

2nd Thematic Group meeting on Supporting the Needs of Forest-Dominant Rural Areas and Municipalities: Laying the Groundwork for networking under the Forest Strategy

This was the second meeting of the Thematic Group (TG) on Supporting the Needs of Forest-Dominant Rural Areas and Municipalities: Laying the Groundwork for networking under the Forest Strategy. The objectives of the meeting were to: discuss how working in partnership with multiple stakeholders can address the needs identified by rural stakeholders in forest-dominant rural areas; explore ways in which the CAP and other tools can help contribute to a balanced approach to achieving multi-functional forests; and discuss how TG members can benefit from continued networking.

Good practices for balancing different needs to achieve multi-functional forests.

Between the first and second meeting of the TG, members had collected 20 examples of good practices from seven Member States to showcase different ways in which networking and working in partnership had been used to balance different needs to deliver multi-functional forests. Four examples of initiatives were presented in this session to show the variety of approaches adopted.

Barbara Oellerer (BOKU) and Burcu Yesil (Climate Analytics) provided an outline of the [Forest Navigator project](#), a Horizon Europe project investigating a range of policy pathways for EU forests towards meeting climate targets to support EU and national policy makers. These policy pathways will be co-designed with EU policy makers, national authorities, and other key stakeholders. They invited members of the TG to join their Stakeholder Board.



Vanja Strand (Swedish Forest Agency) shared the example of the Vilhelmina model forest, highlighting the negotiations and cooperation that had taken place to resolve conflicts surrounding the use and management of a large municipal forest in northern Sweden. Tensions centered around different forest practices, environmental sustainability and access rights for indigenous migrant reindeer herders. Active stakeholder

Event Information

Date: 31 May 2023

Location: Virtual meeting

Organisers: CAP Implementation Contact Point

Participants: 43 participants from 12 Member States, including representatives of Managing Authorities, National Networks, environmental NGOs, agricultural and forestry organisations, researchers, and the European Commission.

Outcomes: The development of recommendations about how networking and collaboration can help resolve tensions and address the multiple needs facing forest-dominant rural areas.

Web page: [2nd meeting on Supporting the Needs of Forest-Dominant Rural Areas and Municipalities](#)

engagement to secure local support and increase knowledge exchange had been essential to highlight the different values of the forest and inform decision making.

Anne Crespin (Pro Silva Europe) presented the Askafor project, which had developed a network of forest owners to discuss the feasibility of transitioning to close-to-nature/continuous cover forestry. The network consisted of foresters and one expert who met periodically in each other's forests to identify the key barriers for changing forest management practices and use peer to peer learning to explore how to overcome these and identify the opportunities. The foresters found the network so useful that they have continued beyond the end of the project.



Finally, **Manuel Bertemeu (University of Extremadura and EURAF)** explained the actions that had been carried out in Spain in the Mosaico project. The aim of this project was to introduce mosaic landscapes, and thus increase the resilience of the area to forest fires by mixing grazed habitats and active forest management. The project has worked collaboratively with land managers, public authorities, and other local stakeholders (e.g., resin tappers and forest users) to change the management of the area, using CAP support where possible to finance the practices required. The provision of advice and facilitation has been central to the success of the project.



Interactive Session: Highlights from the Breakout Group Discussions

TG members broke into three groups to discuss how the various CAP instruments could be used to support multi-functional forests and how working in partnership and networking can help to balance the different needs and interests in forest-dominant rural areas.

Key points and recommendations emerging from the discussions included:

- > The needs and issues facing forest-dominant rural areas vary depending on the area. There was agreement that networking is central to finding solutions for complex issues, and that these cannot be resolved through regulation alone.
- > An easily accessible platform for sharing good practice examples, and institutional networking among Member States were among some of the tools mentioned that could contribute to more effective exchanges among stakeholders.
- > Effective communication about regulations, relevant data (both local and regional, national, EU level), stakeholders' needs, experiences with initiatives and the practical application of regulatory requirements in the field should work in both directions (bottom-up and top-down). It should be encouraged for developing effective institutional and regulatory mechanisms as well as funding support schemes to support the balanced use of forests. Involvement of forest stakeholders in meaningful discussions about the development of legislative proposals that affect forest owners and managers (e.g., Nature Restoration Law, LULUCF Regulations) would help minimise tensions and concerns about the impacts of forest livelihoods and lead to better legislation.
- > Although the CAP includes a range of interventions that can be used to support the development of forest-dominant rural areas, there is confusion amongst stakeholders at the local / national level about which support is available in their country in relation to forestry. The development of easily accessible synthesis of the support available by the relevant authorities would be extremely useful - covering forest specific interventions and horizontal support, e.g., for advice, cooperation etc.
- > There needs to be a change in mindset at national and practitioners' level about ways of managing forest areas in the future so that they are productive, resilient to climate change as well as benefiting the environment and respond to the needs of local communities. These changes in mindset are needed within Member State institutions as well as amongst those working on the ground. It is important that: institutions liaise with one another and do not work in silos; that ways are found to exchange knowledge and experiences between academics, advisers and practitioners; and that local initiatives involve all relevant stakeholders with a stake in what happens in the locality.
- > Forest extension services play a vital role to facilitate the changes required - however, in many places these services have been cut which hampers progress towards delivering targets in a joined-up way, e.g., for afforestation, or for developing new ways of managing the land, e.g., to manage fire risk.

Next steps

TG members agreed that ongoing networking between stakeholders in different Member States had been useful and would benefit from being continued. However, it was not specified what form this should take or who could lead the ongoing networking activities. Marc de Smet (DG AGRI) committed to present the recommendations from the TG at the Standing Forestry Committee meeting on 6 June 2023.