



FAO FORESTRY

Argentina to host XIII World Forestry Congress in 2009

Preparations are under way for the XIII World Forestry Congress, to be held from 18 to 25 October 2009 in Buenos Aires, Argentina. It is expected that this event will attract about 4 000 participants from more than 100 countries. The World Forestry Congress is held every six years and is co-sponsored by FAO and the host country.

The Congress will include one week of presentations, discussions, round tables, parallel events and exhibits. In the two weeks following the Congress, study tours will be offered to diverse types of forests throughout the country. Institutions from various sectors in Argentina will be involved in organizing the Congress, with the advice and assistance of FAO.

The theme for the XIII World Forestry Congress will be "Forests in development: a vital balance". This theme guarantees opportunities to analyse social, environmental and economic aspects of natural resources in a local, regional and global context. The importance of the sustainable management of all types of forests will be emphasized, as well as the contribution of forest resources to the sustainability of the planet. The congress will provide an opportunity to learn about the diverse ecosystems of the different regions of the world, as well as the diverse perspectives of people and organizations who share an interest in forests, including academics, forest producers, environmentalists, rural and indigenous people, forest managers, technical experts and policy-makers. The Congress will offer a truly global view of the future of the world's forests.

Argentina has about 33 million hectares of native forests and an additional 1.1 million hectares of planted forests, covering a broad spectrum of ecosystems, including humid, subtropical, temperate, semi-arid and arid forest types. Thanks to this range and to an extensive network of protected areas, the study tours to different parts of the country will offer incomparable opportunities for

combining the on-site study of diverse forests with the enjoyment of beautiful forest scenery.

Biennial meeting of the North American Forest Commission

The impact of climate change on North American forests was a key focus of discussions at the twenty-third session of the North American Forest Commission, held in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada from 23 to 24 October 2006. With climate variability likely to increase in the future, representatives of the commission's three member countries – Canada, Mexico and the United States – agreed that more intense precipitation events, droughts and heat waves will represent an increasing threat to forest health. The outbreak of mountain pine beetle that is devastating forests in British Columbia may be a harbinger of increasingly severe outbreaks of forest pests, for example. The delegates agreed that adaptation to climate change is one of the great challenges of the future and recommended that all FAO Regional Forestry Commissions consider addressing the issue in 2008.

At its previous session in 2004, the Commission had agreed to undertake, for the first time in its 47 years, an evaluation of its strengths and weaknesses, to assist in identifying means of enhancing its effectiveness. The evaluation report, presented at the meeting, noted that the commission, while not influencing forest policy extensively in the three countries, has been successful as a technical forum and that its working groups have made significant contributions to their subject areas (fire management; atmospheric change and forests; forest products; forest insects and diseases; silviculture; inventory, monitoring and assessment; forest genetic resources; and watershed management). The Commission has been a catalyst for sharing resources to prevent and manage forest fires and pest and disease outbreaks that cross national borders. These initiatives serve as a model for other regions.

Responsible public procurement of forest products

National and local governments are major consumers of wood and paper products. Several governments have developed, or are in the process of developing, purchasing policies to ensure that forest products come from legal and sustainably managed sources.

To encourage the sharing of experience among countries that already have policies in place and those that do not, the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) Timber Committee and the FAO European Forestry Commission held a policy forum in Geneva, Switzerland on 5 October 2006.

The forum "Public procurement policies for wood and paper products and their impacts on sustainable forest management and timber markets" brought together national and local government authorities with industry and trade associations, exporting and



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importing enterprises and non-governmental environmental organizations to discuss ways to encourage public procurement policies and to harmonize them among countries so as to not create market barriers.

The findings of a recently completed FAO study, "Public Procurement Policies for Forest Products and their Impacts", served as the discussion paper for the meeting. The results of a study by the Team of Specialists on Forest Products Markets and Marketing, "Market Effects of Public Procurement Policies for Wood and Paper Products in the UNECE Region", were also presented. Representatives of a number of European countries and the United States described their policies, and the International Tropical Timber Organization (ITTO) presented the viewpoint of tropical exporting countries.

The forum focused on the following questions:

- Are existing public procurement policies effective in achieving their goals?
- What are the impacts of public procurement, including their implications for markets for wood and paper products?
- How can public procurement policies avoid creating market barriers?
- How can implementation procedures be improved, including instruments for verification of legality and sustainability as well as alternative forms of evidence?
- Are harmonized approaches in public procurement policies necessary or possible?

The forum supported the importance of procurement policies. Although their positive effects on sustainable forest management are difficult to prove, they discourage illegal extraction and trade. Public procurement can provide a role model for the private sector.

There are many difficulties with implementation, however. These include the complexity of assessing certification schemes and challenges in allowing evidence of sustainability from alternative documentation. Public procurement policies cannot be expected to solve all problems immediately, and it was proposed that implementers consider a phased approach.

Market players expressed concerns about certain aspects of public procurement policies, including the procedures required, the diversity of approaches between countries and the risk of creating unnecessary trade barriers. They noted a risk that public procurement policies can discriminate against small-scale or community-run forest enterprises and less-developed countries.

At present, only wood products are subject to public procurement policies for ensuring sustainability. This fact, as well as possible excessive transaction costs, may lead to substitution by less environmentally friendly competing materials, such as plastics. This concern needs to be addressed.

In addition, public procurement policies cover only primary wood products. As a result, some unsustainably or illegally produced wood reaches markets in the form of value-added products, which circumvent such policies. The forum concluded that although

it may be technically difficult, governments should consider addressing value-added products in their public procurement policies. Some countries are already doing this.

It is important for countries and stakeholders to exchange information and to cooperate and coordinate actions in this area. The recounting of experiences showed that several countries that have public procurement policies are already working together.

The published proceedings will be available in early 2007. For more information, see: www.unece.org/trade/timber/docs/tc-sessions/tc-64/2006PolicyForum.htm

Forest products industry: producing and using renewable energy to mitigate climate change

The global forest products industry can play a significant part in combating climate change by optimizing the use of raw material, increasing efficiency, using renewable energy in the production process, producing bioenergy and expanding into biorefinery products, while developing the competitiveness of the sector.

This was the conclusion of the International Seminar on Energy and Forest Products Industry, held in Rome on 30 and 31 October 2006, in which intergovernmental organizations and the global forest product industry joined forces. Participants stressed that well integrated and carefully balanced energy and forest policies around the globe set the stage for these developments. Governments, industry, institutions and society at large each have a role to play and should work together.

The forest products industry is a major consumer of energy and used 6 percent of total industrial energy in 2003. But the industry also produces energy. It is the only sector that already generates approximately 50 percent of its own energy needs, the majority from renewable carbon-neutral biomass. But the industry can do better by increasing efficiency, reducing reliance on fossil fuel and expanding the use of renewable energy. Participants discussed ways for the industry to use and produce bioenergy and increase energy efficiency.

The seminar was organized jointly by FAO, the International Energy Agency (IEA) and the International Council of Forest and Paper Associations (ICFPA), in collaboration with the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), the International Tropical Timber Organization (ITTO) and the World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD).

Proceedings of the meeting are available online: www.fao.org/forestry/site/34867/en/