

An aerial photograph of a vast, dense forest landscape. The forest is composed of many green trees, with some areas showing autumnal colors. In the distance, a small lake is visible, reflecting the sky. The horizon is flat, and the sky is a pale blue with some light clouds.

# Reflections on the role of the EU in supporting healthy forests

Hannah Mowat

fern

MAKING EUROPE WORK  
FOR PEOPLE & FORESTS



# Fern

- **Founded:** 1995 - 30 years!!
- **All forests!** Tropical and European
- **Team:** 18 people
- **Location:** 4 offices - Brussels head office
- **Budget:** 3M (Public and Private)
- **Governance:** Flat structure
- **Mission:** To increase understanding of, and access to, European policy making; and to campaign for policies and practices in Europe that focus on forests and forest peoples' rights and deliver economic, environmental and social justice globally.
- **Vision:** An environmentally, economically and socially just world where people influence, improve and implement decisions that affect them, their forests and the climate.

# Evolution of EU Forest Policy: Four Phases of Conservation Forces

## Phase 1: Early Conservation (1992)



Minimal Opposition



## Phase 2: Carbon Focus (2013)



Growing Tension



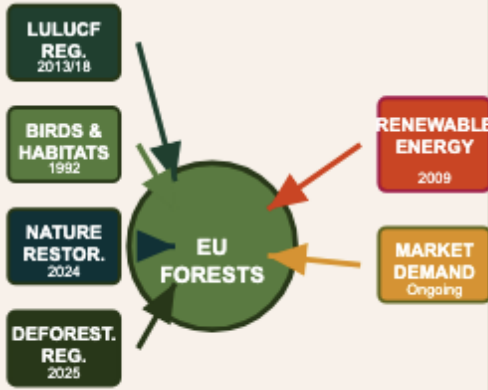
## Phase 3: Restoration Era (2024)



Some Balance



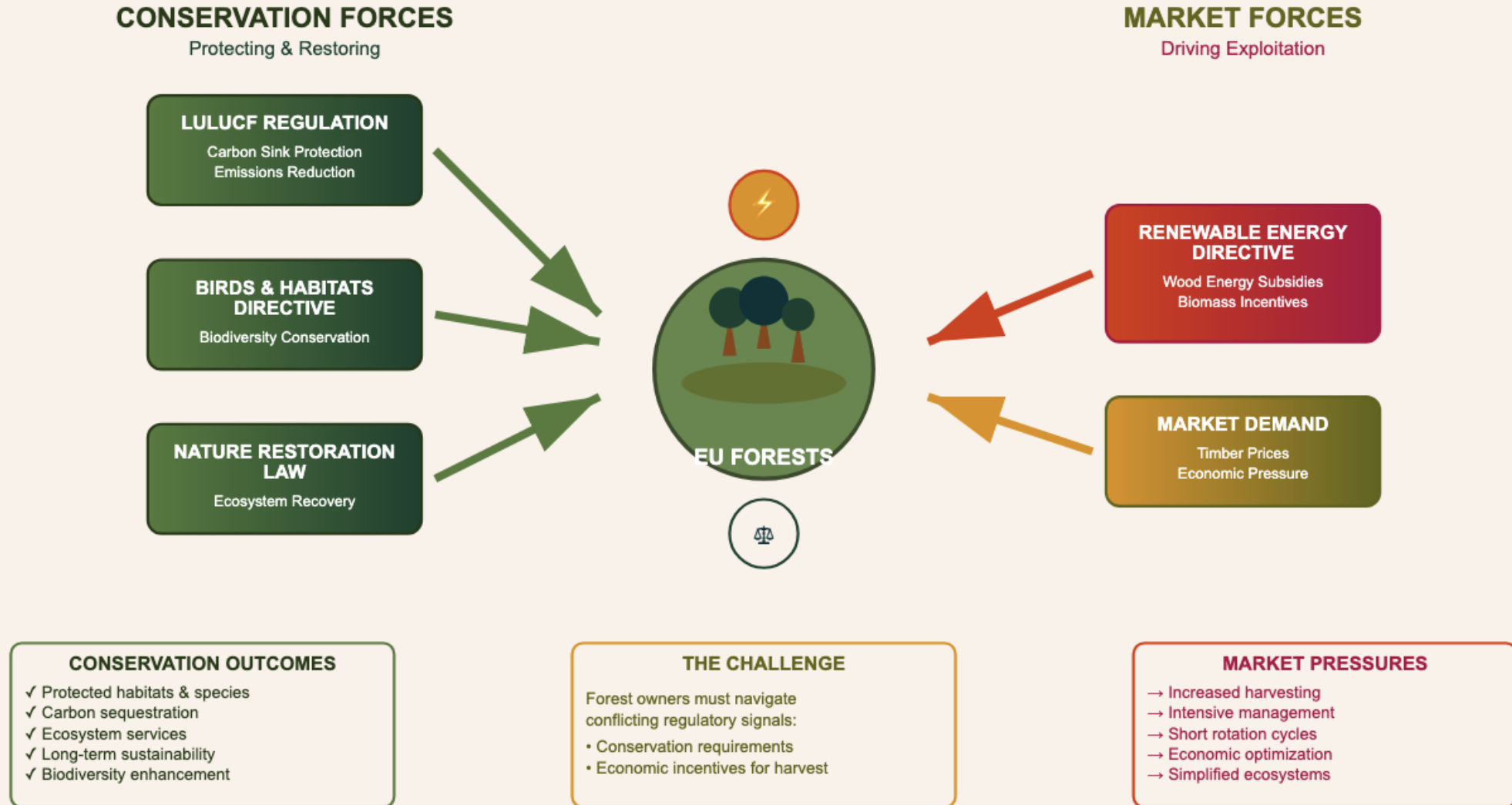
## Phase 4: Supply Chain Control (2025)



More Balance



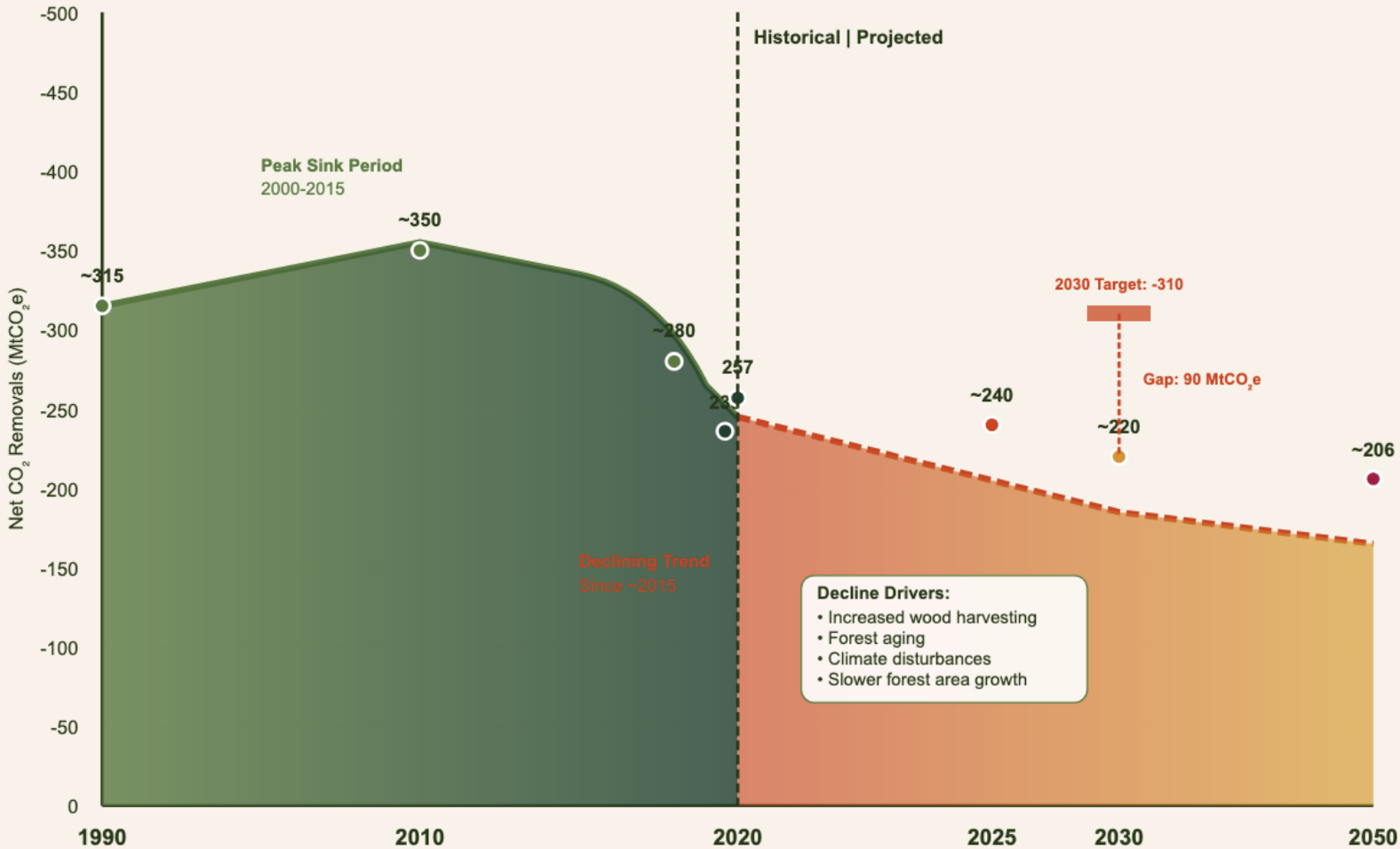
# EU Forest Policy: Competing Forces



Forest owners face competing policy signals: restore ecosystems while meeting energy demand

# EU LULUCF Carbon Sink: Historical Decline and Future Projections

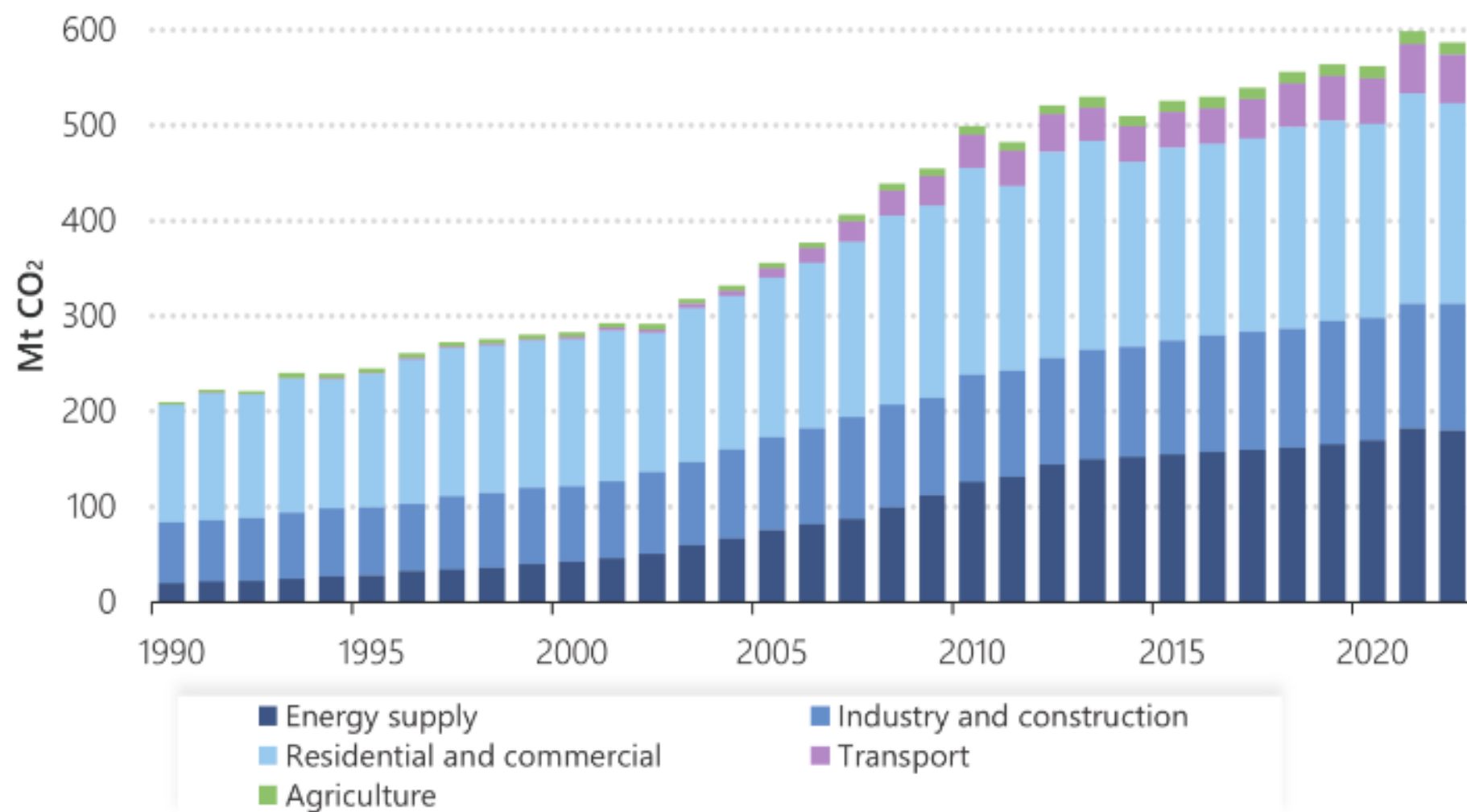
Net CO<sub>2</sub> Removals 1990-2050 (MtCO<sub>2</sub>e)



## LULUCF Chart Legend

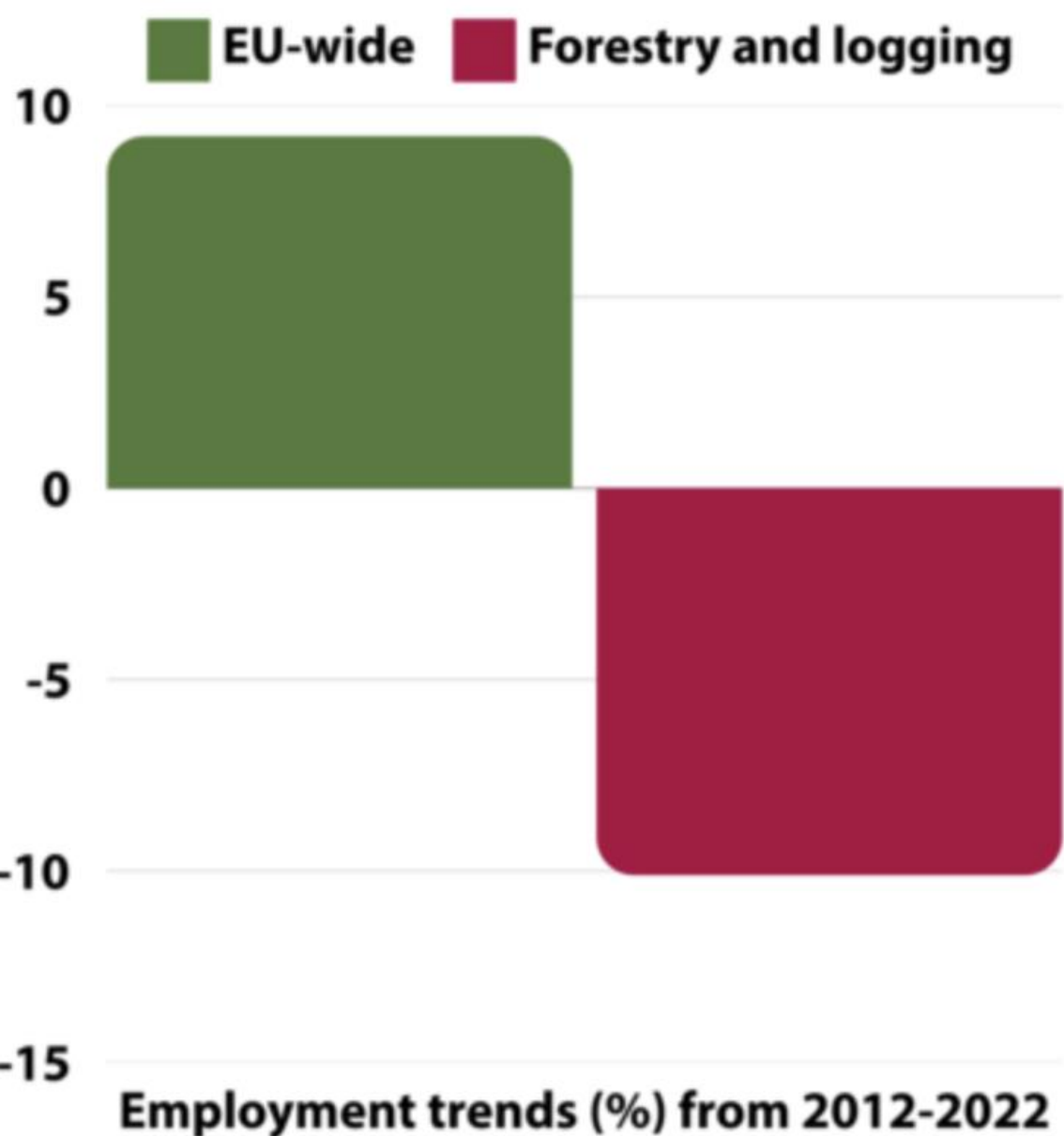
- Historical Data (1990-2023) - Solid green line with data points
- - ● - - Projections (With Existing Measures) - Dashed red/orange line
- █ 2030 EU Target (-310 MtCO<sub>2</sub>e) - Red highlighted bar
- Status:** 2030 target achievement "very unlikely" - significant policy gap of ~90 MtCO<sub>2</sub>e
- Target Gap - Dashed vertical line  
Shows shortfall between projection and 2030 target

**Figure 21 Annual CO<sub>2</sub> emissions from combustion of all types of biomass for energy purposes in different sectors in the EU-27**



**Source:** EEA based on European Commission (2023)

**Notes:** CO<sub>2</sub> emissions from biomass combustion are reported as a Memo Item in national GHG inventories and are not included in national GHG emissions total



While total employment in the EU increased by 9.2% between 2012 and 2022, employment in forestry and logging decreased as strongly in the same period (-10.1%).  
(Eurostat, 2023)

# Nature Restoration Law

## Aim:

- Restore 20% of EU land and sea areas by 2030, expanding to all degraded ecosystems by 2050
- Achieve positive trends in forest biodiversity indicators including deadwood, uneven-aged forests, and forest connectivity

## Requirements for Member States

- National Restoration Plans must be submitted by mid-2026

## Opportunities for Forest Owners:

- Increase standing and lying deadwood, promote uneven-aged forests, enhance forest connectivity, support forest bird populations, and maintain organic carbon stocks

## Open question

- What support is available for forest owners?



# EU Deforestation Regulation

## Aim:

- Ensure products are deforestation-free since December 31, 2020
- Prevent forest degradation from conversion of primary/natural forests to plantations

## Requirements for Forest Owners:

- Provide geolocation coordinates of all harvesting plots and submit onto EU portal

## Open question

- What support is available for forest owners?



# FUNDING RESILIENT FORESTS: RETHINKING EU AND STATE SUBSIDIES

Metodi Sotirov

July 2025

WEBINAR  
**FUNDING RESILIENT FORESTS:**  
Rethinking EU and State Subsidies

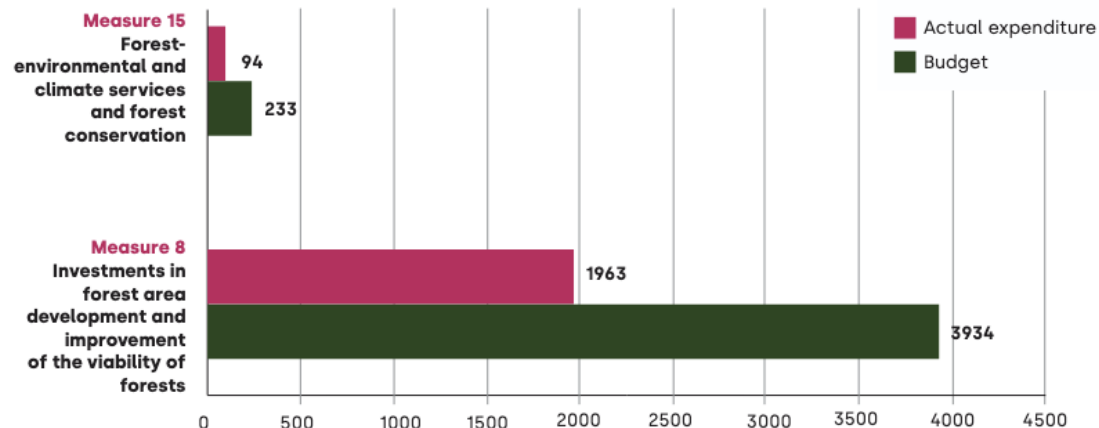
September 25, 2025  
10:00 - 11:00 AM CET

Join the discussion on rethinking forest subsidies  
for climate resilience and sustainability



# Status of subsidies for EU forests

**Figure 3:** Planned and actual expenditure of CAP forestry measures (ECA 2021; Szedlak 2024)



**Table 10:** Overview of the allocation of planned total public expenditure for forestry interventions under the CAP/RDP 2023-2027 (Szedlak 2023)

|                                                                                                      | Planned public expenditure in Euros | Percentage of total planned public expenditure |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------|
| Article 70 "Environmental, climate-related and other management commitments"                         | €671,943,129                        | 16%                                            |
| Article 72 "Area-specific disadvantages resulting from certain mandatory requirements" (Natura 2000) | €242,124,998                        | 6%                                             |
| Article 73 "Investments"                                                                             | €3,282,041,993                      | 78%                                            |
| <b>Total public expenditure planned (for the period 2023-2027)</b>                                   | <b>€4,196,110,121</b>               | <b>100%</b>                                    |

The primary and expected role of the EU is to provide support, incentives, and develop initiatives within the EU climate framework



## Provide Subsidies, Grants, and Incentives

Forest owners believe that the EU should provide subsidies and grants to compensate them or encourage them to follow new rules.

- **For the diversification of species:** Overall, forest owners deplore the lack of means to manage their forests and are interested in incentives and subsidies from the EU to be able to diversify the species.
- **Align financial incentives with climate change targets and climate action at the European level:** The EU has the capability to implement such programmes in connection with its broader climate framework.

However, large programmes at EU level, like the Common Agricultural Policy, **are not believed to be realistic solutions for forests. Forestry and agriculture are very different from one another.** They have their own specificities in each country.



## EU Projects and Initiatives

- **Several respondents highlight the potential for the EU to be involved in finding solutions for forests and mention examples of positive EU initiatives.**
- **Example of Natura 2000 zones** – The EU can be involved in initiatives aiming at protecting natural habitats.
- **Designate protected areas where logging is not allowed** – These decisions would need to be taken based on local understanding and supported by experts, scientists, etc.
- **Have a flexible approach to cooperation** – To ensure value creation, initiatives should be implemented in cooperation with local partners to ensure that implementation takes local specificities into account.

## Other EU responsibilities: Supervision and harmonisation



Several responsibilities were mentioned by the general rural communities for the EU, e.g., they agree that the EU has a role to play in regulating trade and funding research (especially in Czechia) or overseeing the management of forests when national politicians are not living up to the expectations and bringing in sanctions (in Poland).



### Supervision

**Be a supervisor in case of political instability** (e.g., government instability, internal tensions, etc.).

 **Example:** In Poland, because of the political volatility, there is a feeling that forests will never be a priority for the State, and the EU could take responsibilities.



### Regulation of export and import of wood

**At a broader trade level, the EU should achieve harmonisation** when there are general/common interests across the EU countries in order to ensure the perennity of forests.

 **Example from Czechia:** Regulate exports of wood outside the EU, set quotas for exploitation, etc.



### Research Funding

The EU has a potential role to play in **funding research or funding NGOs' educational activities** (especially for left-leaning respondents).



### Sanctions

There is also hope that the **EU would bring in sanctions** to make sure individual member states grow more trees and protect the biodiversity.

# Across the countries surveyed, the national government is not perceived to be living up to expectations

The rural communities surveyed have the impression that the national government has failed in its responsibility to take care of the forests up to now, for various reasons:

## Lack of initiatives and offload of responsibilities

In France and Germany, general rural communities believe the State wants to get rid of some responsibilities including forest management or avoids taking action.



## A bureaucratic burden

The bureaucratic burden is believed to prevent action and to hinder the subsidies application process for forest owners (e.g., overload of paperwork to ask for compensation).

## Obsolete rules

A perception that the State is too far removed from the reality and from what happens on the ground. Existing rules might not be adapted to the current reality any longer (e.g., new risks due to the impact of climate change) and need to be reviewed.

## Lack of education and knowledge of forests

General rural communities think that the level of knowledge about forests among politicians and the national government needs to improve.



## Focus Group recommendations

**There is consensus that we are in a contradictory world between eco-responsibility and consumerist interests, and a middle ground for forests needs to be found**

Many feel that there needs to be a between the protection of (some) forests and the exploitation of (other) forests for commercial purposes (to be regulated by the state).

To reconcile both sides, most respondents believe that dialogue is necessary and that each actor should have a longer-term vision.



### Long-term strategy and programs

There is a need for long-term programme management.



### Joint consultations

Roundtable discussions to confront both views and find a middle ground before starting any project. Also essential before the sale of a forest.



### Education

Public education on the future of forests is paramount to create a new generation of informed citizens. There should be more dialogue between communities and forest owners.



### Regional responsibilities/expertise

Regions should have greater involvement as management methods vary from one forest to another due to the diversity of soils, the climate, etc.



### Subsidies

More subsidies should be offered to encourage sustainable practices (e.g., diversification).

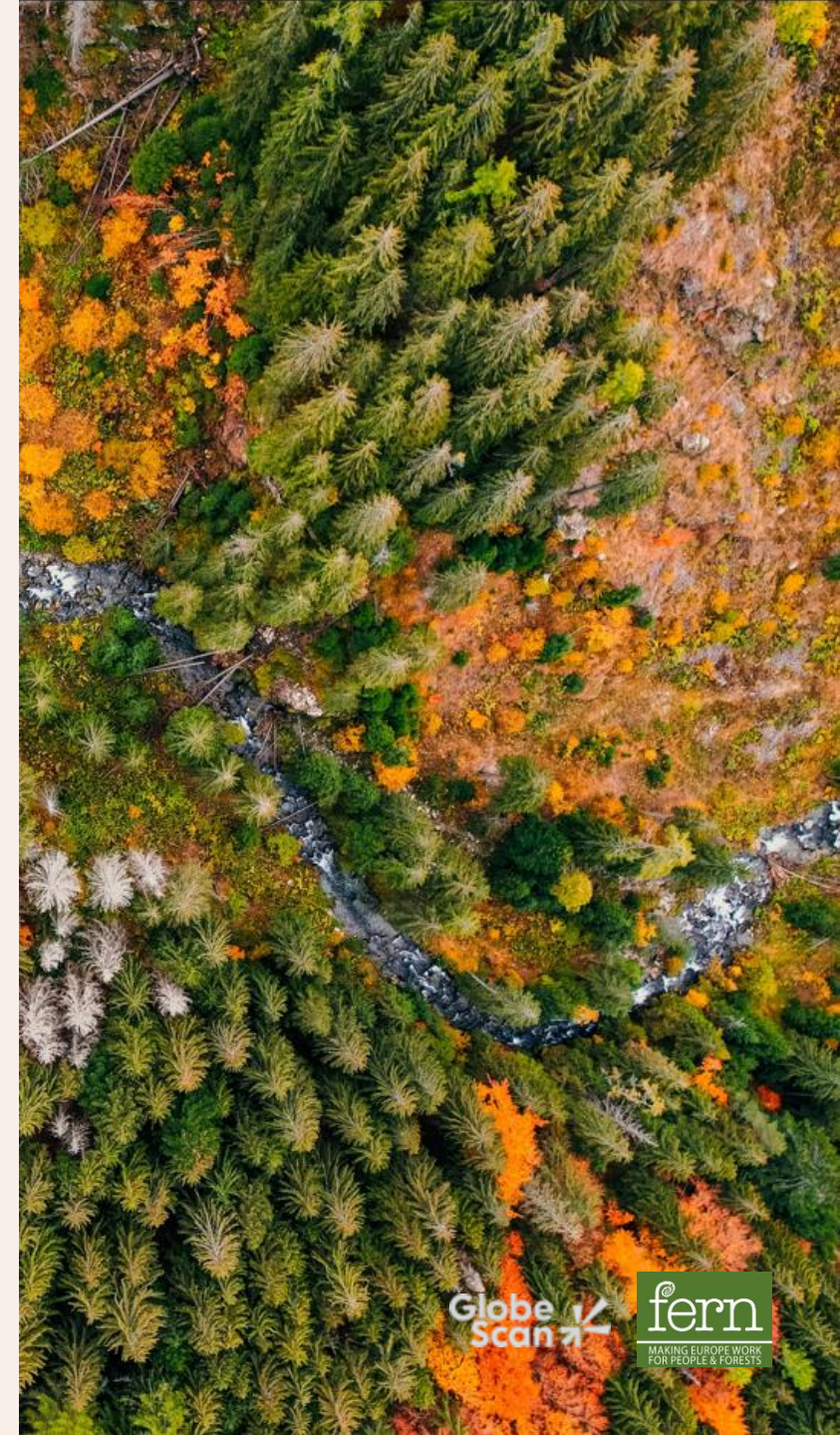


### Transparency

Owners' long-term plans for forests should be made accessible to everyone.

# Fern Recommendations

- **Consult local stakeholders**, and not only count on their representatives.
- **European Forest Pact:** Member States, local authorities, the EU, foresters, civil society need to work together to ensure forests are managed in a way that enables them to play their many roles and **deliver on 2030 Forest Strategy**
- **Regulation to safeguard forests** to close the gap between expectation and reality. Solutions must be sought bottom-up, with strong consultation.
- EU funds should be **cost-efficiently** disbursed to the smallholder foresters and land-owners that can enact **long-term improvements to their forests**.



# Thank you!



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newsletter**

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