Guidelines on

Defining, Mapping, Monitoring and Strictly Protecting EU Primary & Old-Growth Forests

European Commission

The Policy Context

EU Biodiversity & EU Forest Strategies for 2030:

“All the EU’s remaining primary and old-growth forests should be strictly protected”

To support this, the Commission will develop in close collaboration with Member States and stakeholders guidelines on:

- ***on the definition of primary and old-growth forests, including their definition, mapping, monitoring and strict protection***
- *closer-to-nature-forestry practices*
- *biodiversity-friendly afforestation, reforestation and tree planting*

Guideline Development:

A collaborative approach

- Prepared in active dialogue with Member States Experts and key stakeholders (Forest & Nature expert group)
- 3 years process, eight “rounds”
- Voluntary character – designed to complement regulatory framework and trigger discussions and support further implementation at Member States level

European Commission

Context and approach

- **Objective:** facilitate the implementation of the goal of strictly protecting all the remaining primary and old-growth forests in the EU.
  - By providing reliable and scientifically sound definitions
- Definitions based on existing work on the global level (primary forests) and European level (old-growth forests)
- Leaves flexibility to Member States to apply the criteria to the national context

Definitions & operational criteria

Primary forest: *'Naturally regenerated forest of native tree species, where there are no clearly visible indications of human activities, and the ecological processes are not significantly disturbed'*

~FAO Forest Resource Assessment

Old-growth forest: *'A forest stand or area consisting* ***of native tree species*** *that have developed, predominantly through natural processes****, structures and dynamics normally associated with late-seral developmental phases in primary or undisturbed forests of the same type****. Signs of former human activities may be visible,* ***but they are gradually disappearing or too limited to significantly disturb natural processes****.'*

Definition OGF – explanatory note

- **Planted and sowed forests** with native trees **not excluded**
- Includes forest areas where **indigenous peoples engage in traditional forest stewardship** activities
- Forests for which there is **evidence of active forest management - excluded**.
- **Includes stands affected by natural disturbances**. Once mapped, strict protection should apply also if a stand-replacing disturbance causes temporary absence of some indicators

Indicators and Mapping

- Mapping to be carried out once methodology for identification developed on the national level (e.g. setting thresholds, adapting the indicator list)
- To be aligned with definitions and criteria, and based on indicators

  Main indicators: Native tree species, Deadwood, Old or Large Trees

  Complementary indicators: Habitat trees, Structural Complexity, Indicator species, Stand origin
- Methodologies to be science-based and developed transparently
- **Pre-screening**: remote-sensing, existing data from forest owners, research communities, HCV mapping → on-site verification

Strict protection

- Old growth and Primary forest have high ecological value:

  → strict protection

- Only limited and well-controlled activities that do not interfere with natural processes or support and enhance them to be allowed
- Case-by-case assessment of permissible activities (research, disaster prevention, invasive species etc.)
- Buffer zones:

  1) Avoid negative impact of management practices in the surrounding areas on protected area

  2) Avoid negative spill-over effect of natural processes in protected forests on management objectives of the surrounding areas

Monitoring

- Crucial to assess the effectiveness and impact of
  - management measures,
  - human and natural disturbances,
  - climate change.
- Focus on attributes and indicators identified in the guidelines
- Coordinated or integrated with NFIs, Habitats Directive monitoring

Timetable for implementation

Step	Latest date
Member States to **submit their pledges** to the Commission on protected areas (under NADEG), including on strict protection. In line with the precautionary principle, Member States should **without delay strictly protect those forest areas for which there is a strong probability**, on the basis of the currently available information, that they meet definitions and criteria set out in this document.	Beginning 2023
Develop an identification and mapping **methodology.**	End 2023
Finalise the **mapping of public** primary and old-growth forests.	Mid 2025
Finalise the **mapping of private** primary and old-growth forests.	End 2025
Strictly protect identified and mapped primary and old-growth forests.	End 2029

Thank you!

European Commission