

Paper Production and Sustainable Forests

The Facts

The pulp and paper industry depends on, and promotes, sustainable forest management to provide a reliable supply of wood fibre, the key raw material for its products. Well-managed forests bring multiple benefits for society, such as livelihoods, ecosystem services and biodiversity. European forests, from where the region's paper mills source 90% of their wood fibre, have been growing by an area equivalent to 1,500 football pitches every day.

In Europe, wood comes from sustainably managed forests where the cycle of planting, growing and logging is carefully controlled.

Cellulose fibre is the primary raw material for paper making. Of the fibre used by the European pulp and paper industry, 51% comes from virgin wood fibre and 49% from paper for recycling.[1]

In principle, cellulose fibre can be obtained from almost any plant and some non-wood fibre is used in the industry, such as agricultural residues. However, wood is the dominant source because of its renewable and recyclable nature, technical properties, relatively low cost, and year-round availability.

Commercial interest in maintaining wood supply does promote good forest stewardship. Production forests can provide buffers for protected areas and help to protect vulnerable forests from illegal logging, encroachment or conversion to farmland.

Well-managed forests bring multiple benefits for society.

About 33 million people (1% of global employment) are estimated to work directly in the formal and informal forest sector.[2] The forests serve not only wood production, but they also provide many other very important ecosystem services that directly or indirectly contribute to human wellbeing.[3]

The vast majority of terrestrial biodiversity is found in the world's forests. Together, they contain more than 60,000 different tree species and provide habitats for 80% of amphibian species, 75% of bird species and 68% of mammal species. About 60% of all vascular plants are found in tropical forests.[2]

These multitudinous societal and ecological demands and expectations put new pressures on forest resources. This requires forest managers and owners to search for trade-offs between maintaining wood production and the provision of other ecosystem services, such as those promoting human health and well-being.

On the other hand, these might bring new opportunities to the forest sector, enabling diversification and the creation of new green jobs, types of services, value chains and profitable investments that enhance the competitiveness of the forest sector in the coming decades.[3]

European Forests have been growing by over 1,500 football pitches every day.

Between 2005 and 2020, European forests grew by 58,390km^2 – that is an area larger than Switzerland and equivalent to 1,500 football pitches of forest growth every day.[4]

This has been due to afforestation (for example, planting and seeding of trees on land that was not previously forested) and through the natural expansion of forests on areas such as abandoned land.[5]

Forests cover 40% of the European territory and are growing in both area and volume. Currently, the total volume is approximately 28 billion m^3, which is growing by around 612 million m^3 every year. This is a net annual growth of more than 2% once the volume of harvested forests has been deducted.[6]

> *"The forests serve not only for wood production, but they also provide many other very important ecosystem services which directly or indirectly contribute to human wellbeing, mainly provisioning, regulating and other services."*
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> Forest Europe, State Of Europe's Forests, 2020

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Most deforestation happens in the tropics, with agriculture being the primary cause.

According to WWF, deforestation is of major concern in tropical rainforests, home to much of the world's biodiversity. For example, in the Amazon around 17% of the forest has been lost in the last 50 years, mostly due to conversion for cattle ranching. Deforestation in this region is particularly rampant near more populated areas, roads, and rivers, but even remote areas have been encroached upon when valuable mahogany, gold or oil are discovered.[7]

> *"The most common pressures causing deforestation and severe forest degradation are large and small-scale agriculture, unsustainable logging, mining, infrastructure projects, and increased fire incidence and intensity."*
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> WWF, Deforestation Fronts, 2020

The issues of deforestation and forest degradation highlight the importance of sustainable forest management – not just as a valuable resource to make paper, construction products and fuel, but also to provide habitats for wildlife and mitigating climate change.

The print and paper industry is a major supporter of forest certification.

Across the industry, it is recognised that healthy forests are essential for the production of paper and paper-based products. This is why forest certification schemes are ingrained in the way the industry works, to ensure the raw material of wood fibre is sourced from sustainable forests.

In Europe, the two most recognised certification schemes are the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) and the Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification (PEFC).

Both the FSC and PEFC schemes have similar objectives: the certification of forests to credible, independently verified standards of responsible forest management, conserving the natural habitats of plants and animals, and respecting the rights of forestry workers and local communities. Both PEFC and FSC operate robust chain of custody schemes that track wood and wood fibre through every step of the supply chain, from the forest to the end-user.

The vast majority (90%) of the European paper industry's wood fibre originates from Europe. To prove wood is sourced from sustainably managed forests, the paper industry strongly relies on forest certification, in particular FSC and PEFC: 73% of wood and even 90% of market pulp comes from forest management certified sources.[8]

Sources

1. Cepi, Key Statistics, 2022
2. FAO, The State of the World's Forests, 2022
3. Forest Europe, State Of Europe's Forests, 2020
4. Two Sides Analysis of FAO data, 2005-2020
5. European Environmental Agency, Briefing, Forests, 2020
6. EU Green Source, 2023
7. WWF, Deforestation and Forest Degradation, accessed September 2023
8. Cepi, Forest Resources, accessed September 2023

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