

1st European Conference on Small Forest Holdings explores innovative solutions and sustainable approaches to manage small-scale forest holdings

200 international forest experts debate at FAO-Rome solutions for forest land abandonment, low profitability and forest fragmentation in the EU.

The successful conference brought together key stakeholders from across Europe and many Forest Owners' Associations, who attended the launch of *Laurus*, a European network providing training and innovation for technical staff of forest owners' organisations.

Rome, 22 May 2025 – The first European Conference on Small Forest Holdings was held from 20 to 22 May 2025 at the headquarters of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) in Rome. The event brought together over 200 key stakeholders from across Europe, including representatives from public institutions, private organisations, and NGOs spanning the entire European forest sector.

Co-organised by the FAO and the European Forest Institute (EFI), and funded by the European Union, the Conference was primarily coordinated by the CeseFor Foundation and the University of Florence on behalf of the SMURF Consortium. It was supported by the Italian Ministry of Agriculture, Food Sovereignty and Forests (MASAF) and the Spanish Ministry for the Ecological Transition and the Demographic Challenge (MITECO).

The Conference provided a vital platform to exchange knowledge, share best practices, and explore innovative and sustainable approaches to managing small-scale forest holdings. It addressed the profitability of small forest properties, the challenges of fragmentation, and the crucial role of forest owners' associations within the EU. Discussions focused on promoting Sustainable Forest Management while supporting local value chains based on forest products and ecosystem services.

European small forest network

A highlight of the event was the launch of [*Laurus*](#), a European-wide network aimed at fostering innovation transfer and knowledge exchange among forest

practitioners. Laurus to empower technical staff of European Forest Owners' organisations through innovation, training and connection to promote a new forest management paradigm that is economically viable, ecologically sound, and socially inclusive — ensuring the long-term resilience of Europe's forests.

Forest fragmentation remains a significant challenge in Europe, contributing to biodiversity loss, increased vulnerability to wildfires and climate change, and hindering effective forest management. The Conference emphasised the urgent need for tailored, sustainable, and economically viable solutions to support small forest owners and advance the implementation of the EU Forest Strategy.

High-Level Opening Ceremony

The opening ceremony featured several prominent figures from the international forestry and environmental policy arena, including: **Zhimin Wu**, Forestry Director at the FAO; **Emilio Gatto**, General Director for Mountain Economy and Forestry, Ministry of Agriculture, Food Sovereignty and Forests (Italy); Division General **Antonio Danilo Mostacchi**, Commander of the Carabinieri Command for the Protection of Biodiversity (Italy); **Elsa Enriquez Alcalde**, Deputy Director General for Forestry Policy and Combating Desertification, Ministry for the Ecological Transition and the Demographic Challenge (Spain); **Francisco Javier Rodríguez**, Project Officer at the Research Executive Agency (REA) of the European Commission; and **Pablo Sabín**, CEO of the CeseFor Foundation (Spain).

The three-day programme included keynote speeches, panel discussions, technical sessions, networking opportunities, and an exclusive field trip to Castelporziano Estate natural reserve of the Italian state. Key themes covered included the current state of small forest holdings in Europe, legal and financial support systems, forest owner engagement, forest-based value chains, and ecosystem service markets.

The Conference marked an important milestone in fostering stronger cooperation across Europe's forestry community and underscored the importance of small forest owners in shaping a sustainable, inclusive future for European forests. Conclusions will be soon available on the [Project's website](#).

About SMURF: The SMURF project, aligned with the EU's Forest Strategy, promotes sustainable forest management through innovative Closer to Nature Silviculture practices (CNS) and a harmonized European Payment for Ecosystem Services (PES) system. By tailoring solutions for small forest properties, SMURF enhances carbon farming, biodiversity, and forest product valorization. With a multidisciplinary approach and diverse stakeholder engagement, SMURF provides holistic sustainability solutions across the forest-based value chain.



Ten organizations from Spain, Belgium, Italy, France, Portugal, and Denmark collaborate with a translational, multidisciplinary, and multi-actor approach. This project is granted by the European Research Executive Agency (REA) under the Horizon Europe program.

For more information about the SMURF project, visit www.smurfproject.eu.

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