



3rd Policy Steering Committee Meeting Sept. 2023

During the annual ForestNavigator consortium meeting, members of the Policy Steering Committee (PSC) gave an update on important forestry policy developments at the EU level, and in two of the ForestNavigator case study countries Ireland and Sweden. They also provided relevant feedback for ForestNavigator work discussed during the annual consortium meeting.

Adrian Tištan (DG-ENV), highlighted the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030, and the accompanying Guidelines for implementation that have been published in 2023, as well as the EU Forest Strategy for 2030. Adrian presented more in detail the close to nature guidelines and the Close to Nature Management Toolbox by different EU regions. He emphasized the move towards multifunctionality and closer to nature forest management. He has also provided an update on the EU forest monitoring law objectives, still under approval.

Nicolas Roberts (EEA) complemented the update of EU level policies, focusing on the less discussed policies such as the circular economy action plan and the EU sustainable finance strategy. He also presented tools developed at EEA that may help to align forest information in the future.

Shane Flanagan (Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Ireland) discussed highlights from the 2023 expanded Irish Forestry Programme. The Programme expands forestry premiums to stimulate afforestation, native forests, including a broadleaves target and emphasizes continuous cover forestry. He discussed factors, such as competing land use targets (including competition with agricultural sector) that make it very challenging to achieve the legally binding climate change targets in Ireland by 2050. Increasing forests emissions trends in Ireland's forest estate are adding to the challenge.

Hillevi Eriksson (Forestry Agency, Sweden) discussed the changing policy environment in Sweden, where there is an increased focus on actions such as rewetting for climate mitigation. Unfortunately, she reports declines in support for climate change policies, such as a pause in obligations to increase national biofuels targets or biodiversity protection areas.

Detailed feedback and further discussion highlighted the forest management storylines, the role of the bioeconomy and forest management maps. With regards to the storylines, PSC members emphasized the importance of aligning the various storylines with the EU Forest Strategy and EU policy goals such as the revised EU LULUCF Regulation targets, as well as national obligations. Further emphasis was put on the need to balance various elements of the storylines, including the wood substitution effects, climate adaptation, ecosystem services, and the bioeconomy, to meet EU policy goals and targets. Given that targets are to be achieved at the national level, assessments of storylines should be conducted at this level to address and highlight specific needs.

Members of the PSC stressed the role of the circular bioeconomy in forest storylines and addressing various climate targets. They noted that the bioeconomy plays an important role to reduce pressures on forests and that managing forests in a more sustainable manner might yield positive results for both climate (i.e. carbon) and biodiversity. The consortium will consider future wood substitution effects and the benefits for forest sector, energy sources, and biodiversity. Many important questions were raised, including how the EU forests can contribute to the sustainable transition of society and how payments for ecosystem services could support the transition. The PSC members and consortium partners discussed specifically the circular bioeconomy, which is considered a means of reducing consumption and promoting more sustainable practices in the bio-based sector.

Feedback and discussion focused also on the forest management map, including the classes and the purpose of the map. Within the project, the forest management maps are used for calibrating the current status of management in large scale models. In addition, members highlighted the forest management maps may also be valuable to be used as an indicator for the future EU forest monitoring system. Questions arose about refining forest management classes, improving resolution, and understanding the data layers used to refine forest management. The distinction between plantation forests and intensively managed production forests was also raised, and it was noted that the information should remain useful for assessing management sustainability.

Along the remaining three years of the project, feedback from the PSC will continue to be solicited to ensure the project results will be of optimal use for policy makers.