



Guidelines on

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

The Policy Context

EU Biodiversity & EU Forest Strategies for 2030:

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

Council conclusions Oct 2020:

“STRESSES the importance [...] of the protection of remaining primary forests; and WELCOMES the ongoing participatory processes of defining, mapping and monitoring primary and old-growth forests, aiming to ensure their conservation”

To support this, the Commission has developed in close collaboration with Member States and stakeholders ***Guidelines on Defining, Mapping, Monitoring and Strictly Protecting EU Primary & Old-Growth Forests***



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)
- Methodology to be aligned with the definitions and criteria, and based on following indicators

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

Complementary indicators: Habitat trees, Structural Complexity, Indicator species, Stand origin

- **Pre-screening:** remote-sensing, existing data from forest owners, research communities, HCV mapping → on-site verification

Process for mapping

Mapping methodologies to be:

- science-based and developed transparently + shared publicly;
- harmonised within biogeographical regions;

Mapping to be:

- Coordinated by national authorities: consolidating and integrating existing data or new mapping carried out;
- GIS results to be made public + shared with the EEA once legally protected

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

Timetable for implementation

Step	Latest date
<p>Member States to submit their pledges to the Commission on protected areas (under NADEG), including on strict protection.</p> <p>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.</p>	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

Links to other legislation

Renewable Energy Directive (recast):

- Forest biomass for bioenergy, to be eligible for financial support, cannot be sourced from primary and old-growth forests
- Transposition deadline May 2025: no obligation to map forests but **obligation to define on the national level** (distinct from primary forest);
- Encouraging MS to align national definitions and carry out mapping as per the Guidelines

Deforestation Regulation:

- Operators to ensure no products are placed on the EU market or exported from the EU coming from forest degradation = primary forest → planted forest
- No mapping obligation, but existing maps can be used to lower burden for operators to make informed assessment

Links to other legislation

Nature Restoration Regulation:

- Protection of existing or enhancing the development/restoration of old-growth forests can facilitate meeting obligations under Article 4 = improve the condition and re-establish area of the relevant forest habitats (e.g. western taiga forest, Fennoscandian broadleaved forests)

Forest Monitoring Regulation (proposal):

- Mapping obligation by 1 January 2028, definitions to be aligned with the Guidelines

Objectives of the session

- Highlight the importance of primary and old-growth forests and their protection;
- Get updates on the current status of mapping and protection efforts in the region;
- Explore possibilities for harmonisation of definitions;
- Understand the challenges and limitations of the national processes;
- Highlight opportunities of old-growth forest protection in public and private forests

Thank you!