

Six Regional Forestry Commissions meet

FAO's six Regional Forestry Commissions, established between 1947 and 1959, bring together member countries in each region every two years to address the most important forestry issues and advise FAO on regional forestry priorities. Between February and June 2010, all six commissions held their biennial meetings, in preparation for the twentieth session of the Committee on Forestry in October 2010. The reports and documentation can be viewed at: www.fao.org/forestry/46199

African Forestry and Wildlife Commission and first African Forestry and Wildlife Week.

The seventeenth session of the African Forestry and Wildlife Commission (AFWC) met in Brazzaville, the Congo, from 22 to 26 February 2010. Concurrently, the commission also observed the first African Forestry and Wildlife Week, giving intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations a chance to present their activities and plans in forestry and opportunities for collaboration.

Under the theme "African forests and wildlife: response to the challenges of sustainable livelihood systems", the AFWC session highlighted the need for greater attention at the policy level regarding the important contribution of the forestry and wildlife sectors towards poverty reduction and national economic development, as well as the urgent need for increased resource allocation.

Main areas of discussion included:

- the role of non-wood forest products (NWFPs) in food security and poverty reduction – with focus on the need to strengthen legal frameworks, inventories and the capacities of small NWFP enterprises, and to include NWFPs in poverty reduction and food security programmes;
- the important contribution of protected areas and ecotourism to improved livelihoods for local communities – with focus on promoting equitable sharing of transparently generated revenues;
- climate change – with endorsement of sustainable forest management as the basis for the forest sector's ability to make a significant contribution to climate change mitigation and adaptation, and emphasis on the role of national forest programmes in this regard;
- forest and wildlife management for economic development, including a specific request that FAO assist countries in human-wildlife conflict mitigation and equitable sharing of benefits.

Countries of the region also expressed the need for methodology for evaluating trees outside forests; support in implementing REDD (reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation); and dialogue between forestry and agricultural institutions to improve sustainable land use.

Near East Forestry and Range Commission. Most Near Eastern countries have low forest cover but extensive areas of sparse trees. Recognizing the importance of achieving balance among

policies concerning forests and grazing lands, the nineteenth session of the Near East Forestry Commission endorsed a change in name and mandate, becoming the Near East Forestry and Range Commission. The session was held in Hammamet, Tunisia, from 5 to 9 April 2010, concurrently with the first Near East Forestry Week. The theme was "Forest and range: adapting to global changes for sustainable development".

The meeting reviewed recently published guidelines for good forestry and range practices in arid and semi-arid zones of the Near East (see www.fao.org/docrep/012/a1040e/a1040e00.pdf). Other sessions addressed fire management, the potential of oil-producing trees for energy production, forest policy and sustainable development, rangelands and biodiversity conservation, and wildlife and protected area management.

An in-session seminar was held on assessing risks and vulnerability to climate change of the forestry and range sectors. Given the vulnerability of the region to climate change, the commission drew attention to the need for information and capacity building to help the countries of the region access climate change funds and strengthen their mitigation and adaptation activities, and to raise awareness among decision-makers of the pivotal role of forests and rangelands in climate change adaptation.

The commission noted in particular the need for support to national forest programmes, climate change, forest and rangeland policy, wildlife and protected areas, forest fires, forest protection, afforestation and rangelands rehabilitation. It also drew attention to the importance of recognizing the role of local knowledge in national policies and programmes.

European Forestry Commission. The potential of European forests for climate change mitigation and adaptation, wood energy and forests and water were the central themes of the thirty-fifth session of the European Forestry Commission (EFC), which took place in Lisbon, Portugal from 27 to 29 April 2010. The meeting recognized that attention on forests is at an all-time high as a result of recent climate change negotiations. It noted the potential for the International Year of Forests, 2011, to help further raise the profile of forests and forest-related issues.

Over a quarter of the carbon stored in the world's forests is found in the pan-European region. The session looked into ways and means of bridging the gap between the mitigation potential of European forests and their current low share in carbon markets. The need to create an enabling policy environment for forest adaptation measures by small forest owners was also recognized. The commission recommended that FAO consider developing a global network to assist countries in implementing their international commitments related to forests and climate change.

The commission noted the need to improve knowledge and data collection on wood energy, with a view to clarifying its environmental impacts and potential in sustainable energy



production. The benefits of payment for ecosystem services schemes for the forest and water sectors were especially noted, and further work to enhance their implementation was recommended.

To improve intersectoral understanding, EFC agreed to engage in dialogue with the water, energy and climate change sectors. To maximize synergies, the commission agreed to include the activities of *Silva Mediterranea* in its integrated programme of work and recommended to expand the mandate of the Working Party on the Management of Mountain Watersheds to include issues related to forests and water.

North American Forest Commission. Communicating the role of forests in climate change adaptation and mitigation was a main theme of the twenty-fifth session of the North American Forest Commission (NAFC), held in Guadalajara, Mexico from 3 to 7 May 2010.

Canada presented the findings of a recent study on the potential of biofuels, bioenergy and biomaterials to revitalize the Canadian forest sector, highlighting the value of partnership among sectors (forests, energy, chemicals, bioproducts). The United States of America outlined its new administration's national vision for forest management since 2008. Mexico reported on its development of forest governance models, monitoring systems and verification criteria to pave the way for REDD-plus and to generate long-term incentives to attract investment in the forest sector.

The commission reviewed the work of its many active working groups: on atmospheric change and forests; fire management; watershed management; forest insect pests, diseases and invasive plants; forest inventory, monitoring and assessment; forest genetic resources; and silviculture.

The commission highlighted fire management, climate change and water as the key issues for forestry in the region, and also called for the development of methodologies for valuing forest externalities in national forest inventories.

Latin America and Caribbean Forestry Commission. The Latin American and Caribbean Forestry Commission (LACFC) held its twenty-sixth session from 24 to 28 May 2010 in Guatemala City, Guatemala.

The session emphasized:

- initiatives for improving forest governance, institutions and legislation;
- the importance of strengthening forest health institutions (both governmental and academic) and improving regional collaboration to address forest pests and diseases, as they are a cross-border issue;
- capacity strengthening in national forest inventories, since information on the state of forest resources in the region is generally inadequate or dispersed, making it difficult to estimate the forest sector's real contributions;

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LIVE IN CHRONIC HUNGER AND
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- the need for additional funding for community forestry, as involving communities is fundamental for sustainable forest management.

An area of concern was the appropriation and improper use of forest genetic resources in the region. The commission expressed the need for stronger exchange of knowledge and experience among countries regarding *ex situ* conservation of these resources and the development of legal instruments governing their protection and related intellectual property. Access and benefit sharing and use rights relating to traditional knowledge were emphasized.



FAO launched the publication *Casos ejemplares de manejo forestal sostenible en América Latina y el Caribe* (exemplary cases of sustainable forest management in Latin America and the Caribbean), carried out under the auspices of LACFC. The study describes 35 success stories in the region, selected by a panel of experts over two years of intensive work based on 11 minimum criteria. The commission welcomed a proposal for a second phase of the project, to focus on knowledge transfer and national capacity building.

An in-session seminar on climate change, organized jointly with NAFC, emphasized that it is necessary to intensify efforts on adaptation, and not only mitigation. The session emphasized that sustainable forest management is a prerequisite for adapting forests to climate change.

Asia-Pacific Forestry Commission. The twenty-third session of the Asia-Pacific Forestry Commission (APFC) reviewed the many intersessional activities implemented during the preceding two years, including completion of the second Asia-Pacific Forestry Sector Outlook Study, regional forest policy studies, three forest policy short courses, a forest law enforcement and governance (FLEG) stocktaking exercise and numerous activities of the Asia-Pacific Forest Invasive Species Network. Bhutan hosted the session in Thimphu from 9 to 11 June 2010.

The meeting highlighted efforts in the region to prevent and mitigate the impacts of forest fires, pests and diseases; promote ecotourism; improve watershed protection; and ensure clean and reliable water supplies. Noting the increased emphasis being given to forest ecosystem services, the commission requested that FAO help develop methodologies to include evaluation of these services in national forest resource assessments.

The meeting emphasized the value of public-private partnerships in helping the forest sector contribute to poverty alleviation, economic recovery, employment and rural development.

APFC noted strong synergies between REDD and biodiversity conservation, and emphasized the need to develop tools for assessing forest degradation, forest fragmentation and related biodiversity loss, inviting further efforts to harmonize forest-related definitions.

The commission welcomed the emergence of various multilateral FLEG initiatives, including among others the Asia Forest Partnership and the Responsible Asia Forestry and Trade (RAFT) programme, and called for additional regional dialogue on FLEG.

Prior to the meeting, a three day workshop was held to explore how the concept of gross national happiness, pioneered by Bhutan, could be used in place of gross domestic product (GDP) as a measure of forest value to reflect the full range of benefits that society derives from forests.

Another side event addressed the challenges and issues of managing forests in small island developing States (SIDS), where forests and trees are especially crucial to social and economic development.

Workshop examines challenges of new trade measures in Europe

World trade of wood and paper products, including value-added products, has doubled over the past ten years. China is the main driver of the global timber trade, having rapidly become the major importer of roundwood and the major exporter of value-added wood products.

European regulations affecting the trade of timber products are evolving quickly. Recognizing the need to monitor this evolution closely because of its potential impacts on the entire forest sector, the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) and FAO, together with the World Trade Organization (WTO), organized the workshop "Emerging Trade Measures in Timber Markets", held on 23 March 2010 in Geneva, Switzerland.

The workshop provided a comprehensive overview of the increasingly complex regulatory framework affecting trade of wood and products. More than 100 stakeholders participated from government, industry, trade associations, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations and academia.

In addition to debate on trade measures such as tariffs and export taxes, participants discussed the emergence of non-tariff measures aimed at curbing illegal logging and favouring the use of timber harvested from sustainably managed forests, such as certification systems and public procurement policies. The meeting also addressed subsidies, notably those that encourage the use of renewable energy based on woody biomass.

Participants recognized the importance of phytosanitary measures in trade, as the global escalation of trade of all goods, often in wooden packaging or on wooden pallets, increases the risk of the spread of harmful insects and diseases. The International Standard for Phytosanitary Measures No. 15 (ISPM 15) concerning wood packaging material was presented, in connection with the WTO Agreement on the Application of Sanitary and Phytosanitary measures.

For a full report and presentations, see: timber.unece.org/index.php?id=270

Fruits of FAO support to poplar planting in China

Support from FAO to an Italian funded project promoting poplar cultivation in China culminated in the conclusion of a formal Memorandum of Understanding between China and Italy in early 2010. The project, supported by FAO as Secretariat of the International Poplar Commission (IPC), promotes poplars for sustainable livelihoods and land use and has become an example of successful international transfer of germplasm, science and technology.

In Siyang County, Jiangsu Province, the project has enabled a remarkable economic transformation, showing how forestry and agroforestry can provide a successful way to address poverty, hunger and environmental degradation. Since the 1970s, the



planting of poplars on more than 100 000 ha of flood plains and marginal lands has increased Siyang's tree cover from 7 to 48 percent.

The sustainable management of poplars in smallholder woodlots and agroforestry systems has led to a thriving local wood industry in Siyang. The resources of the poplar plantations account for 50 percent of the county's gross domestic product.

In addition, around 1 million people in Siyang now benefit from the ecosystem services of poplar forests in restoring marginal flood plains and stabilizing the banks of the Yellow, Huai and Yangtze rivers. Large expanses of planted poplar trees now protect agricultural fields from floods, wind, sandstorms and soil erosion. The trees also store carbon, mitigating climate change.

In recognition of the role of poplars in rural development, Siyang County has created the world's only historic Poplar Museum, which highlights the catalytic role played by FAO, IPC and Italian cooperation. It was founded on the exact spot where the first two Italian clones were planted in Siyang. Local authorities hold a biennial poplar festival that attracts more than 100 000 people,

with national media attention. At the festival in May 2010, the State Forestry Administration of China presented Siyang County with an award for outstanding environmental achievement and the nickname "Hometown of Poplar Culture".

Dissemination of popular DVD continues

The multimedia presentation *Forests and climate change: a convenient truth*, co-produced by FAO and the Forestry Commission of the United Kingdom in 2008 in all FAO official languages, has now been translated into additional languages – e.g. Czech, Danish, Italian, Japanese, Nepali and Vietnamese – through efforts by partners in many countries.

The informative presentation is available on FAO's Web site, on YouTube and on a much-reprinted DVD which can be ordered from FO-publications@fao.org. Illustrating its value as a teaching tool, a partner in New Zealand has sent a copy to every secondary school in the country.