

PRO SILVA 30TH ANNIVERSARY MEETING IN SLOVENIA 2019

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"Forests in Europe are in Danger – Solutions offered"

Bark beetles and drought are killing thousands of hectares of forests in Czech Republic, Northern Austria, Germany, France, Belgium, etc. not only spruce is dying, but also silver fir, Scots pine and European beech.

A summary of reports from the member countries of Pro Silva showed that a series of drought years, where the annual precipitation just reaches 50-60% of long-term averages leads to **dramatic effects on European forests**. Especially in the northern part of central Europe bark beetle infestations in spruce forests have exploded (e.g. Bohemian Moravian highlands, Alsace, Germany), the frequency of forest fires is unprecedented (e.g. pine forests of Brandenburg). Even healthy old growth beech forests in full natural condition are dying, especially on richer, humid soil conditions (e.g. Spessart, Alsace) and also young oak plantations cannot withstand rapid change in environmental conditions.

As a result, the **timber market** has collapsed, even exports to China cannot make forest enterprises profitable and many small forest owners simply gave up.

Forest **rescue programmes** are being developed in a number of European member states. Behind the scenes there is a strong lobby from conservative forestry groups that want to continue with their accepted practices and maintain the status quo. They are demanding genetic varieties of spruce that will survive and prosper in drier climate conditions. But they are fighting against the forces of relentless climate change. Epigenetic effects offer an alternative way and have been shown to be quicker than to slow breeding success, which would take decades. Natural processes and regeneration offer the maximum amount of genetic exchange and evolutionary adaptation. Nature has found its way over thousands of years.

What we need is a major **paradigm shift**. The latest scientific evidence¹ must be implemented to forest practices, that show that structured mixed forests with dynamic processes relying on natural regeneration help to stabilize the forest.

¹ e.g. Ruppert Seidl, Tomas Vrska,



Nevertheless, we should be open to “new” - non indigenous - tree species and to the use of different tree provenances. There must be guided “assisted migration” in the woods.

It is also not possible to reforest all post disturbance areas, since not there are not enough seedlings from the nurseries, nor so qualified personnel to plan! We need to combine enrichment planting of low numbers of young target tree species and leave space for natural successions. We must aim to create mixed forests with irregular stand structures and healthy soil.

Europe-wide - selective - **over-browsing** by ungulates (red deer, roe deer, sika deer, etc.) prevent natural regeneration and often lead to extinction of important tree species like silver fir and oak, which cannot regenerate without fencing or other artificial protection. The hunting directives must be changed and fulfilled to control ungulate populations and to prevent this creeping and invisible forest dieback.

As even natural or semi-natural forests, as well as forests in full protected areas are dying, the demand of NGO's and nature conservationists to increase the area of “**non-intervention management**” is leading up in a dead-end-street. Our forests need modern nature orientated management, which helps the best tree species and individual trees to develop. The most important issue of the future will be to mark trees for selective cuttings and to help tending the young stands. We need more qualified foresters in the forest, not in the offices, and more skilled forest workers !

The immense importance of the **ecosystem services** provided by European forests, in combination with a sustainable economic utilisation of timber, requires an **integrative approach** to forest management as promoted by Pro Silva. Forest management is the only economic activity that can produce valuable timber in a carbon storing process, as well as in deadwood and humus in the forest, as in the timber products for house construction and other purposes. **The CO₂ consuming economic** element will be one of the most important in the future, also substituting materials originating from fossil sources in different ways (bioeconomy).

Pro Silva demands

At their 30th anniversary Pro Silva demands active forest management in a sustainable Close-to-Nature way. All European states are encouraged to develop the **legal and financial framework** for implementing Close-To-Nature forest management in public and state forests, as well as in private forests. However, this can only be achieved on the condition that governments change game management practice and hunting directives to let the forests grow!

In a carbon balancing tax system close-to-nature forestry should gain some advantages !

Pro Silva offers an impressive **network of forest practitioners and scientists** which is guided by a set of fundamental principles it has developed over 30 years. The numerous declarations are on our website www.prosilva.org as guidelines for better management of the forests of the future. Furthermore, we offer a network of **exemplary forests** all over Europe to visit and study recent developments. In addition, we offer the best strategies for forest conservation !

We support consequent politics to fight climate change on a global scale, but one should not overlook all tiny steps that each individually can contribute.

Pro Silva – growing forests in the future – for more than 30 years

Our roots go back to years before 1900 !

www.prosilva.net – www.forestconservation.eu

More than 70 participants from 25 European countries and one guest from the US held their 30th anniversary meeting in Radlje ob Darvi in the North of Slovenia near the Austrian border. Radlje is the cradle of close-to-nature forest management and its nearby forest of the Pahernik foundation is one of the best examples of this approach, being managed by local foresters under support of the Department of Forestry of Biotechnical faculty in Ljubljana.

Pro Silva held the opening ceremony of this meeting at Radlje castle and presented the nearby forestry educational trail. An exhibition of the development of Close-to-Nature Forestry was opened and some of the founding members from 30 year ago were honoured.

At the conference with title *"Forests for the future – from science to the people"* international experts presented deeper insight into the relation between science and forestry practice.

A final podium and plenary discussion focused on the main urgent issues to improve the resilience of European forests. The following hybrid field workshops held during the following days in different nearby forest stands and in the city forest of Celje gave many inputs and impulses for the participants and also helped the social coherence of the European network.



Eckart Senitza

President Pro Silva

Tone Lesnik

President of Pro Silva Slovenia



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WHO WE ARE

Pro Silva is a European organisation which promotes close to nature forestry and continuous cover forest systems. It was established in 1989 in Slovenia. At present there are 22 full members of the organisation and there are also several other countries with associate membership. Since 2018 we have associated members from the United States (Forest Stewards Guild, New England Forestry Foundation), from India (ForEco India), from Brazil (ACEF St. Catarina) and Canada ("Les Amis de la forêt Ouareau") and hopefully this marks the beginning of the formation of a global network. More than 5500 professionals and forest owners are involved in Pro Silva.

Pro Silva promotes its principles and concepts through a Europe wide program of silvicultural education involving seminars and excursions. Increasingly the members are also involved as partners in national or international research and networking projects. A European network of best practice demonstration forests is being developed.