



MEETING REPORT
**9th Meeting of the Carpathian Convention Working Group
on Sustainable Forest Management**
16 May 2023, online

All the presentations delivered during the WG Forest meeting are available on the Carpathian Convention website¹

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

The 9th meeting of the Carpathian Convention Working Group on Sustainable Forest Management (WG Forest) was opened by Ms. Zlatica Csontos Šimoňáková, Ministry of the Environment of the Slovak Republic, and by Mr. Boris Greguška, Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development of the Slovak Republic. In these opening remarks, Mr. Greguška underlined the importance of continuing cooperation and implementation of the Carpathian Convention and Forest Protocol by the Convention Parties, working on sustainable forest management in the Carpathians, highlighting the need for developing and take into consideration good quality, reliable, verifiable data, and information about the Carpathian forests regarding the importance of using and combining different sources of data, like remote sensing and field-collected data. One of the priority topics by the Slovak chairmanship of the working group is the support for Ukrainian forests in the current situation of the ongoing Russian war of aggression against Ukraine.

The Head of the UNEP Vienna Programme Office – Secretariat of the Carpathian Convention, Mr. Harald Egerer welcomed the participants of the 9th 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, supporting the meeting organization.

2. Remarks by the Polish Presidency, Mr. Maciej Jędrychowski, Polish Ministry of Climate and Environment

On behalf of the Polish Presidency of the Carpathian Convention, Mr. Maciej Jędrychowski, Polish Ministry of Climate and Environment, thanked all Member States and stakeholders for their engagement so far in the ongoing work, as well as their contribution to the protection of the Carpathian heritage and the strengthening the protection of forest areas. The working group adopted a set of indicators related to natural and virgin forests, which will allow to monitor and map new potential areas. Mr. Jędrychowski emphasized the importance of the forests for economic development, and because of that, the importance of the effort to maintain the balance in all relevant aspects of forestry (social, economic, and environmental) by conducting multi-functional, sustainable forest management.

Mr. Egerer thanked the Polish Presidency of the Carpathian Convention for giving extensive information on the forests in Poland, which will be integrated into the Carpathian Inventory on Virgin forests.

¹ <http://www.carpathianconvention.org/eventdetailwg-forests/events/id-9th-meeting-of-the-working-group-on-sustainable-forest-management-wg-forest.html>



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3. Adoption of the Agenda

The Meeting Agenda was adopted without any change.

4. Finalization of the Inventory of the virgin forest in the Carpathians. Presentation by Annemarie Bastrup-Birk, EEA and next steps to finalize the Inventory, including its recognition at CCIC (Carpathian Convention Implementation Committee) and submission to the COP7.

Annemarie Bastrup-Birk, European Environment Agency, informed participants about the status of the Inventory of the Carpathian Virgin Forests. She mentioned that official data from Ukraine and Poland are planned to be included in the Inventory and the updated baseline is planned to be ready before summer for consultation and presentation at the Carpathian Convention COP7 (CC COP7) in October 2023. Information collected on forests will be accessible via the provided web portal link:

<https://maps.eea.europa.eu/EEAViewer/?appid=151024dc3c4d43848acc4cf7b5c63e0>

The pace of policy development has been significantly faster since the adoption of the EU Green Deal (including the Biodiversity Strategy 2020, the Forest Strategy 2021, Nature Restoration Law – 2022, Forest Monitoring Law and long-term planning 2023), with a mounting emphasis on forests. The Forest Monitoring Law aims to create a unified platform for the European Union to gather all necessary forest information for various processes.

With reference to the Carpathians, as next steps, in addition to the activities related to the Virgin Forest Inventory, Ms. Bastrup-Birk proposed the creation of a non-official layer on virgin and quasi-virgin forests, an update of the Inventory according to the new definitions to be adopted on natural/old growth forests and a possible workshop to be organized in 2024 with the EEA, ETC BE, SCC, WG Forests involvement.

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5. Discussion on the definition and criteria of the natural forests in the Carpathians and related extension of the Inventory, the results of which will be sent to the CCIC for consideration.

Mr. Egerer presented the two alternative notes prepared by the Secretariat on the Definition, Criteria and indicators of natural forests. The first alternative note was developed considering the definition of "virgin forest" in the Carpathian Convention according to the Forest Protocol and action plan. For alternative two, the text was developed in line with the Carpathian Convention and taking into consideration the European Commission [Guidelines for Defining, Mapping, Monitoring and Strictly Protecting EU Primary and Old-Growth Forests](#). Another definition of natural forests was also presented by Mr. Egerer, based on the Romanian proposal to equate the definitions of "natural forest" and "quasi-virgin forest", respectively completing the definition of "natural forests" as follows:

"Natural forests" are forests composed of indigenous tree species, which have, first of all, the characteristics and key elements of the native ecosystem, such as the complexity of the species corresponding to the fundamental natural type of forest, the uneven-aged or relatively uneven-aged structure of the stand, the presence of a wide range of structural, genetic and specific diversity; natural processes not being disturbed by the intervention of the human factor in the last three decades.



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After a discussion with the participants, the Secretariat proposed to develop a third alternative note on the Definition, Criteria and indicators on natural forests, based also on the Romanian proposal and to be circulated before the Carpathian Convention Implementation Committee (CCIC) meeting, to be held on 14 – 16 June 2023 in Mszana Dolna, Poland.

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6. Development of the Assessment of climate change risks and impacts on the Carpathian forests and their ecosystem services, UNEP, Sabine McCallum

Ms. Sabine McCallum, climate change expert at UNEP, presented the draft Assessment of Climate Change Risks and Impacts on Carpathian Forest Ecosystems, whose development was encouraged by the Carpathian Convention Conference of the Parties at its 6th meeting ([COP6](#), 2020). This activity has been included in the [Implementation Framework 2030 accompanying the Long-term Vision towards combating climate change in the Carpathians](#) and the [8th meeting of the Carpathian Convention Working Group on Climate Change](#), held on 6 May 2021 online, decided on the very first engagement for developing the assessment of the impacts of climate change on the Carpathian forests to take place at the Forum Carpaticum 2021 (*Special Session and Workshop on Forest ecosystem vulnerabilities to climate change in the Carpathians*). A dedicated informal subgroup of the Working Group on Climate Change and the Working Group on Sustainable Forest Management has been established after the Forum with experts nominated by the Focal Points of the Carpathian Convention which held its first meeting on 16 November 2021. A subsequent survey provided the main basis for the scope and topics covered by the draft assessment presented, supported by a review of European- and regional-scale scientific assessments, interviews with leading research groups and a literature review.

Ms. McCallum proposed the following steps with regards to the finalization of the Assessment:

- written feedback to the draft assessment is requested from the Carpathian Parties until **31 May 2023**, including additional information on recent practical examples (if any)
- the Secretariat will consolidate feedback and provide an [updated/expanded version](#) to the **CCIC meeting on 15/16 June 2023**
- the Secretariat will further prepare the assessment for **publication and approval by the CC COP7 in October 2023**

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

7. Support to Ukraine

7.1. Ministerial Declaration of the Carpathian Convention on the impact of war in Ukraine on the environment and the need for cooperation and assistance and its implementation, SCC, Klaudia Kuras

Ms. Klaudia Kuras, Secretariat of the Carpathian Convention, presented the results of the Carpathian Convention Ministerial Conference, which took place Rzeszów, Poland in November 2022. The conference aimed at addressing the region's most urgent issues, with the conflict in Ukraine being one of the most significant among them. At the conference, Parties discussed also how the Carpathian Convention could provide support to



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Ukraine. During the conference [two Ministerial Declarations](#) were adopted, one of them “[on the impact of war on the environment in Ukraine and the need for cooperation and assistance](#)”, giving the mandate to the Carpathian Convention to facilitate the consultation with relevant actors, partners and stakeholders to contribute to the process of green recovery and reconstruction of Ukraine. Ms. Kuras presented the activities under discussion within the Secretariat to support Ukraine, like the offer of capacity-building support, including training for sectors relevant to the Carpathian Convention (sustainable forest management, biodiversity, sustainable tourism, agriculture, rural development, and climate change) and exchange among universities, in cooperation with Science for the Carpathians initiative, to assist Ukrainian researchers and facilitate academic exchange with other Carpathian countries. All discussed activities will be collected by the Secretariat in one document/platform and are aimed at helping Ukraine to implement the environmental commitments of various international and European frameworks.

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7.2 On behalf of FOREST EUROPE Secretariat, Liubov Poliakova

Ms. Liubov Poliakova, on behalf of FOREST EUROPE Secretariat, informed that FOREST EUROPE signatories and observers showed their solidarity with the Ukrainian people during the High-Level Policy Dialogue (HLPD) 2022, endorsing the Ministerial Decision "Supporting the recovery and sustainable management of Ukrainian forests and its forest sector". Based on the declaration, a network of experts was set up, a list of ongoing and planned projects to support Ukraine was created together with the development of a "Status quo report" describing situation in Ukrainian forest sector. Forest Europe received a priority list from the Ukrainian authorities in building back better the forest sector during and after the war and conducted meetings with International Organizations, donor countries, NGOs to facilitate the support for Ukrainian forestry, also developing a communication campaign and conducting trainings for Ukrainian foresters on fire prevention on contaminated areas in March 2023. Another training will be organized in person in the Transcarpathia region in Ukraine. Ms. Poliakova highlighted the extensive forest damage and impacts caused by the war in Ukraine and the major needs in the recovery. Ms. Poliakova appealed to the WG Forest for further supporting Ukraine and highlighted the importance of better coordination among ministries in the European countries.

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Mr. Michał Magnuszewski, representing the Polish forestry sector, the State Forests, and the Ministry of Climate and Environment, highlighted the support that Poland has already provided to Ukraine. Efforts have been initiated to assist Ukrainian foresters, as well as the affected citizens and refugees. Currently, the focus is on providing various types of equipment and technical resources. In June, plans are underway to deliver equipment for forest restoration.

7.3. Environment Agency Austria, Isabella Greimeister-Pfeil

Ms. Isabella Greimeister-Pfeil, Umweltbundesamt (Environment Agency Austria), introduced the EU4Environment Water & Data Project, with a component on Land Monitoring in Ukraine, implemented by UBA and ADA with OiEau, OECD and UNECE.



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The goals of the project are to reach an improved environmental, climate and socio-economic resilience, and human health, to strengthen governance and capacity for integrated water resources management and to extend the environmental database for knowledge-based decision-making and the access to open data.

Workshops will be organized in Ukraine, with the participation of thematic experts, stakeholders, decision-makers, and practitioners. These workshops aim to provide valuable insights into Earth Observation data, showcasing 1) Vegetation health dynamics in forest ecosystems (Chernobyl exclusion zone, Trans-Carpathian region) and 2) Temporal relationships between the occurrence of droughts and wildfires (Trans-Carpathian region).

An extension of the Corine Land Cover dataset for the Carpathian region is also foreseen within the project.

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

7.4 Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), Alberto Del Lungo

Mr. Alberto Del Lungo, FAO Country Office Ukraine, provided an overview of the forestry situation in Ukraine and the efforts being made to support the country in aligning with EU regulations. Forestry (only wood production) in Ukraine is estimated to contribute about 0.4 percent to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), wood processing and the furniture industry about 1.4 percent to GDP (expert estimates). The forestry sector is highlighted as a significant contributor to the country's economy and the importance of sustainable forest management for environmental stability and economic growth was emphasized. Mr. Del Lungo mentioned the Carpathian Convention and its relevance for the region, as well as the support provided by FAO in strengthening sustainable forest management in the Carpathians. FAO is supporting the Government of Ukraine in implementing the Carpathian Convention in accordance with Pillar One of its strategies of support the country in the forestry sector: "strengthening Sustainable Forest Management to halt deforestation and forest degradation". According to Mr. Del Lungo, there is a need to better integrate agriculture and forestry activities since, nowadays, wood is not the only source of income from forests. Attention should be given to shifting from wood production to more integrated forest management or nature conservation. Working on the multipurpose use and management of forest establishes a bridge between forest ecology and the provision of forest products and services and Sustainable Management of Forests is important to take into consideration most of the principles mentioned above.

The forestry component of EU funded project "Inclusive, Competitive and Sustainable Value Chain Functioning and Development in agriculture, fisheries and forestry (ICSDAFF)" to be implemented by FAO, is already taking into consideration relevant activities concerning the implementation of the multipurpose forest management plan in the Carpathian region.

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

8. Natura Connect project presentation, WWF CEE, Hildegard Meyer

Mr. Hildegard Meyer, WWF-CEE, presented the EU Horizon Project NaturaConnect-Towards a future coherent Trans-European Nature Network (TEN-N), which started in July 2022 and will end in June 2026. The ambition of NaturaConnect is to co-create with key decision-makers and stakeholders, knowledge, tools, and capacity building, to support EU Member States in realizing an ecologically representative, resilient and well-connected network of conserved areas that contribute to achieving the objectives of the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 (which includes expanding protected areas in Europe to cover 30% of land and sea, with 10% being strictly



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protected). Additionally, the project aims to establish a network connecting these protected areas and ensure effective management practices. Within the project, there is a case study on the Danube-Carpathian transboundary region, where the Carpathian Convention is involved.

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

9. ForestConnect Project Presentation, WWF CEE, Tomasz Pezold Knežević

Mr. Tomasz Pezold Knežević, WWF Central and Eastern Europe, presented the project proposal “Forest Connect :Towards a Climate-smart Forest Connectivity for Large Carnivores in the Balkan-Carpathian Region”, which passed the first step of the EU Interreg Danube Region Programme.

ForestConnect is designed to address common challenges and needs for protecting and preserving forest ecological corridors of large carnivores in the Carpathian and Balkan Mountains. Although climate change effects are recognized by management authorities, this is not translated into resilience-enhancing forest management practices and clear guidance for managers of the territories. The project is focusing on providing cross-border and regional solutions that could be adapted not only nationally but regionally – i.e. the Balkan-Carpathian region, the Alps or the Dinarides. More than 10 partners from Slovakia, Serbia, Romania, Ukraine, Bulgaria and Austria are involved. The Carpathian Convention Secretariat is planning to discuss the possible involvement within the project for the second step submission.

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

10. Greenpeace presentation of the report on the Carpathian Forests, Greenpeace in Central Eastern Europe, Robert Cyglicki

Mr. Robert Cyglicki, Greenpeace in Central Eastern Europe, presented the outcomes of the report “[The Carpathian Forests- Europe’s Natural Heritage under attack](#)”. According to the report, by the law only 3% of the forests are free from the wood extraction and there is a significant loss of tree cover equivalent to 4 hectares every hour, a growing number of forestry roads which are altering the fragile mountain ecosystem and large areas of valuable forests are unmapped. Based on the KEO tree canopy cover area on satellite Landsat imagery in the year 2000, about 3.5% of it was lost between 2000 and 2010 and a further 3.9% between 2010 and 2020 and includes all types of forest areas – from spruce plantations to old growth and virgin forests. Mr. Cyglicki highlighted the fragmented nature of protection measures in the region. According to the report, so far, all protective measures, apart from strict reserves and non-intervention zones, have failed to stop the accelerated destruction of unprotected old-growth forests. Even the long-awaited implementation of the Natura 2000 network of protected areas in the Carpathian EU member states did not halt logging or relieve other anthropogenic pressures on natural habitats and species. Unsustainable forestry practices were identified, mainly focused on maximizing timber production without considering environmental aspects.

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11. Update on the Carpathian Biodiversity Framework, including a Carpathian Vison 2050, SCC, Klaudia Kuras

Ms. Klaudia Kuras, Secretariat of the Carpathian Convention, emphasized the close cooperation between the Carpathian Convention and the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity in the framework of the New



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Global Biodiversity Framework adopted last year. The Carpathian Convention is a regional mechanism for the implementation of the Global Biodiversity Framework and a strong commitment was expressed at the last Ministerial Conference in Poland in November 2022 with the [Ministerial Declaration of the Carpathian Convention on Carpathian Commitments for the new post 2020 global biodiversity framework implementation](#). Based on that, the Carpathian Biodiversity Framework (CBF), which reflects the GBF at the Carpathian level, was developed and is now under discussion. The CBF highlights the need for transformative action across sectors to halt and reverse biodiversity loss. It supports the implementation of the Carpathian Convention and its protocols, including the Forest Protocol and of the Carpathian Vision 2050.

A consultation process will be initiated with the Working Group on Forests and other Working Groups of the Carpathian Convention to gather feedback and finalize the development of the CBF. The aim is to adopt this document at COP7 of the Carpathian Convention, which is scheduled for October in Belgrade, Serbia.

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12. Presentation of the documentary film about close-to-nature in the Carpathian forests, CZ Forest Management Institute, Tereza Toulová

Tereza Toulová, Forest Management Institute of the Czech Republic, presented the trailer of the documentary film about close-to-nature in the Carpathian Forests produced by the Institute in cooperation with other partners, which intends to support the implementation of the Forest Protocol in frame the Carpathian Convention by raising awareness and sharing knowledge on close-to-nature forest.

Here the [link](#) to the full documentary film. Here the [link](#) to teaser.

13. AOB

No topics were raised under AOB.

14. Conclusions, next steps and closing of the meeting.

The Chair and the Secretariat thanked the participants for the contributions to the 9th meeting of the WG Forest, stressing the importance of further close cooperation on the protection and sustainable management of the precious Carpathian forests, underlining the role that the Carpathian Convention should play in the European discussion on sustainable forest management giving its legally binding instruments.

Furthermore, Slovakia, kindly offered to host another physical meeting in Slovakia in 2024.

As the next steps, the following was agreed:

- With reference to the Inventory of the Carpathian Virgin Forests, new data from Ukraine and Poland is planned to be included in the Inventory by EEA and the updated baseline is planned to be ready before summer for consultation and then presentation at the Carpathian Convention COP7 in Serbia, Belgrade, on 11-13 October 2023.
- A third alternative note on the Definition, Criteria and indicators on natural forests, based also on the Romanian proposal, will be developed by the Secretariat in consultation with Romania, Slovakia as Forest WG Chair and interested experts, and will be circulated before the



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Carpathian Convention Implementation Committee (CCIC) meeting, to be held on 14 – 16 June 2023 in Mszana Dolna, Poland.

- With reference to the “draft Assessment of climate change risks and impacts on the Carpathian forests and their ecosystem services”, written feedbacks are requested from the Carpathian Parties until 31 May 2023, including additional information on recent practical examples (if any). The Secretariat will consolidate feedback and provide an updated/expanded version to the CCIC meeting. The Secretariat will further prepare the assessment for publication and approval by the CC COP7 in October 2023.
- The documentary film about close-to-nature in the Carpathian forests, developed by the CZ Forest Management Institute, will be translated in all Carpathian languages, starting with a translation in Ukrainian done by the Secretariat and shared with Carpathian stakeholders and partners (included FAO) in the country.
- The 10th meeting of the WG Forest (physical meeting) will be held in 2024 in Slovakia (date and place to be confirmed) and a possible forest workshop could be organized in the Ukrainian Carpathians (depending on the security situation) in cooperation with FAO.