

**Motion 125: Strengthening the protection of primary and old-growth forests in Europe and facilitating their restoration where possible**

RECALLING that primary, virgin or old-growth forests are a keystone element of conservation worldwide, because of both natural and cultural values for humankind, as previously stated by IUCN, e.g. Resolution 6.045 *Protection of primary forests, including intact forest landscapes* (Hawai'i, 2016);

FURTHER RECALLING that in Europe primary and old-growth forest includes virgin, near-virgin, long-untouched forests and those dominated by natural processes – all relating to the notion of primary forest, they are characterised by old trees, uneven-aged stand structure and a large quantity of deadwood, and they play a crucial role in maintaining thousands of species, often rare or endangered, some of them unlisted in European nature policies;

ALSO RECALLING the guidelines promoted by the Resolution of the European Parliament of 3 February 2009 on wilderness areas in Europe, which fully apply here;

NOTING the lack of mutual understanding of European citizens about what is a primary and old-growth forest in the context of Europe, ~~fr~~ despite the clarifications provided by the European Commission Guidelines for the Management of Wilderness and Wild Areas in the Natura 2000 Network (2013);

NOTING the gaps in mapping of the last-remaining primary and old-growth forests in Europe, despite the recent efforts by Sabatini *et al.* (2018, 2021) who show that primary and old-growth forest remnants cover less than 1% of Europe's forest area, and that most are not yet strictly protected;

EMPHASISING that, beyond a priceless existence value, primary and old-growth forests provide essential ecosystem services, contribute to climate change mitigation and support biodiversity;

GRAVELY CONCERNED by the continuous degradation of primary and old-growth forests in Europe due to harmful activities, sometimes despite site protection;

NOTING that protection of remaining patches of primary and old-growth forest is essential for the restoration of primary and old-growth forest-dwelling species; and

~~fr~~EMPHASISING that primary and old-growth forest characteristics develop over long timescales, often requiring more than a century, and that the urgent strict protection of these forests is therefore crucial to fully understanding the natural dynamics of the ecosystem;~~fr~~

1. REQUESTS the Director General to develop a favourable context for conservation by:

a. securing an agreement on a practical understanding relevant for all regions of Europe; and

b. catalysing completion of a comprehensive map of primary and old-growth forests across Europe showing location, natural habitats, maturity level and protective status;

2. ENCOURAGES State Members in Europe to promote a ~~fr~~legal framework in favour of the conservation and restoration of primary and old-growth forests, with actions to:

a. set the strict protection of primary and old-growth forests as a goal for the European Green Deal, and promote its implementation through the Biodiversity Strategy of the European Union

**Commented [HS1]:** Change to “primary and old growth forests” throughout the Motion

(French government)

This is to align with ongoing dialogue in the region

AGREED

**Commented [HS2]:** Adding additional reference to updated paper

Suggestion from WWF, all agreed

**Commented [HS3]:** Comment by Serge Muller, National Museum of Natural History, Paris

**Commented [HS4]:** Comment by Nicolas Gouix, Conservatoire d'espaces naturels

**Commented [HS5]:** Daniel Vallauri, WWF request to delete parentheses as this discussion has advanced with the EU biodiversity strategy

(EU), the European Forest Strategy, the Natura 2000 network, the UNESCO World Heritage Convention, national forest strategies and regional initiatives;

b. support the creation of warning systems, for identifying and preventing new threats as soon as they emerge; and

c. assess and promote protection in perpetuity, namely through protected areas, as well as through other tools such as tax rules, payment for ecosystem services, land purchase, long leasehold and easement opportunities; and

3. ENCOURAGES State Members and forest managers in Europe to save primary and old-growth forests, even the small ones, by:

a. ~~supporting full disclosure of~~ ~~prohibiting~~ ~~Prohibiting~~ Prohibiting timber sourcing from timber sourcing from primary and old-growth forests, with the exception of ancient forests as defined by Motion 46 (Hawai'I 2016) and ensuring the protection of these forests preferentially through regulatory means possibly based on the due diligence mechanism; and

b. catalysing protection and restoration efforts for primary and old-growth forests, including focusing on the expansion and linkage/reconnection of long-untouched forests.

**Commented [HS6]:** Comment by WWF, Daniel Vallauri

Response by UK Defra, Hugh Loxton – in the UK we have ancient woodlands and old growth forests that are culturally important and some amount of extraction takes place, incl. for the cost of managing the woodland so cannot support as amended. Suggestion is 'prohibiting **unsustainable**' .

Response by WWF, DV – fully understand concern raised, however different topic, Hawaii Motion 46 talks about UK ancient forests. This is more old-growth and primary – would be a bad sign to say harvesting should be promoted.

Response by UK Defra, HL – agree UK does not have primary woodlands apart from small places but old-growth includes their definition of ancient woodlands, maybe in this clause we need to distinguish between old growth and primary and prohibit from primary, allow sustainable sourcing from old growth

Response by WWF, DV – mistake to connect old growth forests to situation in UK as this will have huge consequences in Eastern Europe; suggest – adding exception 'for ancient forests as understood in the UK'. Ancient was specifically not used to avoid this pitfall.

Response by Francois, French Govt – agree with Daniel. Suggests use of formulation used in New European Forest Strategy and change prohibiting to 'limiting extractive activity'

Response by Serge Muller – prohibiting and limiting are not the same, with limiting extractive activity can be permitted

Response by HL – we have ancient woodlands i.e. in place since 1600 (soil etc. not only trees) and then introducing new category called long established woodlands i.e. in place from 1840 and both categories fall into generally accepted definition of old growth forests ie in place for over 150 years but neither are primary forest. Easiest way is to distinguish between prohibition in primary forest and limiting extraction in old growth.

Response by DV – Ancient means something else in other countries, one linked to stand maturity / micro-habitat and linked species and then second is linked to more to soil an ...

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**Commented [HS7]:** DV – translation into other languages especially word 'maturity' into French. Daniel should be consulted for translation.

Serge – agree with DV

Suggested language:

primary and old-growth forest = primaires et vieilles forêts  
forêts primaires et vieilles forêts