



## 1. Introduction

Forest Focus is a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council that concerns the monitoring of forests and environmental interactions within the Community, and which was adopted on 17 November 2003.<sup>1</sup> Bringing together earlier Regulations on Forest Pollution<sup>2</sup> and Forest Fire,<sup>3</sup> it represents a Community scheme for harmonised, broad-based, comprehensive and long-term monitoring of forests in Europe. The Forest Pollution Regulation was a result of research in the 1970s showing that air pollution was having an increasingly negative impact on the health of trees, while the Forest Fire Regulation was introduced in 1992 to protect forests against fires. Meanwhile, frequency of forest fires is still increasing in southern Europe,<sup>4</sup> an average of 400,000 hectares of forest being lost to fire each year.<sup>5</sup> Forest Focus is an attempt to combine earlier pieces of legislation on these issues into one that is designed to cater for both these, and the wider environmental concerns relating to forests in Europe.

Given the significance of the Forest Focus legislation for EU forests, and the importance of NGO participation in ensuring its success, this paper presents a summary of Forest Focus and its implementation, and highlights the ways in which NGOs need to contribute to its future development and implementation.

## 2. Objectives

*Forest Focus* aims to monitor and combat the threats to forests from air pollution and forest fire, and also to address issues such as biodiversity, impacts of climate change, carbon sequestration, soil and the protective function of forests.

*Forest Focus* also provides for measures to:<sup>6</sup>

- promote the harmonized collection, management and assessment of data
- improve data evaluation at European Community level

- improve quality of data and information
- develop forest monitoring activities
- enhance the understanding of forests
- study forest fires
- develop indicators and methodologies for risk assessment

### 3. Implementation process

In broadening its scope to address a greater number of the threats facing forests, and by increasing the number of forest monitoring sites throughout Europe, *Forest Focus* represents a major step forward for forest conservation in the EU. Up until 2007, it is anticipated that the emphasis of its implementation will be on the planning and testing of new monitoring systems, while the real benefits of the new Regulation – when information from the monitoring process is used towards combating threats – are expected during the next funding period (2007 – 2013).

#### *Responsibility*

*Forest Focus* is a legally binding instrument. As a Regulation it must be implemented directly by the Member States. The European Commission is responsible for the co-ordination, monitoring and development of the scheme. Moreover, unlike its predecessors, which fell under the responsibility of DG Agriculture, *Forest Focus* falls under the responsibility of DG Environment, thus increasing the importance of DG Environment in relation to EU forest issues. DG Environment has in turn developed a new unit (Forest), under Directorate 3 (Protecting Nature Environment).<sup>7</sup>

#### *National programmes*

*Forest Focus* should be implemented by the Member States under a series of two-year national programmes which are drawn up by the Member States and submitted, including an *ex ante* evaluation, to the

Commission. Approval by the Commission is needed when Member States wish to change their national programmes. After three years a mid-term evaluation by the Member States is required. At the end of the first period over which the scheme runs (four years), an *ex post* evaluation of the national programmes must be carried out.

#### *Reporting by Member States*

Member States must annually forward, to the Commission, any data collected under the *Forest Focus* scheme, accompanied by a report.

#### *Co-operation*

In order for *Forest Focus* to function properly, co-operation is necessary – especially between the Commission's Joint Research Centre (JRC) and the European Environmental Agency (EEA), but also with the International Co-operative Programme on Monitoring the Effects of Air Pollution on Forests (ICP) and the European Forestry Information and Communication System (EFICS). The Commission can, and probably should, also consult other research institutes and experts when needed.

#### *Financial aspects*

The budget for the implementation of *Forest Focus* is 65 million<sup>8</sup> Euros for the first four-year period. This includes 9 million Euros for fire prevention measures. The Commission will finance part (50-75%) of the national programmes.

## 4. Problems and limitations

With its strong focus on monitoring, research, planning and testing, *Forest Focus* risks being primarily an academic exercise rather than a tool to really alleviate the threats to European forests. There also seems to be little room for NGO participation in its implementation, with most of the work being done by forest research bodies.

In addition, some of the measures identified in *Forest Focus* may actually be potentially harmful to

forest ecosystems. For example, through the building of roads to prevent the spread of forest fires – a measure which may further increase fragmentation of already heavily fragmented forests in many parts of the EU.

Finally, there is already some delay in the implementation of *Forest Focus*, beginning with an initial six-month delay in the adoption of the Regulation.

## 5. NGO participation

In order to ensure the Regulation's potential for forest conservation, NGO lobbying for increased NGO participation in *Forest Focus* will be essential.

*Funding* – In the event that *Forest Focus* receives sufficient funding for areas such as demonstration projects, awareness raising and education, it may be possible for NGOs to receive funding from *Forest Focus* budget lines.

*Lobbying* – The results of *Forest Focus* monitoring will provide important information for NGO lobbying efforts for improved forest conservation in the EU.

*Specialist groups* – It is not clear whether or not NGOs are represented in the expert groups (see section 3: *Co-operation*). NGOs should, therefore, initiate discussions with DG Environment regarding the possibilities for increasing NGO participation under *Forest Focus*.

*National programme evaluation* – NGOs can get involved in the process of commenting on *ex ante* evaluations of national programmes as it is likely that some Member States will try to avoid any extra work in order to implement *Forest Focus*. NGOs can also contact their national Ministries for Forestry and/or Environment to find out how *Forest Focus* is implemented in their country.

*Forest legislation development* – In its initial stages, *Forest Focus* aims to provide better knowledge of forest issues through monitoring. This stage is to be followed up, from 2007, by a process of developing the legislation further, based on the results of the monitoring process in the first stage. This second stage will provide an opportunity for NGOs working on improvements to forest management and forest conservation to ensure that forests are sustainably managed and that there is a good working monitoring, assessment and reporting system.

## 6. Conclusion

Given the legally binding nature of *Forest Focus*, and the inclusion of issues such as biodiversity, climate change, soil protection, pollution and forest fire, *Forest Focus* is a progressive piece of environmental EU legislation which has the potential to produce tangible benefits for forests in the EU.

As highlighted above, there are a number of ways in which NGOs can use *Forest Focus* to their advantage, by, for example, lobbying and increasing NGO participation in the evaluation of the national pro-

grammes in which the objectives of *Forest Focus* are drawn up. The Forest Pollution legislation, on which *Forest Focus* was partly based, was very successful in monitoring the effects of pollution on forests. As a result of the measures to improve air quality forests are beginning to recover. Such measures, however, were in the interests of both forest protection and the forestry industry. The ultimate tests for *Forest Focus* – from an environmental perspective – will be in situations where these interests come into conflict.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Regulation (EC) No. 2152/2003

<sup>2</sup> Regulation (EEC) No 3528/86

<sup>3</sup> Regulation (EEC) No 2158/92

<sup>4</sup> More information available at: [http://epp.eurostat.cec.eu.int/cache/ITY\\_OFFPUB/KS-59-04-306/EN/KS-59-04-306-EN.PDF](http://epp.eurostat.cec.eu.int/cache/ITY_OFFPUB/KS-59-04-306/EN/KS-59-04-306-EN.PDF)

<sup>5</sup> Between 1990 and 2002

<sup>6</sup> Available at: <http://europe.eu.int/scadplus/leg/en/lvb/128125.htm>

<sup>7</sup> Available at: <http://europa.eu.int/comm/dgs/environment/directory.htm#b>

<sup>8</sup> See Regulation (CEE) 788/2004, in which article 13 has been amended, at: [http://europa.eu.int/eur-lex/pri/en/oj/dat/2004/L\\_138/L\\_13820040430en00170018.pdf](http://europa.eu.int/eur-lex/pri/en/oj/dat/2004/L_138/L_13820040430en00170018.pdf)