SUMMARY of the 4th THINK TANK MEETING
1-2 April 2025

Biodiversity Conservation and Wood Production: Strategies for Sustainable Forest Management

Prepared by: Nelson Grima and Maja Radosavljevic

1. EXECUTIVE SNAPSHOT

The 4th Think Tank Meeting underscored a broad consensus on the critical need to embed biodiversity conservation into forest management as a central strategy for achieving ecological resilience and long-term sustainability. Scientific insights highlighted the importance of balancing biodiversity, climate mitigation, and economic objectives through coordinated policy instruments and adaptive management models. Retention forestry and landscape-level planning were identified as key approaches to support multifunctional forests that fulfil ecological, economic, and social roles. Climate-smart strategies that prioritize the preservation of existing carbon stocks, promote long-lived wood products, and mitigate emissions from land use disturbances were emphasized as essential for addressing climate challenges. At the same time, participants acknowledged the influential role of diverse stakeholder perceptions (particularly those of policymakers, industry actors, and forest owners) in shaping forest policy and practice.

The meeting also drew attention to several systemic barriers and enablers of sustainable forest management. Gaps in public understanding and trust, particularly around harvesting and the role of managed forests, were seen as critical challenges, highlighting the need for improved communication and engagement. Policy incoherence and bureaucratic fragmentation across governance levels were flagged as significant obstacles to effective implementation. To overcome these, participants stressed the importance of aligning financial mechanisms such as biodiversity-linked incentives and bioeconomy-focused investments, with sustainability goals. Looking ahead, the planned TEAMING UP 4 FORESTS (TU4F) scientific assessment will integrate these insights to shape its scope and recommendations. The TU4F platform will remain a vital cross-sectoral forum for building shared understanding, aligning strategies, and fostering coordinated action among science, policy, and industry stakeholders.

2. KEY MESSAGES

Resilience in the forest sector is increasingly at risk, as mounting climate and biodiversity pressures reduce forest productivity and jeopardize the long-term availability of raw materials, particularly in regions dominated by softwood species. In response, retention forestry and landscape-level planning have emerged as practical, balanced approaches that support continued wood production while strengthening ecological integrity and public confidence. However, existing carbon accounting frameworks and forest policies are in urgent need of reform. Without adjustments to better support long-lived wood products, minimize leakage risks, and align economic incentives with broader climate objectives, current systems may undermine rather than enable climate-smart forest practices.

At the same time, persistent perception gaps and fragmented policies continue to impede meaningful progress. Participants highlighted the importance of bridging the disconnect between the increasing demand for sustainable wood products and widespread public resistance to harvesting practices. To facilitate this transition, targeted financial mechanisms such as biodiversity-linked premiums, climate-smart subsidies, and payments for ecosystem services are essential to incentivize and scale up transformative forest management. Finally, participants emphasized that transparent communication and inclusive, cross-sectoral cooperation are vital to ensure the public's trust in the forest sector in general, and in sustainable forestry efforts in particular.

"Biodiversity conservation and wood production can go hand in hand—many well-managed forests prove this every day. The key is to take a holistic approach. TEAMING UP 4 FORESTS provides a valuable platform for researchers, practitioners, and policymakers to exchange and achieve this balance."

- Amila Meškin
EUSTAFOR

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"In the context of climate change, decisions we make today, shape landscapes for decades. TEAMING UP 4 FORESTS excels in translating latest scientific knowledge into operational insights. The networking opportunities help me to establish partnerships that lead to the implementation of more sustainable practices on the ground."

- Nenad Šimunović
Mondi Group

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3. MAIN INSIGHTS FOR THE FOREST-BASED SECTOR

Resilience in Europe's forests is under mounting pressure, as ecosystems face unprecedented challenges. European forests used to be reliable carbon sinks, but most of them are now shifting towards becoming net carbon sources, with soil carbon stocks being depleted faster than they can regenerate. Simultaneously, ongoing biodiversity decline is eroding ecological stability, compounding the risks to forest health. These pressures are also translating into escalating supply risks, intensifying concerns over the long-term availability of wood due to species decline, increase of drought frequency, and regulatory uncertainty. In this context, adaptive silviculture and species diversification are no longer optional approaches, they have become strategic imperatives to safeguard future forest productivity and resilience.

Retention forestry has emerged as a promising solution, offering balanced gains for both biodiversity and wood production. By preserving key legacy structures such as old trees and deadwood within broader landscape-level planning, this approach helps maintain ecological functions while sustaining economic output. Nevertheless, public perception remains a significant obstacle. A growing disconnect between societal expectations and the realities of sustainable harvesting is exacerbated by fragmented regulations and a lack of transparency. In parallel, the current carbon narrative requires urgent refinement. More sophisticated accounting methods are needed to capture the nuances of biogenic carbon and the substitution effects of wood products. Stable, coherent policy signals are essential to encourage investment in climate-positive forest solutions and to guide the sector through a just and effective transition.

"Given the current environmental, regulatory and economic challenges concerning forests, it is more important than ever to collaborate within the supply chain of forest-based industry, and beyond with all stakeholders.
Industry players are redefining their roles, towards becoming more proactive.
Especially conversations between science, policy and industry, as in TEAMING UP 4 FORESTS, are promising to come up with new approaches to solutions."

- Christian Schuster
LENZING

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"Promotion of biodiversity can and should also be integrated in managed forests, as it can foster their resilience and the delivery of ecosystem services. Knowledge exchange among stakeholders is crucial for an effective implementation of biodiversity conservation strategies across multiple scales."

- Andreea Spînu
University of Freiburg

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4. REFLECTIONS AND STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS

Effective forest management cannot rely on one-size-fits-all approaches. Strategies must be tailored to the unique ecological, social, and ownership conditions of each region to ensure relevance and impact. While science plays a critical role in guiding these strategies, it must empower rather than overwhelm decision-makers. To this end, complex models and datasets must be translated into clear, practical tools that support informed, context-sensitive action on the ground.

Finance, trust, and communication emerged as equally crucial enablers of transformative change. Scalable forest practices, particularly among private forest owners, depend on the availability of appropriate financial incentives to take root. At the same time, overcoming policy fragmentation and institutional inertia requires a strong coordination across sectors, supported by multi-level governance and a shared long-term vision.

Finally, communication must be treated as strategic infrastructure. Strengthening public understanding of forestry's role in climate and biodiversity goals will require more than data; it demands compelling storytelling, on-the-ground demonstration, and inclusive dialogue that builds trust and fosters collective ownership of solutions.

As seen during the Think Tank Meeting and summarized in this document, the challenges facing Europe's forests demand coordinated action, adaptive leadership, and integrated thinking. While there is no silver bullet, the shared commitment among stakeholders is clear: forests must remain ecologically resilient, economically viable, and socially supported. With this in mind, TU4F will continue to serve as a catalyst for strategic collaboration, bridging science, policy, and business to deliver on this vision. We invite all partners and stakeholders to actively contribute through knowledge, data, and reflection, toward shaping the next phase of our work.

"The demand for renewable wood resources is increasing, but the quantities available are limited. It is therefore important to use wood in a sustainable manner, and to process and use it efficiently, according to the so-called cascade principle. Ultimately, an entire sector must evolve and adapt to new conditions with new products."

- Michael Reinhard
Swiss Federal Office for the Environnement

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"This exchange between researchers, industry, policy developers and forest managers is the best way to share perspectives, experiences and expectations.
At the end, we have to create and permanently develop a framework for balancing all needs to assure a resilient biosphere and making bioeconomy happen."

- Roland Kautz
Austrian Federal Forests

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HOST: Teaming up 4 Forests (Forest science-Business platform)

Location: Future Health Lab, Vienna
Moderator: Nathália Granato Loures

List of participants

Alexander Buck, *IUFRO*

Dirk Längin, *Mondi*

Michael Kleine, *IUFRO*

Maja Radosavljević, *IUFRO*

Jose Bolanos, *IUFRO*

Denis Popov, *Mondi*

Johann Rindler, *Mondi*

Janice Burns, *IUFRO*

Andre Purret, *IUFRO*

Gerda Wolfrum, *IUFRO*

Nelson Grima, *IUFRO*

Nenad Šimunović, *Mondi*

Susan Brunner, *Mondi*

Doris Unterrainer, *Mondi*

Marianne Friedrich, *BML*

Christian Ruthner, *MM Board & Paper*

Andreas Kogler, *Papierholz Austria*

Michael Reinhard, *Swiss Federal Office for the Environment (FOEN)*

Andrey Krasovskiy, *IIASA*

Florian Kraxner, *IIASA*

Andreea Spînu, *University of Freiburg*

Metodi Sotirov, *University of Freiburg*

Tommaso Chiti, *University of Tuscia*

Špela Pezdevšek Malovrh, *University of Ljubljana*

Manfred Lexer, *BOKU*

Mersudin Avdibegović, *University of Sarajevo*

Katharina Lapin, *BFW*

Roland Kautz, *Austrian Federal Forests (ÖBF)*

Amila Meškin, *EUSTAFOR*

Rebecca Hunt, *Forest Europe*

Christian Schuster, *Lenzing*

João Melo Bandeira, *The Navigator Company*

Timo Lehesvirta, *Metsä*

Tomáš Parík, *Wood and Paper*

Björn Schmid, *UPM*

Nataša Govedarica, *Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Serbia*