



EUROPEAN FOREST
INSTITUTE

Open letter

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To Heads of States on the need for an Earth Forest Summit

An urgent need to put forests on the global agenda

Climate change has reached a tipping point, becoming a climate crisis that is having a domino effect on many of our world's forests. It is now crucial for global leaders to come together and hold an Earth Forest Summit.

We need to discuss the future of our forests and agree on their governance and actions for the benefit of people and our planet. The benefits of our forests transcend national boundaries, our strategies and actions should too transcend them.

The importance of forests to climate

It is an ironic reverse of evolution to consider that when trees first emerged 380 million years ago the world was 10°C hotter and CO₂ concentrations were 10 times what they are today. Forests made our planet more habitable, and their destruction will make it distinctly uninhabitable for humans and much other terrestrial life.

The IPCC Special Report on Climate Change and Land released in August 2019 brought a clear message:

“Reducing deforestation and forest degradation lowers greenhouse emissions, while sustainable forest management can maintain or enhance forest carbon stocks, and can maintain forest carbon sinks, including by transferring carbon to wood products... These can store carbon over the long-term and can substitute for emissions-intensive materials reducing emissions”.

Forests cover more than 30% of the global ice-free land surface, and are a fundamental part of the solution to climate change. However, they are also being affected in an unprecedented way by climate change itself. Forest fires have reached new levels of intensity, while becoming the new normal in countries where they were not an issue before. The same is true for new pests and diseases affecting our forests. Forest dieback due to long-lasting drought is as well bringing many of our forests to their limits.

The importance of forests for a sustainable future

The world's forests are the largest terrestrial **carbon sink** we have. They are also the main terrestrial source of **precipitation** and **biodiversity** and therefore are key to supporting life on our planet. Furthermore, forests are the largest source of non-food, non-feed **renewable biological resources**. These are key resources that can help to transform our current fossil-based economy into a sustainable **bioeconomy**, accelerating widescale decarbonization.

Tackling deforestation and forest degradation, supporting forest adaption to climate change and natural disturbances, and creating new forests and implementing sustainable forest management are fundamental to moving **towards a climate neutral planet and a sustainable future.**

What action is needed?

The first step is recognizing that forests are our most important terrestrial natural capital and are excessively under-valued and under-appreciated. Second, it is vital to establish a **science-based understanding** on the state of the world's forests, including threats and the opportunities they offer to transition from a fossil economy towards a circular bioeconomy. Third, our forests require a **long-term and holistic approach** which integrates climate change mitigation and adaptation, biodiversity and their role in decarbonizing our economy. This approach requires us to overcome the past short-sighted and polarized debate between conservation and production. Biodiversity and the bioeconomy are the two sides of the same coin: sustainable development.