

# European Forest Monitoring Far from Being Complete

Michael Köhl

The United Nations Climate Change Conference, held in Poznań, Poland, last December, reconfirmed the future problems of human societies arising from climate change. In the forestry sector, the vulnerability and adaptation of forests to climate change render prognoses on future developments difficult and deteriorate the extensive knowledge of forest ecosystem functions and tree growth gained in the long history of forest research and forest management.

In addition to climate change, forestry is facing a diversity of challenges such as the increasing demand for timber as a renewable resource, the need to protect forest habitats and their biological diversity, changing flow of trade driven by globalisation, land-use change, or damages caused by storms, insects and forest fires. All this has exposed forestry to an increased public perception.

The demands of different stakeholders are to some extent contradictory and result in conflicts regarding the appropriate management of forests. For example, those focusing on habitat protection propagate the abandonment of timber harvesting while others claim the sustainable utilization of timber in order to meet the demands for renewable resources. The committed discussions on the "correct" management of forests carry the difficulty that each perspective seems to be per se coherent. Part of the problem is certainly the fact that forests are not an all-in-one device suitable for every purpose. But often the line

of argument is restricted to a specific perception and does not take into account the implications as a whole.

Here forest monitoring comes into play. The current MCPFE report on the State of Forests in Europe 2007 revealed a specific problem. The report utilized information from national forest inventories and from the EC/ ICP-Forests forest condition monitoring as main data sources for the 6 pan-European criteria and 35 quantitative indicators. A detailed analysis of the submitted data showed that the overall completeness of the requested information was 57%. The highest degree of completeness was achieved for the indicators "increment and fellings", "forest area" and "protective functions – soil, water and other ecosystem functions", while lowest levels of completeness were found for the indicators "deadwood" and "services". These findings can be regarded as an indication for the still unbalanced provision of data on the entire set of information needed

to describe the sustainable management of the multiple functions of forests.

These information gaps are not solely the result of a lack of methodological approaches in forest monitoring. In the recent decade much emphasis has been put on the development of schemes to assess the non-timber functions of forests. Now these approaches need to be implemented in forest monitoring programmes. In addition, the analysis of forest monitoring data should not be restricted to a mere description of the current state and changes of forests, but be expanded by epidemiological analyses and causal inference in order to get further insight into forest ecosystem functions and processes.

The European National Forest Inventory Network (ENFIN) and the FUTMON project, which was currently launched by the European Commission and involves 44 European forest research institutions, are promising initiatives to facilitate the provision of a holistic view on European forests. This holistic view is urgently needed in times of competing demands concerning the wood and non-wood functions of forests.

*Michael Köhl is a member of EFI's Scientific Advisory Board, chair of ICP-Forests, and Head of the Institute for World Forestry, Hamburg, Germany.*

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