



PRESS RELEASE

Oslo, 15 July 2008

European Forest Policy in Norway Norwegian MCPFE Secretariat starts work with new working programme and new visual profile

Climate, energy and water will be the focus areas of Europe's key forest co-operation and collaboration process, which Norway is going to chair for the next four years. Norway's Forestry Minister, Lars Peder Brekk, has taken over as Europe's new "forest guardian", and the Norwegian Secretariat is now in progress, with a new visual profile and a recent working programme.

The European "forest guardian" process is the Ministerial Conference on the Protection of Forests in Europe (MCPFE). The MCPFE has been important for Europe, where forests now cover more than 40 percent of the land area. Europe's forests also represent 25 per cent of the world's forest resources and are increasing fast. Since the first conference took place in Strasbourg in 1990, the forest area has increased by 13 million hectares - about the area of Greece - and the forest volume by 360 million cubic metres. This corresponds to more than half a billion trees.

A common understanding of what sustainable forest management means has been an important part of the collaboration between European forest ministers in the MCPFE. They have developed common principles, criteria and guidelines for sustainable management of forest resources. Mr Brekk, whose official title is Minister of Agriculture and Food, says this has established a solid ground for growth and diversity in today's forests.

The new visual profile makes clear the great economic, environmental and social importance of this forest collaboration on the national and international level. MCPFE applies to Europe, but at the same time its political work is connected to the global work of the United Nations for forestry and sustainable development, Mr Brekk says.

Five conferences have been held since the ministerial conferences started in Strasbourg. During the most recent one in Warsaw in November 2007, Norway assumed the chairmanship of the MCPFE. 46 countries and the European Community are brought together by the MCPFE to meet the challenges in the forest sector. In addition, several international, non governmental and private sector organisations participate.

At the Warsaw conference, the forest ministers in Europe adopted resolutions on the use of wood, bio-energy and water. In the resolution on “Forests, Wood and Energy” the countries committed themselves to increase the importance of forests for energy supply. In the resolution on “Forests and Water”, the ministers emphasised that sustainable managed forests secure the supply of good-quality fresh water, provide protection from floods and soil erosion, and combat desertification.

Norway has established a Secretariat to facilitate the MCPFE, and this office is going to foster the development of the forest policy in Europe. The last meeting of the member states held recently in Oslo settled the work programme. High-priority topics are the elaboration of principles for sustainable production of bio-energy and biofuel from forests, to enhance the role of forests in mitigating climate change, and in securing water supplies and protecting against droughts and floods. These are highly topical issues on the political agenda in Europe.

Other important tasks are to elaborate a framework for future forest collaboration and to explore the possibilities for a legally binding instrument on forests in Europe. The Secretariat will also prepare the next ministerial conference, which will be held in Norway in about four years.

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