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Sustainable Planted Forests to Meet Growing Global Needs

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The 2015 Global Forest Resources Assessments report from the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) noted that "...in planted forests, a new timber resource is continuing to be created ... (that will) contribute significantly not only to future wood and energy supplies but ... (also to) a range of wider social and environmental benefits..."

About 25 years ago, planted forests represented 4% of the world's forested area. Today they represent almost 7%. But that 7% provides at least one-third of the world's timber, so their importance should not be underestimated.

"We do not consider planted forests as a replacement for natural forests," said Dr. Christophe Orazio of the European Forestry Institute and coordinator of IUFRO's Task Force on Sustainable Planted Forests for a Greener Future. "We see them as being complementary to natural forests."

"In addition to their economic contributions, they capture significant amounts of carbon; reduce pressure on natural forests and help offset deforestation; offer alternatives for climate change adaptation and, since about 80% of planted forests consists of native species, negative impacts on biodiversity are limited," he said.

Landscape diversity, in which planted forests cover smaller areas and fit into the landscape mosaic, can also address the issue of biodiversity conservation in planted forests, he said.

"Planted forests also contribute to poverty alleviation and are a key component of the green economy, serving not only the traditional timber industry but also emerging transformation processes such as bioplastics, biochemicals and bioenergy," Dr. Orazio added.



Plantation of Olga Bay Larch at Qingyuan in Liaoning Province, China. Plantations such as these will be an important source of roundwood in the future. Photo: John Innes, Coordinator of IUFRO Task Force on Resources for the Future: Transformation in Forest Use)



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The Task Force was established by IUFRO because increased international scientific cooperation aimed at strengthening the commitment to research and development is considered critical to the sustainable management of planted forests.

He noted that globalization, by facilitating the movement of invasive species, can be a threat to monoculture stands and said his Task Force is working with the biodiversity Task Force to explore setting up mixed, two-species plantations.

Two other key considerations are climate change and population growth. When those are factored in, Dr. Orazio said, priorities – geographic regions where the need for planted forests can be considered more urgent – can be identified.

In many developing countries, smallholders and farmers own planted forests and depend on them for their livelihoods. In addition, a large number of people – especially women – gain employment from nursery operations, land preparation, plantation establishment, stand management and maintenance from wood-based industries.

"Africa, as an example, is one of the areas that would benefit from sustainable planted forests where they can help combat deforestation and help provide fuel, food and employment to a rapidly growing population," he said.

The Task Force's main outcomes will result from a focus on some key issues related to sustainable intensification – the intensification of planted forest management aimed at meeting the increasing need for forest products by a growing population, and doing this in a sustainable manner.

Among the Task Force's deliverables will be a joint scientific journal paper and a technical 'state of knowledge' brief on planted forests, and preparation of a scientific journal on "New Practices, Management Tools and Approaches" in industrial tree plantations in the tropics and subtropics. The Task Force will also contribute to the organization of the 4th International Congress on Planted Forests in China in 2018.

The Task Force on Sustainable Planted Forests for a Greener Future is one of several established by IUFRO to advance knowledge under five research themes in accordance with the IUFRO 2015-19 Strategy.

The five themes are: Forests, Soil and Water Interactions; Forests for People; Forests and Climate Change; Forests and Forest-based Products for a Greener Future; and Biodiversity, Ecosystem Services and Biological Invasions.

For more information about the IUFRO Task Force on Sustainable Planted Forests for a Greener Future, please visit:

<http://www.iufro.org/science/task-forces/planted-forests/>



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