

EUFGIS - a new project on FGR documentation is launched



On 1 April 2007, a new project on the "Establishment of a European Information System on Forest Genetic Resources (EUFGIS)" started its activities to strengthen documentation work in this area. EUFGIS is one of the actions supported by the European Commission under the Council Regulation No 870/2004 on genetic resources in agriculture. It is coordinated by Bioversity International and has six other participating partners: the Federal Research and Training Centre for Forests, Natural Hazards and Landscape (BFW) in Austria, the State Forest Tree Improvement Station (SNS) in Denmark, Institut National de la Recherche Agronomique (INRA) in France; the National Forest Centre (NLC) in Slovakia; and the Slovenian Forestry Institute (SFI) in Slovenia and Forest Research in the UK. The project will run until 30 September 2010.

EUFGIS aims at establishing a Web-based information system to serve as a documentation

platform for national FGR inventories and to support practical implementation of gene conservation and sustainable forest management in Europe. The project will create a network of national focal persons in European countries to provide updated data for the information system once it has been established. Before the information system can be developed, the major effort is to harmonize minimum requirements for dynamic gene conservation units of forest trees and develop common information standards for these units at pan-European level. The project will also provide training on FGR documentation to the national focal persons.

EUFGIS is building on the experience gained and lessons learnt from the development of the European Plant Genetic Resources Search Catalogue (EURISCO). Thus, in terms of information technology, the know-how and technical solutions to establish the EUFGIS system are readily

available and well tested. Similarly to EURISCO, Bioversity International is committed to hosting and maintaining the EUFGIS system once the project has ended.

The EUFGIS project will directly benefit the EUFORGEN Networks which are currently developing "common action plans" for target tree species to strengthen gene conservation efforts from the pan-European perspective. The common action plans aim at sharing responsibilities for FGR conservation among European countries. A necessary step in the development of the common action plans is to obtain geo-referenced data on the existing dynamic gene conservation units of forest trees throughout their entire distribution ranges in Europe for further analyses and strategy development. However, the development of the common action plans has been hampered by a lack of common minimum requirements for the gene conservation units.

(continued on page 4)



*A gene reserve forest of small-leaved lime (Tilia cordata).
Photo: J. Koskela, Bioversity International*

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continued from page 3).

As a result, a wide range of protected forests are presently declared as gene conservation areas in addition to more specific gene reserve forests. This creates obstacles for the monitoring of sustainable forest management in Europe and the related reporting efforts. It is also difficult to compare the national data across countries. Most protected areas are established solely for species or habitat conservation and their suitability for long-term gene conservation has rarely been assessed prior to their establishment. Furthermore, gene conservation often has a low priority in the management of the protected areas and in most cases any active silvicultural measures, which are typically needed for managing forest genetic resources, are not allowed in the protected areas.

The EUFORGEN Networks have now developed the minimum requirements for groups of different tree species such as conifers, scattered broadleaves and stand-forming broadleaves. These requirements will be harmonized by the EUFGIS project and the Networks will provide further inputs for this. The EUFORGEN Steering Committee also provided its inputs to the project by reviewing terms of reference for a national focal person and an agreement to share relevant national data. The EUFORGEN National Coordinators are now in the process of nominating the focal persons and associated European countries interested in the participating in the project have been asked to do the same.

The first meeting of the EUFGIS Steering Group, consisting of representatives from all the partner institutes, was held in Rome on 12-13

April 2007. The meeting discussed the overall project implementation and various activities. On 22-24 October 2007, EUFGIS will organize a European workshop on FGR inventories and documentation at Magleås Center in Birkørød (near Copenhagen), Denmark. In addition to the national focal persons, representatives of the EUFORGEN Networks and other experts in this area are expected to attend the workshop. The purpose of the workshop is to analyze how different countries are collecting and managing FGR information. The workshop will also initiate the harmonization of the minimum requirements for gene conservation units of forest trees and development of information standards for the EUFGIS system.

For further information on EUFGIS, please contact the project coordinator Jarkko Koskela at Biodiversity International (j.koskela@cgiar.org).

Forests, energy and water

European forests and their sustainable management provide a number of benefits, services and products for human well-being. Sustainable forest management can also contribute to climate change mitigation, energy supply and water protection. The importance of these issues will be stressed by the 5th Ministerial Conference on the Protection of Forests in Europe (MCPFE), due to be held in Warsaw, Poland on 5-7 November 2007.

The preparatory process for the Conference has included a series of earlier drafting meetings and, on 5-6 June 2007, the MCPFE Expert Level Meeting continued negotiations for the Conference documents in Warsaw. The meeting focused on debating the contents of a draft Ministerial Declaration and two Resolutions, to be adopted under the theme "Forest for Quality of Life". The Declaration will stress the role forests play in benefiting the quality of life and tackling challenges such as climate change. The Resolution on wood and energy encourages several actions to enhance mobilization of wood and the role of the forest sector in energy production. The second Resolution stresses the protective functions of forests for water resources and mitigation of water-related natural disasters through sustainable forest management.

At the Warsaw Conference, the European ministers responsible for forests will endorse further actions in these areas and continued implementation of earlier Ministerial Resolutions. The Conference will also offer an opportunity for sharing views among the European ministers, representatives of international organizations and non-governmental organizations and delegates from observer countries outside Europe. It will also report on the state of forests in Europe and progress made by the countries in practicing sustainable forest management, including conservation of forest genetic resources.

The MCPFE Liaison Unit has launched the Conference Web site at <http://5th.mcpfe.org/>. Further information on the MCPFE process is available at www.mcpfe.org

