Carpathian Convention Working Group on Sustainable Forest Management
Work Plan and Mandate 2027–2029

While conducting its activities, the Carpathian Convention Working Group on Sustainable Forest Management (WG Forest) will follow its Terms of Reference and the strategic objectives established therein. As main reference documents, the WG Forest will use the relevant decisions adopted at the Carpathian Convention COP8, the Protocol on Sustainable Forest Management and its Strategic Action Plan, and the Carpathian Biodiversity Framework and its Implementation Plan, while contributing to the implementation of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030, the EU Forest Strategy for 2030 and the EU Nature Restoration Regulation. The WG Forest will also contribute to the four strategic priorities of the Presidency of Ukraine (2027–2029) set out in Decision COP8/3 para 2: strengthening the position of the Carpathians at the European level; balancing economic development with environmental protection; advancing biodiversity conservation and ecosystem integrity; and strengthening climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction through sustainable water and land management.

Timeline: unless otherwise specified, the envisaged activities are to be implemented continuously/completed by COP9 in 2029. The implementation of the Work Plan is subject to the availability of resources.

1) Implementation of the Forest Protocol and the Carpathian Biodiversity Framework

Action: Continue working on the priority topics of the WG Forest, in coherence with the Carpathian Biodiversity Framework and the strategic priorities for 2027–2029

Mandate:

DECISION COP8/13 para 6:
Requests the WG Forest, in cooperation with other relevant Working Groups and stakeholders, within their respective mandates, to:
a. support the implementation of the Forest Protocol and contribute to the implementation of the Carpathian Biodiversity Framework;
c. identify priorities for regional cooperation and potential joint initiatives;
d. strengthen and maintain cooperation with other relevant Working Groups, particularly on cross-cutting issues related to climate change, biodiversity and ecosystem services;

DECISION COP8/3 para 4:
Requests the thematic Working Groups to revise and implement their respective Work Plans, if applicable, in coherence with the strategic priorities and the programme of work for 2027-2029;

DECISION COP8/14 para 3:
Invites Parties, relevant Working Groups and stakeholders to:
a. promote integrated and participatory planning approaches that align sustainable energy and infrastructure development with biodiversity conservation, spatial planning and ecological connectivity objectives;
c. ensure that environmental impact assessments and strategic planning tools are systematically applied to transport and energy infrastructure projects, including in transboundary contexts;

Strategic Action Plan of the Forest Protocol – Actions 6.1–6.3, 8.1, 11.1 and 11.2

Envisaged activities:

- Continue working on the priority topics: identification and protection of natural, especially virgin and quasi-virgin forests; close-to-nature forest management; forests and climate change, including integrated forest risk management; forest connectivity and restoration; and support to Ukraine on forest-related issues;

- Strengthen cooperation on the priority topics with the WG Biodiversity, WG Climate Change and WG Sustainable Agriculture and Rural Development;

- Exchange experience on integrating forest and biodiversity safeguards into spatial planning and environmental assessment of infrastructure and energy projects in forest areas.

Action: Update the Inventory of Virgin Forests of the Carpathians and extend it to other degrees of naturalness, particularly quasi-virgin forests, in line with EU Guidelines

Mandate: DECISION COP8/13 para 2:
Encourages further use and development of the Inventory of Virgin Forests of the Carpathians, and invites the Parties, the WG Forest, relevant stakeholders and the European Environment Agency to cooperate in extending the inventory to additional categories of forest naturalness, as appropriate;
Decision COP7/13 para 3 – Criteria and indicators for the identification of quasi-virgin forests

Strategic Action Plan of the Forest Protocol – Actions 6.1, 6.2 and 6.3

Envisaged activities:

- Parties to review the Inventory and identify new virgin and quasi-virgin forests in line with the criteria and indicators adopted at COP7[1] and EU guidelines

- Prepare, by the end of 2027, guidelines on step-by-step collection of information on quasi-virgin forests, taking into account national definitions and the EU Guidelines on primary and old-growth forests (2023), and present them at a workshop for the Parties;

- Promote the effective protection of virgin and quasi-virgin forests, exchange information on related economic implications and compensation, and continue exchange with the Permanent Secretariat of the UNESCO World Heritage site "Ancient and Primeval Beech Forests of the Carpathians and Other Regions of Europe".

Action: Promote close-to-nature forest management in the Carpathians

Mandate: DECISION COP8/13 para 6:
Requests the WG Forest, in cooperation with other relevant Working Groups and stakeholders, within their respective mandates, to:
b. facilitate and promote exchange of knowledge, experience and good practices on sustainable forest management in mountain areas, including close-to-nature forest management approaches, forest restoration and measures to enhance the resilience of forest ecosystems to climate change and other natural hazards.

Strategic Action Plan of the Forest Protocol – Action 8.1

Envisaged activities:

- Hold the experience exchange among the Parties on restoration of close-to-nature forests, including experience from relevant projects;

- Cooperate on guidelines for the management of forests in protected areas and Natura 2000 sites, taking into account relevant EU guidance on closer-to-nature forest management;

- Discuss and propose projects and initiatives promoting close-to-nature forest management.

Action: Exchange information and coordinate efforts to address illegal logging

Mandate: DECISION COP8/13 para 1:

[1] CC/COP7/DOC8 – Criteria and indicators for the identification of quasi-virgin forests in the Carpathians http://www.carpathianconvention.org/cop7/docs/officialdocuments/CC_COP7_DOC8_Criteria%20and%20indicators%20quasi-virgin%20forests%20ADOPTED.pdf

Encourages Parties to strengthen the implementation of the Protocol on Sustainable Forest Management, taking into account national circumstances, with a view to ensuring the sustainable use, conservation and restoration of Carpathian forest ecosystems;
Decision COP6/13 para 7

Strategic Action Plan of the Forest Protocol – Action 5.3

Envisaged activities:

- Exchange information and coordinate efforts to address illegal logging, taking into account existing mechanisms and platforms, as appropriate; further actions to be considered by the WG Forest.

2) Forests and climate change

Action: Promote the Assessment of Climate Change Risks and Adaptation Options for Carpathian Forests and their Ecosystem Services[2] taking into account the specific conditions of the Parties

Mandate: DECISION COP8/13 para 4:
Encourages Parties, relevant Working Groups and stakeholders to consider and apply the policy recommendations of the Assessment of climate change risks and adaptation options for Carpathian forests and their ecosystem services, as appropriate;

DECISION COP8/19 para 8:
Encourages Parties to consider, as appropriate, translating and disseminating key knowledge products and assessments developed under the Carpathian Convention into national languages, with a view to facilitating their wider use in policymaking, implementation and awareness-raising;

Strategic Action Plan of the Forest Protocol – Actions 11.1 and 11.2

Envisaged activities:

- Further disseminate the Assessment, including through Climate-ADAPT and FOREST EUROPE, and prepare a plain-language summary and translations into national languages, building on the Czech translation;
- Support the implementation of the Assessment's recommendations through activities such as workshops and the development of educational materials, planning and management guidelines;
- Select priority recommendations for joint action and propose projects and initiatives supporting them.

Action: Strengthen cooperation on integrated forest risk management

Mandate: DECISION COP8/13 para 5:
Takes note of the results of relevant EU projects, including ForestConnect project, and encourages the WG Forest and relevant partners to support the development of strategic approaches to climate-resilient, risk informed, and connectivity-enhancing forest management;

DECISION COP8/13 para 6:
Requests the WG Forest, in cooperation with other relevant Working Groups and stakeholders, within their respective mandates, to:
b. facilitate and promote exchange of knowledge, experience and good practices on sustainable forest management in mountain areas, including close-to-nature forest management approaches, forest restoration and measures to enhance the resilience of forest ecosystems to climate change and other natural hazards.

DECISION COP8/17 para 2:

[2] CC/COP7/DOC10 – Assessment of Climate Change Risks and Adaptation Options for Carpathian Forests and their Ecosystem Services http://www.carpathianconvention.org/cop7/docs/officialdocuments/CC_COP7_DOC10_Assessment%20of%20climate%20change%20risks%20Carpathian%20forests%20FINAL.pdf

Invites Parties, Working Groups and relevant stakeholders to further develop and strengthen integrated early warning systems for environmental risks, including floods, flash floods, droughts, forest fires and extreme weather events based on harmonized monitoring, methodologies, indicators and data systems. Such efforts should ensure full integration and interoperability with existing environmental information systems, and promote cooperation at transboundary and regional levels through exchange of data, best practices and experience;	
Envisaged activities: - Consider the establishment of a subgroup of the WG Forest on integrated forest risk management, as proposed by the WG Forest Chair at the 17th CCIC meeting, covering landscape fires (including fires on agricultural land and forest fires), drought, water retention and the prevention and management of natural hazards; if agreed, prepare its terms of reference and invite the Parties to nominate experts; - Exchange with the Alpine Convention, including its Working Group on Mountain Agriculture and Mountain Forestry, on risk monitoring and good practices, and with FoRISK on knowledge and practice exchange on wildfires, windstorms and biotic agents; - Compile good practices and develop joint approaches on wildfire prevention, drought resilience, water retention and the protective functions of forests, in cooperation with the WG Climate Change on early warning systems; - Promote integrated, community-based fire management across the Carpathian region, linking local fire prevention, early detection and response with regional coordination and cross-border data exchange; Share data and findings on landscape fires, including from the Regional Eastern Europe Fire Monitoring Center (REEFMC) and the project Forest Resilience for Disaster Risk Reduction in the Danube Region (FoReDiR), and promote research on post-fire succession in fire-sensitive beech, spruce and fir forests.	**Envisaged activities:** - Consider the establishment of a subgroup of the WG Forest on integrated forest risk management, as proposed by the WG Forest Chair at the 17th CCIC meeting, covering landscape fires (including fires on agricultural land and forest fires), drought, water retention and the prevention and management of natural hazards; if agreed, prepare its terms of reference and invite the Parties to nominate experts; - Exchange with the Alpine Convention, including its Working Group on Mountain Agriculture and Mountain Forestry, on risk monitoring and good practices, and with FoRISK on knowledge and practice exchange on wildfires, windstorms and biotic agents; - Compile good practices and develop joint approaches on wildfire prevention, drought resilience, water retention and the protective functions of forests, in cooperation with the WG Climate Change on early warning systems; - Promote integrated, community-based fire management across the Carpathian region, linking local fire prevention, early detection and response with regional coordination and cross-border data exchange; - Share data and findings on landscape fires, including from the Regional Eastern Europe Fire Monitoring Center (REEFMC) and the project Forest Resilience for Disaster Risk Reduction in the Danube Region (FoReDiR), and promote research on post-fire succession in fire-sensitive beech, spruce and fir forests.

3) <u>Forest connectivity and restoration</u>
Action: Assess and improve forest connectivity and restoration
Mandate: DECISION COP8/13 para 5: Takes note of the results of relevant EU projects, including ForestConnect project, and encourages the WG Forest and relevant partners to support the development of strategic approaches to climate-resilient, risk informed, and connectivity-enhancing forest management; DECISION COP8/9 para 2: [Adopts the revised International Action Plan on Conservation of Large Carnivores and Ensuring Ecological Connectivity in the Carpathians 2027–2035, and invites Parties, the WG Biodiversity, Large Carnivore Expert Group, and other relevant Working Groups and stakeholders to support its implementation;]

DECISION COP8/9 para 7:
Acknowledges the outputs of the ForestConnect project relevant to the implementation of the Carpathian Convention and its instruments related to improving ecological corridors and habitats for large carnivores, in particular, the Strategic Action Plan (SAP) with Adaptation Actions and Climate Resilience-Enhancing Forest Management practices for protected areas and other project results, and invites the WG Biodiversity, its Large Carnivores Expert Group and relevant stakeholders to consider and make use of the SAP, as appropriate, in the context of their further activities;

DECISION COP8/17 para 5:
Encourages Convention bodies and Working Groups to make use of CCIBIS, as appropriate, for sharing thematic outputs, project results and other relevant information generated under the Convention;

Strategic Action Plan of the Forest Protocol – Actions 4.2 and 6.5

Envisaged activities:

- Promote the implementation of the ForestConnect Strategic Action Plan with Adaptation Actions and Climate Resilience-Enhancing Forest Management Practices for Protected Areas and related guidelines, and use CCIBIS to share forest-related data, outputs and project results;
- Continue engaging the EEA/ETC-DI on assessing forest connectivity and prioritization for conservation and restoration, using NaturaConnect outputs and supporting the implementation of the EU Nature Restoration Regulation in the Carpathians;
- Contribute to the forest-related actions of the revised International Action Plan on Conservation of Large Carnivores and Ensuring Ecological Connectivity in the Carpathians 2027–2035, subject to its adoption at COP8.

4) <u>Support to Ukraine</u>

Action: Support Ukraine on forest-related issues, in coherence with ongoing initiatives in the Ukrainian Carpathians, in particular the GEF-8 project "Enhanced Protected Areas Network for Biodiversity Conservation and Development"

Mandate: DECISION COP8/2 para 2:
Welcomes ongoing and planned initiatives supporting Ukraine, including the CARPATHIAN LIFE, the GEF-8 project on protected areas in the Ukrainian Carpathians, and cooperation with UNIDO, and encourages further engagement and contributions by Parties and partners;

DECISION COP8/2 para 3:
Welcomes cooperation with international processes and organizations, including Forest Europe and the Food and Agriculture Organization, particularly in support of sustainable forest management and recovery efforts in Ukraine, and encourages further synergies in this regard;

DECISION COP8/2 para 5:
Encourages the continued and active participation of Ukrainian authorities, experts, protected areas managers, civil society and other stakeholders in the activities of the Carpathian Convention, including Working Groups, projects and regional initiatives;

Strategic Action Plan of the Forest Protocol – Actions 3.1 and 3.2

Envisaged activities:

- Promote coherence between the forest-related activities of the GEF-8 project and the Forest Protocol, its Strategic Action Plan and this Work Plan, with technical input from the WG Forest, as appropriate;
- Present the progress and results of the GEF-8 project at WG Forest meetings and share them with the Parties, including data on virgin and quasi-virgin forests for the update of the Inventory, where available;
- Facilitate the participation of Ukrainian experts in the WG Forest, its activities and experience exchanges, and identify further support needs and partners, including FOREST EUROPE and FAO.

5) Cooperation with partner initiatives

Action: Contribute to the forest-related priorities of the Carpathian Convention–EEA Work Plan 2027–2029, subject to its confirmation by the EEA (TBC)

Mandate: DECISION COP8/4 para 6:
Welcomes the ongoing cooperation with the EEA and its contribution to improving the availability, accessibility and comparability of environmental information relevant to the Carpathian region, based on the existing Partnership Agreement and in this context approves the Work Plan 2027-2029 (TBC), and further encourages continued cooperation between the Secretariat, Convention bodies and the EEA to implement it;

DECISION COP8/13 para 7:
Requests the Secretariat, subject to the availability of resources, to:
b. facilitate cooperation with the European Environment Agency and other relevant partners;

DECISION COP8/17 para 4:
Encourages cooperation with relevant European and global initiatives and actors, including the European Environment Agency and other data and knowledge platforms, to ensure compatibility and added value of Carpathian monitoring efforts;

Envisaged activities (TBC):

- Contribute to the harmonization of criteria and definitions of virgin and quasi-virgin forests, in coherence with definitions proposed at the EU level, and to the co-production of an old-growth forest layer for the EEA information systems;
- Contribute to the mapping and monitoring of the forest indicators of the EU Nature Restoration Regulation in the Carpathians;
- Promote structured exchange of expertise with the EEA, ETC-DI and Eionet, including on FISE, BISE and Climate-ADAPT, and reciprocal participation of experts in relevant meetings.

Action: Cooperation with the Science for the Carpathians (S4C)

Mandate: DECISION COP8/3 para 5:
Invites Parties, Working Groups and relevant stakeholders to closely consider and support implementation of recommendations from the Science for the Carpathians network, as relevant for the Programme of work and strategic priorities for the implementation period 2027-2029;

DECISION COP8/7 para 3:
Encourages the thematic Working Groups and the Carpathian Convention Implementation Committee to make systematic use of relevant scientific knowledge and practical experience, including outputs of the S4C network, particularly its recent recommendations in their work;

DECISION COP8/7 para 4:
Encourages continued cooperation between the S4C network, the Working Groups and the Secretariat to:
a. support evidence-based implementation of the Convention and its Protocols;

Strategic Action Plan of the Forest Protocol – Actions 9.1, 9.2, 14.1 and 14.2

Envisaged activities:

- Consider the S4C recommendations relevant to sustainable forest management when planning and implementing the activities of the WG Forest;
- Encourage scientific and technical exchanges, including on guidelines for forest road and skid trail planning, design, maintenance and management;
- Invite S4C experts to WG Forest meetings, contribute to a forest-related session at the Forum Carpaticum 2027, and identify projects and funding for relevant actions.