

European Forest Institute

Activity Report - Year 2024

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1. Introduction

The European Forest Institute was established with the aim of enhancing international forest research and providing decision makers with unbiased forest-related information at a pan-European level. EFI has its Headquarters in Joensuu, Finland, and has offices in Barcelona, Bonn, Rome and Brussels, and project offices in Malaysia and China.

On 9 September 1993, 12 founding member organisations signed the Act of Constitution of the European Forest Institute. Thirty years later, the Institute has grown from a small association to an international organisation with 30 Member Countries, around 130 member organisations in 39 countries, and 156 employees from 43 nationalities (55% are women).

The governance of EFI has the following bodies: Council, Board, Scientific Advisory Board. The Council provides input into the strategic policy framework of EFI activities, ensuring that EFI services its original purpose. The Board consists of eight members, four of whom are elected by the EFI Council and four by EFI Associate Members (CNR is an associate member). The Scientific Advisory Board (SAB) contributes to the research and policy support activities of EFI.

The activities of EFI in the period 2022-2025 are organized in Programmes (Governance, Bioeconomy, Resilience) and research networks, that are aimed at supporting the Programmes. In 2024, a restructuring of EFI is starting and is planned to be completed in 2026.

1. Main activities carried on by EFI during 2024 relevant for Italy and for CNR

EFI's flagship publications and policy briefs were accessed 6270 times in 2024. The highest number was reached by the From Science to Policy publication on 'Carbon farming in the European forest sector' and by the policy brief on 'Combating health problems with urban forests'. A ThinkForest event on 'What do we know about carbon farming in European forests?' was held on 16th October in Brussels to present the outcomes of the From Science to Policy study 'Carbon Farming in the European forestry sector', (<https://doi.org/10.36333/fs17>, the first author is Tommaso Chiti from the University of Tuscia, Italy). Following this, an Italian seminar was organised by the Biocities Facility on 29th of November in the Italian ministry in Rome. [Seminario Carbon-Farming per le foreste europee e italiane. 19 novembre 2024, Roma, Ministero Agricoltura, Sovranità Alimentare e Foreste], followed by a ThinkForest dinner event (by invitation only) on "Ask a Scientist: Carbon Farming as a promising practice to enhance carbon storage in European Forests?" in Brussels to allow for direct engagement with the environmental and forest attachés. A ThinkForest Ask a Scientist webinar on carbon farming in European Forests was held on 7th April to offer participants the opportunity to discuss with leading scientists and ask questions in relation to the From Science to Policy study 17. Two EFI policy briefs were launched: EFI policy brief 10 on How can carbon farming in forests contribute to carbon neutrality? and EFI policy brief 11 on How to strengthen the European forest carbon sink through restoration: integrating active restoration and adaptation.

EFI's From Science to Policy study on carbon farming was launched in October 2024 and has already been referenced in important European Commission advice documents. To reach the EU's commitment of carbon neutrality by 2050 different avenues to store more carbon, including in soils, need to be pursued. The interdisciplinary team of authors identified different contributing forest management practices, which have varying caveats. While afforestation has the biggest potential, it remains challenging to perform those land-use changes on a large scale. Peatland restoration and management have the second largest long-term potential. While rewetting peatland significantly reduces soil GHG emissions, side-effects (e.g. increased methane emissions) can offset benefits and, in the short-term also increase CO₂ emissions when productive forests are targeted. Long and variable timescales in forest management and natural disturbances present major challenges to enhancing forest carbon. Setting baselines for verifying carbon removal and gains, establishing clear proofs

and gains in the absence of such measures as well as advancing methods and their harmonization remain essential.

The **Policy Support Trust Fund Steering Committee meeting** was held in Joensuu on 13th March 2025. Steering Committee members were informed about main highlights from the Annual Report 2024 including communication developments and impact and financial results for 2024. They discussed the activity plan for 2025 (planned ThinkForest events and communication activities) and were also briefed on the outcomes of a mapping on EU forest policy objectives and targets (1992-2024) that has not been published yet. They discussed the future of the Policy Support Fund as the current Trust Fund term ends by the end of 2025. This discussion will continue throughout 2025.

The EFI Biocities Winter School, “Cities Call Forests and Back” was organized in collaboration with AlberItalia and Society of Silviculture and Forest Ecology (SISEF), in December 2024 in central Italy. Twenty Early Career Researchers and postgraduate students with a wide set of backgrounds dealing with forest, urban and environment issues came from 11 different countries in and outside Europe. The week-long programme featured international speakers and lecturers with the aim to provide knowledge on urgent and emerging issues linking cities to forests and providing the tools to transform cities as we know them today to Biocities.

The 9th Ministerial Conference of FOREST EUROPE, held on 1-2 October near Bonn, gathered more than 160 delegates from 34 European countries, the European Commission, Australia and 24 observer organizations. Two major outcomes were the Bonn Ministerial Declaration on the Future of Sustainable Forest Management in Europe, and the Bonn Ministerial Decision on the establishment of a Forest Risk Facility (FoRISK) as a tool to enhance forest resilience.

The launch of the Forest Governance Index website sparked growing interest in assessing national forest governance and its dynamics. The FGI offers a means for systematic checks of forest governance, enhancing stakeholders' understanding of and access to information on key aspects such as participation, accountability and oversight, legislative and institutional clarity, transparency, and compliance promotion and enforcement.

In 2024, EFI's International Partnerships Facility strengthened its commitment to fostering legal, deforestation-free value chains in cocoa, coffee, and palm oil-producing countries. Responding to the EU's request, it launched the Technical Facility on Deforestation-Free Value Chains under the Team Europe Initiative to advance sustainability and ensure regulatory compliance. The Technical Facility assists countries in transitioning to sustainable, deforestation-free supply chains in line with the EU Deforestation Regulation. It provides targeted policy and technical support, focusing on key commodities such as cocoa, coffee, rubber, palm oil, soy, and cattle. Expertise offered includes traceability systems, legal frameworks, deforestation monitoring, and stakeholder engagement. The Technical Facility's demand-driven activities emphasise smallholder inclusion and foster multi-stakeholder dialogues, operating across Africa, Latin America, and Southeast Asia.

The 8th Mediterranean Forest Week (8MFW) took place in Barcelona in November. EFI's Mediterranean Facility (EFIMED) led the organisation of the region's flagship forest event which brought together almost 300 experts, policymakers, and researchers from more than 30 countries in the Mediterranean and beyond. It included enriching interactions among participants, engaging field visits in Catalan forests, and six dynamic plenary sessions exploring critical topics impacting the region's forests from a cross-cutting and multidisciplinary perspective. EFIMED coordinated six preparatory webinars before the sessions. The event concluded with a high-level session announcing a proposed Mediterranean Forest Initiative to enhance cooperation among regional actors and scale up restoration efforts. The 8MFW was also an opportunity to strengthen synergies between projects and key organisations. This included hosting the EFI-coordinated ResAlliance project annual meeting and facilitating knowledge transfer on wildfire prevention between the Barcelona Provincial Council, the Catalan Government, and key organisations attending the 8MFW.

2. Activities carried on by Dr. Carlo Calfapietra within EFI during 2024 and impact on the Italian scientific community

Connection and information exchange with EFI offices, sharing of information with CNR and other Italian colleagues.

The previous focal point Dr. Giorgio Matteucci participated in person to the Annual Assembly, including scientific and open events, that was held in Bonn in September 2024.

Support to EFI for the connection within the Italian community for the progress of the Biocities Facility in Rome.

3. Evaluation of the participation in terms of benefits and membership cost

The fee is very cheap and has a very high “money for value” return in terms of scientific and lobbying activities for projects and technical/policy activities in the field of forest, wood and sustainability.

New opportunities are emerging from the establishment of the Biocities Facility in Rome.

4. Evaluation of Italians’ attendance and how to improve interest and involvement

In EFI the Italian attendance is very active and considered, also with relevant roles in the governing bodies of the Institute.

5. Italian experts with important roles within the Union or within related Commissions and Programs (if known)

Dr. Elena Paoletti, Research Director at CNR-IRET, former member of the Scientific Advisory Board, is Board member since 2023.

Dr. Silvano Fares, Director of CNR-ISAFOM, and prof. Gherardo Chirici, University of Florence, are SAB members since 2023.

Prof. Scarascia Mugnozza (Università della Tuscia) is Responsible of the Biocities Facility in Roma.

6. If Union with CNR Commission, short summary about the 2024 CNR Commission activities

Not relevant

7. Notes (if any)

Not relevant

8. Conclusions

The participation of CNR in EFI activities is surely relevant and with value return for the Institution and its researchers

Signature