest Protocol that calls for the identification and protection of natural, especially virgin forests of the Carpathians.

Ms. Ana Marín Guerrero presented the criteria and indicators agreed by the Parties and the process of establishing the Inventory its current statues and results of the recent country consultations that should lead to its finalization. Ms. Guerrero informed about the updates and comments provided by the Parties. Furthermore, Ms. Guerrero informed about other documented primary and old-growth forests in the Carpathians according to the European Primary Forest Database (EPFD v2.0) of Sabatini et al. (2020a) and UNESCO's Primeval Beech Forests of the Carpathians and Other Regions of Europe (UNEP-WCMC 2021).

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As an intervention, Mr. Korzhov delivered a presentation on process of identification of virgin forest in Ukraine.

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Furthermore, Mr. Mikoláš made an intervention on the importance of the primeval forest reserves. Ideally, conservation of primary and old-growth forests should rely on a functionally connected network of strict forest reserves, aimed at integrating all small and isolated primary and old-growth forest patches, with adequately managed buffer zones and corridors. Delineating buffer zones of an adequate size is therefore essential for the conservation of isolated and small stands of primary and old-growth forests. Functions of the buffer zones are:

- Protection of the integrity of primary forest stands and protected areas.
- Maximise connectivity between stands of primary forest which are part of a cluster and between forest stands located at a reasonable distance from each other.
- Integrate primary forest stands with landscape scale conservation measures.

As the next steps regarding the inventory, it was agreed to integrate the comments and updates received from the Parties, particularly to collect the missing information from Ukraine and Poland (Poland didn't provide sufficient information, particularly no geolocations, which are necessary to integrate provided information into the Inventory).

The Secretariat underlined that the Inventory shall not be considered as a project product but as a process and a subject of change, however, the aim is to present and adopt a most advanced version of it at the seventh Conference of the Parties to the Carpathian Convention, to be held in the autumn 2023.

Regarding the extension of the inventory (second layer) to other degrees of naturalness, it was agreed that further discussion about the definition, criteria is needed.

The Chair of the meeting call for better cooperation and synergies between on the topic with other processes, bearing in mind that the Forest Protocol is the only legally binding instrument in Europe on sustainable forest management, as well the binding definitions of natural and virgin forest. The WG Forest work should contribute to the ongoing work of the European Commission on ongoing harmonization of definitions on primary and old-growth forests under the EC Working Group on Forests and Nature.

Lastly, it was agreed to call for additional meeting of the WG Forest that would be dedicated to the definitions of other degrees of naturalness, particularly the natural forests in the Carpathians.

The WG Forest appreciated the work done so far by the EEA and ECT/DI and requested to continue supporting the finalization of the inventory of virgin forest and possibly its extension to other degrees of naturalness of the Carpathian forests.

14. Development of the Assessment of climate change risks and impacts on the Carpathian forests and their ecosystem services

Mr. William Keeton presented the process of developing the assessment of climate change risks and impacts on the Carpathian forests and their ecosystem services, which is in line with the decisions of the COP6 and the [Long-term Vision 2030 towards combating climate change in the Carpathians](#).

The process initiated by the [workshop at the Forum Carpaticum June 2021](#), followed by the first expert group meeting further discussed key impacts and risks as forest ecosystems are facing as well as adaptation responses in the Carpathian region. Further a draft structure for the assessment was presented that is being filled with more in-depth information through a subsequent survey (see the full [background document](#)).

Preliminary conclusions of the assessment include:

1. Climate change effects on disturbances such as fire, wind, insects, and pathogens is of fundamental importance for forest ecosystems and biodiversity
2. Climate change effects on drought and flood frequency and intensity also of great concern
3. Effective adaptation responses are critical, e.g.
 - Restore landscape heterogeneity to increase system resilience
 - Adaptive forest management approaches
 - Reforestation and endemic species restoration
 - Anticipating novel ecological communities of the future

From the discussion on open issues and gaps, the WG Forest identified some additional priority concerns to be further considered within the assessment, including spread of invasive pathogens, climate risk for primary forest, need for guidelines for restoring landscape heterogeneity, game as agent that is harmful to the forest.

As the next step in developing the assessment, the suggested gaps will be considered, while further individual consultations with relevant Parties/experts will be conducted to obtain missing information. Furthermore, the WG Forest will receive an additional request to review and comments on the current synthesis document.

[Related presentation is available on the Carpathian Convention website](#)

15. Assessing forest connectivity and prioritization for conservation

Ms. Annemarie Bastrup-Birk, European Environment Agency and Ms. Ana Marin Guerrero, ETC/DI, jointly delivered the presentation on assessing forest connectivity and prioritization for conservation. In the first part of the presentation Ms. Bastrup-Birk presented the most important elements of EU environmental acquis, including the EU Green Deal and the flagship strategies. Within the biodiversity strategy 2030 and forests, • protection commitments include protecting all remaining EU primary and old-growth forests, and further protection to build a truly coherent Trans-European Nature Network; • Increasing the quantity of forests and improving forest health and resilience are actions that are viewed to drive a joint agenda for achieving both biodiversity targets and climate neutrality; • All public forests and an increased number of private forests should have management plans that include biodiversity-friendly afforestation and reforestation and closer-to-nature- forestry practices.

Furthermore, within the EU Biodiversity Strategy 2030 there is ongoing work on harmonization of definitions for primary and old-growth forest (primary forest according to the FAO definition, OGFs still under development). Ms. Bastrup-Birk stressed the ambitious objectives of the EU Biodiversity Strategy that proposed that 30% of the total area should be protected and 10% should be under strict protection, which gives an opportunity for protection of the Carpathian forest, and particularly primary and old-growth forest under strict protection. Furthermore, the EEA representative underlined the importance of the forest monitoring for achieving the EU environmental objectives and particularly the incoming EU Nature Restoration Law, in this respect the EU Framework for Forest Monitoring and Strategic plans are under development.

The second part of the presentation delivered by Ms. Ana Marin Guerrero, outlined a demo method for assessing forest connectivity and prioritisation for conservation/restoration.

Concluding, the EEA and ETC/DI stressed that the work tested under the collaboration with the Carpathian Convention has been valuable for future monitoring of forest connectivity as requested for upcoming EU forest assessments (i.b. EU Nature Restoration Law),

Presented method should be operational at EU level by 2025/26 if the NRL and EU Framework for forest monitoring are agreed for implementation. However, upcoming budget cuts planned for 2023 might challenge the further work. EEA considering how to prioritise and tackle these challenges to meet the legal requests as well as needs for protecting, restoring and maintaining sustainable management of our forests

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16. Climate-Smart Forest Management for Central and Eastern Europe

Mr. Milan Huncaga, WWF Slovakia, presented the project on Climate-Smart Forest Management for Central and Eastern Europe, which the overall goal of the proposed project is to improve management of forests in Central and Eastern Europe by fostering a transition to climate-smart forestry for the benefit of people and nature. Project specific objectives include:

- Review (proofing) of selected forest management models currently used in the Central and Eastern European region from the viewpoint of climate change.
- Demonstrate application of the climate-smart forestry measures in project demonstration sites in 3 countries of the Central and Eastern European region (Slovakia, Bulgaria and Hungary) and to test their economic feasibility and environmental impact compared to the conventional forestry methods.
- Foster inclusion of climate-smart forestry measures into relevant planning documents related to forest management and /or nature conservation on local to national level (such as forest management plans, nature management plans) as well as into programming documents for EU Regional Funds.
- Increase awareness on climate-smart forestry methods among professional foresters and other relevant professional groups (researchers, conservationists) in the Central and Eastern European region.
- Transfer experience from project demonstration sites to and replicate climate-smart forestry methods in other areas in the Central and Eastern Europe region (including neighboring countries).
- Gain support of the public for climate-smart forestry by increasing awareness on forests and climate change.

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17. Visit to the Forest School in Slovakia - Foresters for raising public environmental awareness

The Secondary Vocational School of Forestry is located in Banská Štiavnica. Currently, the school offers two vocational specializations in the study field of Forestry: Forestry and Landscape Ecology. The school has rich equipment and everything necessary for the quality education of young people and their preparation for the forestry profession or for university. The Secondary School of Forestry has the Kysihýbel School Forest with its own horses, ponds, woods, forest machines, forest workers, its own forest administration and shooting range. In addition to studying, it is possible to develop other skills of interest for the life of a person connected with nature: Hunting and Falconry, Horse riding and care, Beekeeping, Fishing.

18. Ongoing activities within the Forest Europe

The Co-Chair Mr. Boris Greguška, Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development of the Slovak Republic, provided general information about the Forest Europe, which is the voluntary high-level political process for dialogue and cooperation on forests in Europe aiming at enhancing the cooperation on forest policies in Europe and securing and promoting sustainable forest management with the objective of maintaining the multiple functions of forests crucial to society. It has set a definition and criteria and indicators for Sustainable Forest Management (SFM) that are internationally recognized as guidelines for sustainable forest management.

In 2021, at the 8th FOREST EUROPE Ministerial Conference titled “The Future We Want: The Forest We Need”, held in Bratislava, Slovakia on 14-15 April 2021, the Bratislava Ministerial Declaration outlining the Vision for European forest 2030 was adopted, along with the Bratislava Ministerial Resolution „Adapting pan-European Forests to Climate Change“, including the work towards the pan-European forest risk knowledge mechanism (FoRISK).

The aim of this mechanism is to support European countries, through different means and ways, in their effort in forest adaptation to climate change and enhancing resilience and mitigation potential of their forests on ongoing activities of the Forest Europe and possible cooperation opportunities.

On the occasion of the FOREST EUROPE High-Level Policy Dialogue (on 30 August 2022), the European ministers responsible for forests and the observers sent a strong signal of solidarity with the Ukrainian people and the forest sector by endorsing the Ministerial Decision “Supporting the recovery and sustainable management of Ukrainian forests and its forest sector”

Mr. Keeton stressed that the Assessment on climate change impact on the Carpathian forest is well aligned with the (FoRISK) pan-European forest risk assessment being currently concluded for the FOREST EUROPE by the European Forest Institute. Mr. Keeton suggested closer cooperation with EFI for possible synergies and future activities.

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19. Ecological Connectivity and Nature Based Solutions in the Carpathian Region – applied research project

Ms. Noelia Villazon and Mr. Michael R King, students from the Geneva Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies, presented their research project that on Research on the potential socio-economic and environmental impacts of implementing Nature-based Solutions (NbSs) to enhance ecological connectivity in the Carpathian region. The project is conducted in partnership with UNEP and the Secretariat of the Carpathian Convention.

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20. Review and adoption of the updated Terms of Reference for the WG Forest

Ms. Klaudia Kuraś, UNEP Vienna Programme Office- Secretariat of the Carpathian Convention, outlined the new structure and provisions of the Terms of Reference (ToRs) for WG Forest, including its legal background and mandate, strategic objectives, global and European policies and processes, composition and organization of work, responsibilities, activities, co-ordination and cooperation with other WGs and stakeholders. She stated that the Terms of Reference will be effective upon approval of the Carpathian Convention Implementation Committee (CCIC) and shall continue at least until end of 2023/COP7 with a possibility for extension. Ms. Kuras informed that no comments to the draft ToRs for WG Forest were received in the given deadline and in this respect the ToRs will be submitted to the CCIC for its consideration.

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21. Discussion and recommendations by the WG Forest on the future Work Plan

The Chair together with the Secretariat facilitated a discussion on the further activities of the WG Forest that should be included in the new WG Forest Work Plan for 2023 – 2026. It was recommended to continue fulfilling the tasks given by the COP6 and particularly to finalize the Inventory of virgin forest in the Carpathians by integrating the comments and updates from the Parties, especially to collect the missing information from Ukraine and Poland (Poland didn't provide sufficient information, particularly no geolocations, which are necessary to integrate provided information into the Inventory).

Regarding the extension of the inventory (second layer) to other degrees of naturalness, particularly natural forests, it was agreed that further discussion about the definition and criteria is needed. The Secretariat offered to prepare a background document to facilitate the discussion. The WG Forest agreed to call for another WG Forest meeting to be held in an online format, which should be dedicated to the topic on definition of natural forest in the Carpathians.

Regarding the Assessment of the climate change impacts on the Carpathian forest, the draft document will be circulated to the WG Forest again for comments and further inputs. In addition, further individual consultations with relevant Parties/experts will be conducted to obtain missing information.

Regarding the S4C recommendations, while the relevant for the WG Forest recommendation will be added to the Work Plan, the topic which should be particularly considered in the future is the forest roads and related knowledge exchange.

Furthermore, the topic of forest restoration and connectivity shall be further developed, as well as consideration of possibilities for support to Ukraine.

All suggested topics for future WG Forest Work Plan should be integrated and finalized by the Secretariat and sent to the WG Forest for providing comments and further suggestions, especially considering that the WG Forest representatives from Hungary, Romania and Serbia were missing at the meeting.

Once the WG Forest Work Plan, once agreed by the WG Forest, will be sent to the Carpathian Convention Implementation Committee for its consideration.

22. AOB

Not topics were raised under AOB.

23. Conclusions, next steps and closing of the meeting

The Chairs and the Secretariat thanked the participants for contributions to the 8th meeting of the WG Forest, stressing the importance of further close cooperation on protection and sustainable management of the precious Carpathian forests that are the core natural feature of the region, as well as underlining the role that the Carpathian Convention should play in the European discussion on sustainable forest management giving its legally binding instruments. The WG Forest thanked EEA/ETC/DI for continuous cooperation on the relevant WG Forest activities, particularly the development of the Inventory of the virgin forest, and requested further support.

Furthermore, Slovakia, kindly offered to host another physical meeting in Slovakia in 2023.

As the next steps the following was agreed:

- The WG Forest Work Plan 2023-2026 will be consolidated by the Secretariat and circulated to the WG Forest for comments and further suggestions,
- Once finalized the WG Forest Work Plan 2023-2026 will be sent to the Carpathian Convention Implementation Committee for its consideration,
- WG Forest recommended the updated Terms of Reference for approval;

- Regarding Inventory of virgin forest, the EEA/ETC/DI will integrate comments by the Parties and will collect the missing information from Ukraine and Poland,
- Considering the extension of the Inventory of the virgin forest in the Carpathian to other degrees of naturalness, particularly natural forests,
- WG Forest asked the EEA/ETC/DI to continue supporting the WG Forest work, particularly the development of the inventory of virgin forest in the Carpathian, with a possible extension to the other degree of naturalness,
- The Secretariat will prepare a background document for the discussion on definitions and criteria of other degrees of naturalness, particularly the natural forests in the Carpathians, to be included in the Inventory.
- Next, 9th meeting of the WG Forest (online meeting) will be organized to discuss the definitions of other degrees of naturalness, particularly the natural forests in the Carpathians (date to be confirmed),
- The 10th meeting of the WG Forest (physical meeting) will be held in 2023 in Slovakia (date to be confirmed),
- A draft of the Assessment of the climate change impacts on the Carpathian will be circulated to the WG Forest again for comments and further inputs. In addition, further individual consultations with relevant Parties/experts will be conducted to obtain missing information.

Field Trip on 12 October 2022

The manager of the nature trail Počúvadlo/Banský Jarok is the State Forest Enterprise (LESY SR š.p.). The nature trail leads along the collecting ditch, which used to supply water to Lake Počúvadlo. Eight boards display information about forestry and its related activities as well as the surrounding fauna and flora. It is also possible to observe the different vegetation types of trees and to observe nature-based management. The route offers nice views of dense forests and meadows.