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European Forum of Northern Sweden's views on the EU-Commission's expected proposals for Forest Monitoring and Strategic Plans

European Forum of Northern Sweden (EFNS) is a network for politicians at the local and regional levels from Norrbotten, Västerbotten, Jämtland Härjedalen and Västernorrland. EFNS is a meeting place and knowledge arena where EU policies are analysed and discussed in respects where it affects northern Sweden. EFNS monitors European issues to influence EU legislation, EU strategies and action programmes, and the EU budget. The purpose of EFNS is to safeguard the interests of northern Sweden both in the European arena and in relation to national level issues with a clear European perspective.

The European Commission's legislative proposals on *Forest Monitoring and Strategic Plans* are expected to be laid out in the second quarter of 2023. The European Commission justifies the need for this new legislative proposal referring to its lack of knowledge on forests in the EU today and to a need for forest management plans to be harmonized across the Union to avoid fragmentation. In its preparatory work, the European Commission proposes that increased monitoring of forests should be carried out using satellites, i.e. remote sensing. So far, the European Commission has not offered any clarification on how to design the supranational strategic plans for forests in the EU. Thus, this position statement has chosen to focus on forest monitoring, which Sweden has a long history of.

In short, our position statements are as follows:

- 1. It is important to increase knowledge on forests at EU level.** The EU's knowledge of the state of forests within the Union needs to increase. To achieve this, existing and processed data from Member States should be collected and – if necessary – further processed at EU level in order to be comparable across countries.
- 2. Ground-based observations are necessary.** Reliable information on forests, which can form the basis for forest management decisions, cannot be solely obtained by remote sensing using satellite data. Decisions on forest plans and forest management must be made based on a combination of ground-based data and remote sensing.
- 3. Diversity in forestry management practices is important.** EFNS emphasizes the positive aspect of forest owners' different ways of managing their forests, as this creates a variety in forest landscapes. Forest stock with a variety of predominant tree species and age classes can imply stronger resilience against different types of disturbances such as forest fires, insect attacks and the impact of climate change.
- 4. Several positive trends for forests in the EU.** Several trends for forests in the EU are currently positive, with an increasing amount of forest land, increased carbon storage, and increased wood harvest. In order to ensure these positive trends, factors contributing to



these trends need to be analyzed. EFNS therefore wants to see a research effort on the social, economic and ecological factors behind these positive trends.

1. It is important to increase knowledge on forests at EU level

EFNS welcomes the proposal for comparable information on the state and status of forests in the EU. Knowledge is crucial for making balanced decisions and selecting measures to ensure that forests are resilient against disturbances such as insect attacks, forest fires, snow damage, and damage caused by wild animals.

EFNS agrees that within EU Member States national statistics are needed to observe trends and track the status of forests. However, EFNS would like to emphasize that monitoring systems and comprehensive national statistics already exist in many of the Member States. In Sweden, data has been available since the 1920s. Member States that currently lack knowledge data collection systems should be supported to create systems suited to them and their forests.

Once collected and processed, national statistics may need further processing at EU level in order to be comparable across countries and form the basis for decision-making, e.g. with regards to the proposal for binding nature restoration targets.

EFNS believes that it is cost-effective and logical to use knowledge data collection systems that already exist at the national level. Further, we find there is an understanding and acceptance of current national data collection systems amongst forest owners on whose land the information is collected.

2. Ground-based observations are necessary

Within the EU and within the Member States themselves, there exist large variations in forests. Thus, EFNS wishes to emphasize it is important that decisions on forest management continue to be based on information that foresters, forest owners and forest managers receive through their close proximity to the forests and by observing events and trends from the ground-level perspective.

3. Diversity in forestry management practices is important

In the description of the forthcoming legislative proposal, the European Commission writes that effective decision-making today is hampered by limited information available, causing forest planning to be fragmented. This description of reality needs to be nuanced.

EFNS would also like to point out that fragmentation, i.e. diversity in plans and forest management practices between different foresters and landowners, should not be considered as negative per se. On the contrary, this provides diversity in the forest landscape with forest stocks consisting of different predominant tree species and age classes, which can imply stronger resilience against different types of disturbances such as forest fires, insect attacks and the impact of climate change. A varied forest landscape also allows for different animal species to find their environment, depending on whether they seek shelter, daily rest, or food.



4. Several positive trends for forests in the EU

The *State of Europe's forests 2020* report shows that between 1990 and 2020 forest area in the EU increased by 9 %, the amount of carbon stored by 50 %, and the timber harvest went up by 40 %. The trend of increasing carbon stock and increased abstraction of renewable materials in the form of forest raw materials support efforts to achieve EU's climate objectives. Although there are local and regional problems with insect attacks and dry flammable biomass remaining in the forests, several overall trends have a positive outlook.

In order for EU's forests to continue to develop in the right direction, it is important that forest owners and managers, those who know their forests best, continue to keep their sense of responsibility for forest health and at a ground level can observe risks, such as insect attacks so that these can be curbed before turning into major infestations that are difficult to stop.

EFNS wants to see an investment in research to increase knowledge on the factors that support positive development in forests in terms of growth, wood extraction, increasing carbon stocks and biodiversity at the landscape level.

Increased knowledge is important to create conditions for the continued positive development of forests in the EU. EFNS therefore wants to see a research effort on the social, economic and ecological factors that support the positive development of forests in the EU.

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