Conifers Network meets in Hungary

Representatives from 24 countries participated in the seventh meeting of the Conifers Network in Sopron, Hungary on 10-12 June 2008. The meeting was hosted by the University of West Hungary and the participants also visited the Sárvár Experimental Station of the Hungarian Forestry Research Institute as part of the field trip.

In addition to reviewing the progress of the Network activities and updating the workplan, the meeting discussed the use of forest reproductive material and its implications for conservation of forest genetic resources. Forest reproductive material produced for trade is well documented in Europe but most countries do not keep records on how and where the material are finally used. In Hungary alone, there are some 900 registered nurseries producing 307 million seedlings of forest trees annually and a large part of the production is exported to other countries. Imported material may threaten gene conservation efforts, if it is planted close to gene conservation units of autochthonous tree populations, and may cause loss of adaptability of existing forests.

The Network further discussed selection of genetic material for given site conditions and how climate change is expected to impact on this. In marginal environments in particular, the adaptive potential of the material is a critical factor. It was considered essential that the knowledge gained so far by testing or by practical experience should be incorporated into the characterization of forest reproductive material and that the properties of the genetic material traded should be tagged with more detail, where available (e.g. early or late flushing provenance, photoperiod and temperature in relation to flushing and growth, and plasticity if the material is tested in many sites).

The summary report of the meeting is available at www.euforgen.org

Seed orchard of European larch (Larix decidua) *near Sárvár, Hungary. Photo: J. Koskela, Bioversity International*

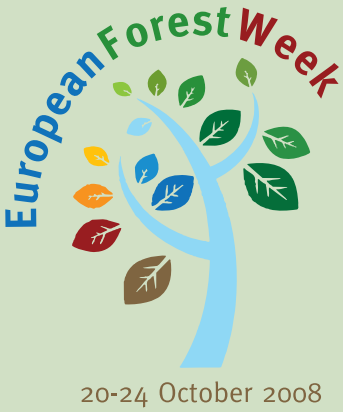
EUFGIS update

The Slovenian Forestry Institute hosted a meeting of the EUFGIS project (Establishment of a European Information System on Forest Genetic Resources) in Ljubljana on 1-3 October 2008. The project partners and the expert group met for a third time and discussed finalization of pan-European minimum requirements and data standards for dynamic gene conservation units of forest trees (see the previous issues of this newsletter for additional information).

Subsequently, the database structure of the information system is now being finalized and a test version of the information system is scheduled to be ready by the end of 2008.

In spring 2009, the project will organize four sub-regional training workshops on the information system for national focal points in Avignon (the Mediterranean region), Copenhagen (northern European countries), Ljubljana (eastern and south-eastern European countries) and Vienna (central and western European countries). The workshops will take place during March-May 2009; the exact dates and further information will be communicated directly to the national focal points. Further information can be obtained from the EUFGIS Coordinator, Jarkko Koskela (j.koskela@cgiar.org).

European countries celebrate their forests



On 20-24 October 2008, over 100 forest-related events were organized in 30 countries to celebrate the first European Forest Week. At regional level, a concentration of various events was organized jointly by the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the UN Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), the Ministerial Conference on the Protection of Forests in Europe (MCPFE) and the European Commission at the FAO headquarters in Rome on 21-24 October. The events were built around the 66th session of the UNECE Timber Committee and 34th session of the European Forestry Commission of FAO, attended by more than 400 participants from 45 countries. The purpose of the European Forest Week was to increase the visibility of forests and the forest sector and raise awareness about their importance, as agreed by the fifth MCPFE Conference in Warsaw in November 2007.

The joint plenary sessions of the Timber Committee and the European Forestry Commission focused on adaptation of forests and forestry to climate change, as well as the role of forests in contributing to energy supply and in conserving water resources. The two bodies also adopted a joint market statement following discussion on the main drivers of change in markets of wood-based products, such as increased use of forest biomass for energy and the green building movement.

Each morning plenary session was followed by several parallel sessions, policy dialogues and side events to continue the discussion on various topics, such as forest law enforcement and governance, the new forest policy of the Russian Federation, the role of wood products in climate change mitigation, and adaptation of forest trees to climate change. Further details on the discussions and outcomes of the European Forest Week are presented in a summary report published by the International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD) at www.iisd.ca/ymb/efw/.

On 21 October 2008, Bioversity International organized a side event on adaptation of forest trees to climate change, to highlight the importance of forest genetic resources in this process and to promote the work done in the context of EUFORGEN and the EUFGIS and EVOLTEE projects. The side event was chaired by Jarkko Koskela (EUFORGEN Coordinator) who also presented the recommendations of the earlier workshop on climate change and forest genetic diversity, held in 2006 as part of the MCPFE Work Programme (see NL32 page 4). Bruno Fady, INRA-Avignon (France) gave a presentation on how trees can acclimatize, adapt and migrate as a response to environmental changes and what is known on the evolution of forest trees during the past 12 000 years. The second invited speaker was Jason Hubert, Forestry Commission (UK) who focused on the challenge of providing managers with advice on how to use forest genetic resources in the face of climate change. He also discussed the different options that forest managers can deploy to manage the risks and uncertainties in this regard.

Bioversity International also set up a booth at FAO to distribute publications and display posters of EUFORGEN, EUFGIS and EVOLTREE. The presentations of the Bioversity side event are available at www.europeanforestweek.org/51336/en/. Further information on other events held during the European Forest Week can be found at www.europeanforestweek.org.

Bioversity International booth at the European Forest Week (FAO, Rome).
Photo: B. Vinceti, Bioversity International