

Forestry and Wood Update

October 2010 - Volume 10 Number 10

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COFORD’s activities are funded by the Irish Government under the National Development Plan.

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#

Research Programme

Project update

*Each issue of the newsletter carries a short article on new and ongoing COFORD-funded projects. Feedback on the articles is welcome and should be addressed to the project leaders (contact details at the end of the article).*

# FIRMEC: Forestry in Ireland – Modelling its economics

The aim of the FIRMEC project is to model the impact of changes in competing land-use sectors and the external policy environment on future afforestation rates. The unusual and atypical economic behaviour that occurred at the peak of the land and property bubble during the Celtic Tiger period contributed to a situation where the incentives for forestry were increasing but the participation levels were decreasing. This situation made it impossible to develop an economic model of forestry planting decisions based upon historical aggregate data.

Therefore, the project team is undertaking a choice experiment survey to quantify potential farm forest planters’ attitudes under alternative market conditions. A forest investment evaluation tool “FIVE” (Forest Investment Valuation Estimator) has been developed, which allows the estimation of economic returns from various species, productivity and forest management scenarios. Linking with FIVE, we are developing a novel survey technique of presenting farmers with economic returns associated with different forest scenarios, based on the individual farm characteristics. This survey will generate a dataset of farm characteristics and planting choices which can be interrogated to develop a model to capture farmer preferences for planting.

A Discounted Cash Flow analysis was conducted on the economics of changing part of a farm from an agricultural enterprise to a forest enterprise. This work shows a positive return from changing to forestry for all enterprises except where winter wheat is replaced by ash.

Work is also ongoing on using NFS (National Farm Survey) data to analyse the characteristics of farmers who change from agriculture to forestry enterprises.

*For more information contact Mary Ryan - email: mary.ryan@teagasc.ie.*

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# SUPPLYCHIP - Facilitating the supply of wood chip from forest plantations for a major heat user

Teagasc has begun work on the COFORD funded research project, *SUPPLYCHIP – Facilitating the supply of wood chip from forest plantations for a major heat user*. This project involves the use of data generated from a previous project CLUSTER, which located areas of high concentration levels of private forestry and derived a local production forecast for 4,500 ha of private forest in Counties Roscommon and Mayo. CLUSTER identified a number of issues which need to be addressed in order to facilitate the thinning and harvesting of forest plantations so that the forest resource can achieve its full forecasted wood energy potential.

The key aim of the research is to address the potential of geographic concentrations of forestry as a renewable raw material for the wood energy sector and to identify what are the main barriers to harvest. It will attempt to generate a wood energy forecast based on timber assortments and rank forest plantations based on the ease and cost of harvesting, focussing particularly on the roading infrastructure requirements. It is hoped that the research will develop a template for the assessment of wood energy potential within cluster areas, and put in place a system to enable the coordination of a supply chain for a major heat user.

The research objectives are:

* To quantify the likely breakdown of volume by wood energy assortments in first and subsequent thinning operations in forest plantations.
* To evaluate the roading infrastructure that will facilitate harvesting of forests for wood energy and likely cost implications for policy makers.
* To provide a potential wood energy flow ranking of plantations based on roading infrastructure, wood energy potential and haulage distance to end users.

Niall Farrelly, Teagasc, Athenry, will coordinate the project, with Joanne Fitzgerald of Teagasc, Oak Park, managing the project. Henry Phillips is also on the project team and will advise on wood energy assortments, logistics and roading infrastructure. *For more information, contact Niall Farrelly - email: niall.farrelly@teagasc.ie.*

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Information and support services

# New publication: An evaluation of continuous cover forestry in Ireland

## Report investigating the potential of continuous cover silvicultural system in Ireland

This new publication, outlining results of a COFORD-funded project on continuous cover forestry was compiled by lead author Dr Áine Ní Dhubháin, along with members of the project team: Tom Bolger, Michael Keane, the Tottenham family, Nuala Freeman, Séamus Kennedy, Mathias Holzmann, Denis Coghlan and Donal O’Hare

A continuous forest is a forest so treated that the forest cover is continuously maintained and the soil never exposed (Troup 1927). Thus continuous cover forestry (CCF) includes all those silvicultural systems, which involve the continuous and uninterrupted maintenance of the forest (Troup 1928). These silvicultural systems tend to be associated with natural regeneration.

In Ireland the majority of forests are non-native even-aged conifer monoculture plantations managed primarily under the clearfell system. Although the practice of continuous cover forestry has been used productively for the past 120 years in continental Europe it has still to make an impact in Irish forestry; yet indications are that pressure to introduce alternatives to clearfell systems in Ireland will increase.

The majority of the forest estate in Ireland is comprised of even-aged Sitka spruce (*Picea sitchensis* (Bong.) Carr.) plantations. In these plantations the process of transformation will involve opening up the canopy to encourage the emergence of an understorey through either natural regeneration or underplanting. However, little is known in Ireland about the process of opening up a canopy and how this influences the microclimate and soil dynamics in the understorey. Hence this project set out to:

* examine the survival and associated growth rates of six tree species of varying shade tolerances when planted under three different levels of canopy openness in a 40-year old Sitka spruce stand;
* quantify light levels in Sitka spruce stands under different levels of canopy openness;
* develop models that could be used to predict light levels in the understorey using readily available and easy to measure stand variables;
* assess how different levels of canopy openness affect the soil nitrogen dynamics; the processes involved in nitrogen transformations in the forest soil; soil temperature, water and pH;
* establish demonstrations of methods to transform even-aged Sitka spruce stands to continuous cover forestry.

This report is available as a pdf to download at no cost from [www.coford.ie](http://www.coford.ie). For further information, contact Dr Áine Ní Dhubháin - email: aine.nidhubhain@ucd.ie

References:

Troup, R.S. (1927). Dauerwald. *Forestry* 1(1): 78-81.

Troup, R.S. (1928). *Silvicultural systems*. Oxford University Press.

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# WoodWisdom-Net and ERA-NET Bioenergy joint call for proposals

## New call launched – project proposals are invited

A joint call has been issued for research and development proposals for the WoodWisdom-Net Research Programme and ERA-NET Bioenergy addressing "*Sustainable forest management and optimised use of lignocellulosic resources: Bridging gaps between research disciplines, producers, consumers and society*". The deadline for applications is 1 December 2010, 1 PM (CET).

In this call the European Research Area Networks (ERA-Nets) WoodWisdom-Net 2 and ERA-NET Bioenergy aim to step up the cooperation and coordination of research activities carried out at national and regional level by joining forces to promote innovative research and cooperation to help optimise the use of trees and forests.

Both ERA-Nets have launched several joint calls in the past, two within the WoodWisdom-Net Research Programme (on wood material science and engineering in forest-based value chains) and four within the ERA-NET Bioenergy (small-scale combustion, cleaning of product gas from biomass gasification, short rotation coppice and on clean biomass combustion). This is the first joint call integrating both ERA-Nets. Total public funding of ca. 18.5 M€ will be jointly provided by 19 national funding organisations during 2011-2014.

This joint call offers participants a simplified introduction to R&D projects at the European level. Individual project partners seek funding from their national funding agencies in accordance with the relevant call and national funding rules. The added value is the opportunity to easily access international know-how, to gain technology and market expertise and to integrate into international value chains. Programme activities include joint monitoring of the projects, programme seminars, dissemination of results and a central programme website.

Proposals for collaborative transnational projects on basic and/or applied research and/or industrial research and development are welcome. There is no funding available for industrial/commercial scale pilot projects.

The call covers the research topics listed below. Each proposal should address at least one or more of these topics. Innovative forms of cooperation are encouraged, e.g. interdisciplinarity (natural/technology sciences and social sciences, researchers-users), research and implementation, involvement of stakeholders.

* Forest for multiple needs of society, including enhanced productivity and optimised use of forest feedstock.
* Advanced products and technologies for primary wood processing and manufacturing of wood and fibre-based products.
* Advanced biofuels and biorefineries.

Refer to the full call text for a detailed description of the call topics and their focus areas. All call documents and forms are published on the websites: www.call2010.woodwisdom.net and [www.eranetbioenergy.net](http://www.eranetbioenergy.net). Updated information on this joint call and all relevant documents, including full call text and application form, are published on the two participating ERA-Nets’ websites: WoodWisdom-Net - [www.call2010.woodwisdom.net](http://www.call2010.woodwisdom.net), ERA-NET Bioenergy - [www.eranetbioenergy.net](http://www.eranetbioenergy.net).

*Alistair Pfeifer (email:* *alistair.pfeifer@agriculture.gov.ie**) is the WoodWisdom-Net representative for Ireland. For all the latest news and information about forthcoming events, visit* [*www.woodwisdom.net*](http://www.woodwisdom.net)*.*

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# EUFORGEN (Phase IV)

* Discussion of the challenges and opportunities for conserving and utilising forest genetic resources in the face of climate change

A meeting of the steering committee of the European Forest Genetic Resources Programme (EUFORGEN) took place recently in Austria as part of the Forest Biodiversity week long programme on ‘Genetic Aspects in a European Context’. It was hosted by the Federal Research Centre for Forest, Natural Hazards and Landscape (BFW) in Mariabrunn, Vienna. National coordinators from over 30 European countries discussed the challenges and opportunities for conserving and utilizing forest genetic resources in the face of climate change and developed a work-plan for 2010 to 2012. Key tasks agreed include the development of an action plan for the next two years, building on the technical and public awareness work that EUFORGEN has been carrying out since its establishment in 1994.

 It was agreed that during this period an assessment of the gene conservation status of forest trees in Europe should take place and also the development of pan-European gene conservation strategies as follows:

* Review the earlier work by the EUFORGEN Networks on Common Action Plans including selection criteria for dynamic gene conservation units.
* Undertake an assessment of gene conservation status for model species based on the EUFGIS data.
* Carry out a review of the knowledge on the genetic diversity of the species.
* Select the most valuable dynamic gene conservation units from the pan-European perspective.
* Identify gaps in the network of dynamic gene conservation unit to improve their long term sustainability.
* Construction of strategies at the level of group of species.
* Draft a comprehensive report on the outcomes.
* This report will be ready by June 2012 and results will be presented at a workshop on forest genetic resources conservation in September 2012.

It was also agreed that the development of genetic monitoring methods for gene conservation units of forest trees should be undertaken. This will require:

* A synthesis of existing documents
* Analyses of the EUFGIS and other databases relevant for genetic monitoring purposes
* Recommendations for improving EUFGIS data standards for genetic monitoring
* Present options for genetic monitoring methods, including defining time intervals for monitoring (per groups of tree species)
* Cost assessment of the options for genetic monitoring methods
* Prepare a report on the outcomes
* This report will be completed by June 2012 and the results presented at the workshop on forest genetic resources conservation in September 2012.

A Task Force was nominated from the members to oversee this project. Members of the Task Force include Hojka Kraigher (Slovenia); Tor Myking (Norway); Giuseppe Scarascia (Italy): Sven de Vries (Netherlands); Francois Lefevre (France); John Fennessy (Ireland) and Alexander Alexandrov (Bulgaria).

The next meeting of the group is scheduled to take place in late 2012 in Nancy in France.

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# British and Irish Hardwoods Trust (BIHT) news

## 20-21 October – Ross on Wye and the Forest of Dean, UK

The autumn 2010 meeting of the BIHT Management Committee is to take place at Ross on Wye on 20 and 21 October with an outdoor session visiting seed stands in the Forest of Dean, led by Kevin Stannard, Deputy Surveyor of the Forest of Dean. The programme will focus on the many issues concerning seed stand management. The morning session will include a number of papers on aspects of seed stand management and seed collection practices:

* Seed stand management and seed collection practices - David Boshier, University of Oxford
* Species and provenance use policy in England - Rebecca Isted of the Forestry Commission
* BIHIP, branding and marketing improved material - Bryony Morgan

Several species groups will also have an opportunity to meet and to record progress with their respective programmes. These include the Oak Group, the Ash Group and the Sycamore Group. For further information visit the BIHIP website at [www.bihip.org](http://www.bihip.org) or email: Jo.Clark@northmoortrust.co.uk

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National and international news

# Get ready to thin!

## First thinning of conifers demonstration, Castleplunkett, Co Roscommon - 5 October

Many farm forests planted in the early-mid 1990s now require thinning. Thinning is a critical forestry operation to improve the quality and value of the timber crop. On Tuesday 5 October at Castleplunkett, Co Roscommon, Teagasc and Forest Service in association with Coillte, will hold an important national demonstration of first thinning of conifers.

With the very strong current timber prices, thinning can maximise the return from private forestry plantations but good planning and decision making are crucial if the benefits from thinning are to be fully realised. The timing of first thinning is vital as late thinning can devalue the timber crop and risk the stability of the entire forest.

Forest growers will be brought through the various steps involved in thinning a conifer forest. The importance of the provision of satisfactory access, knowing the condition of your forest, selling your timber to the right buyer, the mechanics of the thinning operation and protecting the environment are some of the important issues which will be discussed by professionals from Teagasc, Forest Service and Coillte.

Coillte is thinning this privately owned forest and will give live demonstrations of cutting, processing and extracting the thinnings to roadside using their own harvesting and extraction machines. As more and more owners are getting involved in preparing their forests for thinning the important subject of chainsaw safety will be addressed. The opportunities to add value to your thinnings by sawmilling on site will be demonstrated by a local mobile sawmilling contractor. At Kilmurray Hall, a number of forestry companies and organisations will have trade stands offering an extensive range of information on all aspects for forestry.

Arrive any time between 11.30 am and 1 pm at Kilmurray Hall, Castleplunkett, Co Roscommon. Participants will be bussed to the nearby site and the demonstration will take approximately 2.5 hours. This is an outdoor event so please bring appropriate footwear and raingear. All are welcome and the event is free.

For further information contact Noel Kennedy <http://www.teagasc.ie/forestry/staff/noel\_kennedy.asp> or visit www.teagasc.ie/forestry for travel directions, etc.

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# Forest establishment event

## 12 October – Strokestown, Co Roscommon

Establishment of farm forestry and REPS tree planting measures. Tuesday 12 October, Bunnageddy Equestrian Centre, Strokestown, Co Roscommon. Arrive any time between 11.30 am and 1 pm. Buses will depart from the Hall to the demonstration site every twenty minutes between 11.30 am and 1 pm and the demonstration will take approximately 2.5 hours. This is an outdoor event so please bring appropriate footwear and raingear. All are welcome. Event is free. For more information, contact Noel Kennedy on 087-9090504 or visit [www.teagasc.ie/forestry](http://www.teagasc.ie/forestry) for further details such as travel directions.

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# Connick presents certificates under new Wood Fuel Quality Assurance Scheme

## Wood Fuel Quality Assurance Scheme to inspire consumer confidence

Seán Connick, TD, Minister of State at the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food with responsibility for forestry, has presented certificates to the first companies to become members of the new Wood Fuel Quality Assurance Scheme. Speaking at the presentation, the Minister of State said "Wood fuel is becoming more and more popular for home heating in Ireland. Over recent years many homeowners, hotels and other establishments have made the switch to wood to replace imported oil and coal. The schemes run by the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland have provided much of the impetus for this change". Welcoming this development, Minister of State Connick continued "Switching to wood is a good move as it will save on heating bills, but it is also good news for forest owners and those in the business of supplying wood fuels. Owners now have expanding local markets for first thinnings, which are now coming on-stream in ever increasing quantities. In fact there are plentiful supplies of wood fuel in forests which have been established over the past two decades under the State funded forestry schemes. National investment in these schemes since 2000 is over €1.3 billion. Using wood for heating also stacks up in reducing emissions of greenhouse gases, and how these contribute to climate change. Reducing Ireland's dependence on imported fuels and securing indigenous sources are key elements of national policy and wood has an important role in helping to meet these goals".

Presenting the awards, Minister of State Connick welcomed the initiative of the companies and bodies involved in developing the quality assurance scheme, saying "I want to congratulate the companies who have got together with the National Standards Authority of Ireland, the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland, Waterford Institute of Technology and forestry officials from my own Department in collaboration with the Irish Bioenergy Association, in developing this Scheme over the last year. For wood fuel to compete in the marketplace, it needs to be of a quality that is fit for purpose and inspires consumer confidence. This new Scheme is an important step in that process. It is for these reasons that the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has provided grant aid in support of the development and promotion of the scheme".

The Wood Fuel Quality Assurance (WFQA) scheme is operated by the Irish Bioenergy Association. It is a quality assurance scheme for wood fuels - wood pellets, wood chips, wood logs and wood briquettes. Certification of companies which apply to join and use the WFQA logo is carried out by the National Standards Authority of Ireland. WFQA assures customers that products have been independently tested, are consistent and quality assured in terms of moisture content, ash content, size and the source of the fuel.

The wood fuel industry has grown significantly over the past five years, and has penetrated into households, commercial premises, government organisations (including the Dáil which will soon be heated by wood chip and pellets) and industrial operations. The current demand is estimated to be 30,000 tonnes of wood pellets and 75,000 tonnes of wood chips annually. This largely indigenous industry provides sustainable fuel for heating and electricity and is a significant employer - especially in rural areas. Throughout 2009, the wood fuel sector has come together to form this quality assurance scheme and certification to ensure the continued growth of this market. Through the use of wood fuels Ireland can effectively reduce its dependence on imported fossil fuels, providing employment, improving security of supply, improving Ireland's trade balance and reducing carbon dioxide emissions.

The WFQA was put together through an initiative by the wood fuel industry in collaboration with the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland, the National Standards Authority of Ireland, the Irish Bioenergy Association, Teagasc and Waterford Institute of Technology. For further information contact Noel Gavigan at the Irish Bioenergy Association (noelgavigan@irbea.org) 087 6845977 or 057 8641044.

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# Forestry promotion campaign 'Growing Woodlands - Enhancing Our Lives'

## 3-16 October 2010, Co Roscommon

Sean Connick T.D., Minister of State at the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food with responsibility for forestry, has launched a series of forestry promotional events to be held in Co Roscommon from 3 to 16 October 2010. Launching the campaign entitled '*Growing Woodlands - Enhancing Our Lives'*, the Minister of State congratulated the participating organisations from the forestry, farming, non-governmental and state sectors for their initiative in arranging a number of events to highlight the benefits that trees and woodlands bring to our lives. Commenting on the range of events, he commented that they were "designed to attract and inform a wide spectrum of the public, from farmers and other landowners to school children and homeowners and businesses interested in trees as a sustainable and renewable resource". For more information see [www.teagasc.ie/forestry](http://www.teagasc.ie/forestry) or www.agriculture.gov.ie/forestry.

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# Update on discovery of the *Phytophora ramorum* disease on Japanese larch

## All necessary actions are being taken to deal with this threat

Referring to the significant threats posed to forestry by land and forest fires and the recent discovery of the *Phytophora ramorum* disease on Japanese larch, Minister of State Connick TD has advised that he is closely monitoring the situation in conjunction with the Forestry Inspectorate and assured all forest owners that the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food is taking all necessary actions and will continue to liaise closely with landowners in order to ensure everything possible is being done to deal with this threat. Minister of State Connick also recorded his appreciation for the advice and assistance from other organisations in monitoring the situation.

Speaking on the forestry sector generally, Minister of State Connick acknowledged the challenges ahead and reiterated his determination to ensure that the most efficient and effective use was made of all resources allocated to the area.

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# Passive House Planning Package workshop

## 20 - 21 October 2010 - Clontarf Castle Hotel, Dublin 3

SEAI is presenting a two-day Passive House Planning Package (PHPP) workshop ON 20 - 21 October 2010 at the The Clontarf Castle Hotel in Dublin. This fifth PHPP workshop will be delivered by Passivhaus Institut certified and accredited trainers and is presented in direct demand from professionals involved in the design of passive houses in Ireland. Based on a series of extensive and interlinked data sheets the PHPP is a clearly structured design software package developed by the world renowned Passivhaus Institut. It can be used by architects, engineers, consultants and designers etc. to assist in the careful design and modelling of any building to achieve the passive house standard.

The passive house standard is a specific construction standard for buildings (any building) which results in good thermal comfort conditions all year round without traditional space heating systems and without active cooling.

The two-day workshop offers participants a comprehensive insight and the fundamentals in designing and operating passive houses including an in-depth interactive demonstration of the PHPP 2007. Online registration is online at www.seai.ie/bookshop. The workshop is RIAI and CPD approved. For further details please contact Paul Dykes (SEAI) direct on T: 023 8863393 or E: pauld@reio.ie.

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# Science and Technology Europe

## 23 November - The Square, Brussels

Public Service Event’s second annual SciTech Europe conference will help promote breakthrough research, successful innovation networks and potential investment opportunities. It aims to bring together some of the leading figures in science, engineering and technology across Europe for a high level meeting on how we can turn science into commerce. Confirmed speakers include:

* Professor Helga Nowotny, President, European Research Council
* Dr Peter Tindemans, Convenor – Science Policy Working Group, EUROSCIENCE, Board member of Initiative for Science in Europe (ISE)
* Professor Dr. Kurt Deketelaere, Secretary-General, League of European Research Universities (LERU)
* Dr John Smith, Deputy Secretary General, European University Association (EUA)
* Professor Mohamed H.A. Hassan, Executive Director, TWAS, The Academy of Sciences for the Developing World

Further details of the programme are available at http://events.publicservice-delegates.co.uk. For more information email rdaniels@publicservice-delegates.co.uk

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# Forest biodiversity – Genetic aspects in a European context

## Feedback from a seminar looking at issues around property rights of material from improvement and conservation programmes

A seminar organised by the Norwegian Forest and Landscape Institute and under the auspices of the Nordic Genetics Centre and hosted by BFW (Federal Research Centre for Forests, Natural Hazards and Landscape) took place recently in Vienna as part of a week-long programme on forest genetic resources conservation. The seminar entitled ‘Who owns the genes of the forest trees’ attempted to address the many issues around how to define property rights of biological material such as forest reproductive material developing from tree improvement and conservation programmes.

There is great ecological, economic and social value within forest genetic resources. However, the true legal status of this resource for protection of these values has not been clearly defined. This conundrum lay at the heart of debate for assembled forest and legal experts on the first day of the meeting in Vienna looking to build a sound future for Europe’s forest genetic resources.

Morten Walløe Tvedt, a plant law specialist from the Fridtjof Nansen Institute in Norway illustrated the types of challenge facing legal definition in this field. “How do we define property rights and ownership beyond biological material? Is it the owner of the tree, the owner of the land or perhaps the finder of the propagating material who gains the ownership right?” He went on to describe how patent law might be applicable to trees in the areas of novel breeding methods or for short rotation systems for biomass, where essentially the relevance of patents and plant variety protection is determined by commercial imperatives. In other words, is there a market? Dr Tvedt pointed out that a key obstacle is the fact that for most tree species, the rotation time is long, way beyond the 20 year protection afforded by patents.

In an attempt to move this debate forward a Nordic project on Access and Rights to Forest Genetic Resources has just published its early recommendations. This study has been carried out against the background of the open access “Everyman’s Right” within the region which essentially says that forests are available to everyone.

Under climate change, where natural adaptation may become insufficient, there will probably be an increased need for transport of forest genetic resources between countries, to track the changes. With this growing demand, bureaucratic access regulations might prove a barrier, so there is a need to ensure any new bureaucratic procedures are streamlined and practical, says Dr Tor Myking of the Norwegian Forest and Landscape Institute, who has been involved in this Nordic study.

The meeting heard from two successful European research and data projects where successful co-operation and contractual arrangements on the free movement of forest genetic resources have been achieved. In the EVOLTREE project, Dr Silvia Fluch explained how standard agreements have proved effective in moving material in and out of its DNA repository centre in Austria. Similar success is set to be achieved in the TREEBREEDEX project, says Sven De Vries of Wageningen University and Research Centre who is currently examining three possible routes forward. The big question though is can such “gentlemen’s agreements” be applied to the cut and thrust of real commerce?
All involved in the debate are well aware that their discussions are highly topical and timely. In Nagoya in Japan in October this year the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) is expected to deliver new legal frameworks on access and benefit sharing in genetic resources. Forest resources are set to be included.

Carl Gustav Thornström of the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences warned that we are moving towards too much political correctness on this whole genetic resources issue without proper regard to practicality. He doubts that Nagoya will deliver a workable framework for forests or other areas when such basic building blocks and definitions such as what is a plant variety still have to be established. He made a plea for far better training of people in the interface between law and genetics so that perhaps new thinking could be applied to resolving these forest genetic conundrums. After all, wind-borne Norway spruce pollen grains, and other genetic material
passing across borders on insects and birds have no respect for international treaty, passports or lawyers.

For further information contact Tor Myking at the Norwegian Forest and Landscape Institute at: tor.myking@skogoglandskape.no

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# New tool to aid dynamic forest gene conservation launched in Vienna

## Information-sharing portal featuring standardized data on gene conservation units across the entire distribution range of Europe’s forest trees

An event on *Forest biodiversity, genetic aspects in a European context* was recently organised by BFW (The Austrian Federal Research and Training Centre for Forests, Natural Hazards and Landscape). It began with the ceremonial switching on of the EUFGIS (Establishment of a European Information System on Forest Genetic Resources) information-sharing portal, featuring standardized data on gene conservation units across the entire distribution range of Europe’s forest trees. This function was performed by Mr Gerhard Mannsberger, Director General of the Austrian Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, Environment and Water Management. Mr Mannsberger said that despite the many challenges facing Europe’s forests he was confident that the best route forward for their continued sustainable management lies in the further strengthening of pan-European co-operation. Austria is committed to maintaining its active role in the Forest Europe process, he said. The internet based EUFGIS portal is a key product of an EU-funded project designed to help dynamic gene conservation of trees in the face of climate change.

The future of Europe’s forests and forestry will depend on the ability of trees to adapt to changing climate. But this requires the active intervention of man to augment evolutionary processes and genetic diversity within tree populations. This approach is termed “dynamic gene conservation” and it is based on managing tree populations at their natural sites within the environment to which they are adapted (in situ), or artificial but dynamically evolving tree populations elsewhere (ex situ).

In the past, countries in Europe have conserved their forest genetic resources through gene reserve forests and other conservation units. However, there has been great variation in how this is done, how it’s managed and in the quality of the data collected and stored.

“Through co-operation and hard work over the last three years with forest colleagues right across Europe we now have a harmonized tool and database that can help set and maintain unified minimum standards for dynamic gene conservation units,” says project co-ordinator Dr Jarkko Koskela of Bioversity International. The portal makes available for the first time, geo-referenced and standardized data on gene conservation units throughout the distribution range of Europe’s forest trees.

“So far we have seen national focal points in 31 countries entering data on some 2200 gene conservation units and more than 100 tree species into the portal,” says Dr Koskela. His expectation now is for the EUFGIS portal to facilitate truly pan-European gene conservation strategies and action plans and to drive a real sharing of responsibility in forest genetic resource conservation among European governments and countries.

An instant example of where the EUFGIS portal is already in action is in the pan-European forest policy process (Forest Europe) which is preparing for the next stage of the State of Europe’s Forest report for 2011. Forest genetic resources are a specific objective. “With this tool we have moved from vague descriptions and indicators to having at our fingertips very sound information –both quantitatively and qualitatively – to describe species by species the state of gene conservation. We can then relate with some precision to the threat of future climate change scenarios and at the same time identify gaps in conservation units and conservation policy,” say Dr François Lefevre of INRA Avignon, France, one of the EUFGIS project partners.

Dr Jarkko Koskela, the coordinator of the EUFGIS project at Bioversity International, thanked BFW for organizing the special event and noted that the portal is a concrete example of how the pan-European co-operation can benefit national efforts in managing forests.

The CEO of WWF Austria – Hildegard Aichberger – spoke about the role of genetics in nature conservation. She showed how genetic “tracking” of the families of the now rare wolves and bears in Austria was helping with understanding their origins and interconnections, providing useful knowledge for conservation and possible assisted breeding. Afterwards she discussed the attitude of WWF Austria to the central subject of the Vienna meeting – dynamic gene conservation. Ms Aichberger confirmed that in her view, conservation has to move on from a “fossilising” stance to one of greater, dynamic intervention if future generations are to have a reasonable chance of enjoying biodiversity. She continued “we in Austria know that with climate change plants, trees and animals are tending to move northwards and upwards, in our country that is towards the Alps but on their own the species cannot move fast enough, we calculate that climate change here is moving seven times faster than species migration.” Ms Aichberger accepted that in her field there was little that could be done directly about climate change effects, but that there were many other factors that could be addressed. One of these is ensuring that species have enough space in which to express their behaviour and survival. “We need to think differently about conservation – not just national parks or protected areas – but have large areas, interconnected with corridors to facilitate species movement.”

Other speakers in the session included Dr Reinhold Steinacker from the University of Vienna looking at climate change and discussing with Silvio Schuller of BFW whether appropriate forest genetic resources might help mitigate negative climate change effects.

Genetic resources for bio-energy production and the role of forest biodiversity in research, advocacy and capacity building in Central and Eastern Europe were also on the agenda. Our mission in assembling these speakers was to share and explain the specialist subject of forest genetic resources to a more general audience and de-mystify it, said the main organiser of the event Dr Thomas Geburek of BFW. “It has proved a useful start and now we must build further on such dialogue,” he concluded.

For further information: Jarkko Koskela at Bioversity International j.koskela@CGIAR.ORG or visit the EUFORGEN website at [www.euforgen.org](http://www.euforgen.org)

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# Natural Connections: the role of green space in connecting people to their local environment

## 1 December 2010 - Sheffield Centre in the Park at Norfolk Heritage Park, Sheffield

At a time of political and economic flux the time is right to think about changes in society and how they influence what people want from greenspace. Is there a need to re-think our objectives and the methods we use to deliver them? The institutions and legislation governing land use and management in the UK have their roots in the immediate postwar years. Are they still fit for purpose?

Public interest in nature and the outdoors has never been greater, but the number of visitors to the countryside is falling. Public and institutional concern over the environment is at an all-time peak, but resources to manage natural areas have never been more difficult to find. What’s going on?

Different people will have different answers. In this seminar, hosted by the Countryside Recreation Network, case studies and recent research will be used to explore the reasons for change. We will draw on the experience of participants to look forward, reflecting on how green space might cater for new needs and aspirations.

The event will encourage participants to reflect on the way that concepts of ‘natural’ and ‘outdoors’ have evolved, and continue to change as society itself changes. What do these changes mean for the services that greenspace provides and how we manage greenspace as a component or urban and rural infrastructure?

The emphasis will be on practical approaches and active participation by delegates in identifying and understanding the changes in public perceptions and aspirations. Delegates will have an opportunity to discuss their own circumstances, and learn through sharing experiences with colleagues from different areas and different specialisms.

For more information contact Countryside Recreation Network, Sheffield Hallam University, Unit 1 Sheffield, Science Park, Howard Street, Sheffield, S1 1WB. Email: crn@shu.ac.uk Tel: 0114 225 4494 Fax: 0114 225 6319

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