Establishment of a European Information System on Forest Genetic Resources (EUFGIS) (009 AGRI GEN RES 870/2004)

Joint meeting of the EUFGIS Expert Group and the Pilot Group
Slovenia Forestry Institute, Ljubljana, Slovenia, 1-2 October 2008

Second meeting of the EUFGIS Steering Group
Slovenia Forestry Institute, Ljubljana, Slovenia, 3 October 2008

Summary of the meetings

Present:

Expert Group Members:
Sándor Bordács (EUFORGEN Stand-forming Broadleaves Network)
Thröstur Eysteinsson (EUFORGEN Forest Management Network)
Peter Rotach (EUFORGEN Scattered Broadleaves Network)
Oudara Souvannavong (FAO)
Lorenzo Vietto (EUFORGEN Scattered Broadleaves Network)
Leena Yrjänä (EUFORGEN Conifer Network)

Expert Group Members unable to attend:
Paraskevi Alizoti (EUFORGEN Conifer Network)
Tor Myking (EUFORGEN Stand-forming Broadleaves Network)

Pilot Group Members
Dagmar Bednarova (Forest Research Institute, Slovakia)
Cathleen Baldwin (Forest Research, United Kingdom)
Andrej Verlič (Slovenian Forestry Institute, Slovenia)

Project Partners
Jason Hubert (Forest Research, United Kingdom)
Hojka Kraigher (Slovenian Forestry Institute, Slovenia)
François Lefevre (National Institute for Agricultural Research, France)
Roman Longauer (Forest Research Institute, Slovakia)
Ditte Christina Olrik (Danish Forest and Nature Agency, Denmark)
Silvio Schueler (Federal Research and Training Centre for Forests, Natural Hazards and Landscape, Austria)
Jarkko Koskela (Bioversity International)
Michele Bozzano (Bioversity International)
Milko Skofic (Bioversity International)

Opening of the joint meeting of the Expert and Pilot Groups

H. Kraigher, the hosting partner, welcomed the participants to Slovenia and gave an overview of the compound hosting the meeting and different research institutes located there. J. Koskela, the project coordinator, welcomed the participants to the meeting on behalf of Bioversity International. All participants then introduced themselves. J. Koskela introduced the agenda of the meeting, which was adopted without changes.

O. Souvannavong updated the participants on the preparation of the State of the World's Forest Genetic Resources (SoW-FGR) report. He informed that FAO has started the preparatory process and that the preparation of the report will be further discussed at the 12th Session of the FAO Commission on Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (CGRFA) in October 2009. The actual work would then start in 2010 and the SoW-FGR report is expected to be ready by 2013. He further updated the participants on the FGR documentation efforts in the different regions of the world. He also underlined that the EUFGIS information system will be widely used as a model for similar efforts in other regions.

J. Koskela briefly informed the participants on the development of a EUFORGEN report on the status of FGR in Europe. The data for this report will be obtained from the EUFGIS information system.

Update on the EUFGIS project

J. Koskela presented an update on the EUFGIS project and the outcomes of the second meeting of the Expert Group, held in Avignon in April 2008. He also summarised the progress made in the development of the pan-European minimum requirements and data standards for dynamic gene conservation units of forest trees. After the meeting in Avignon, both documents were updated and circulated for further comments. Third drafts of the documents were then prepared for the present meeting.

Discussion on the pan-European minimum requirements

J. Koskela presented the third draft of the pan-European minimum requirements to the participants. The draft was then discussed in detail and several suggestions were made to improve the document.

It was agreed that a summary box should be added on the first page of the document highlighting all key points of the minimum requirements. Regarding the chapter on the dynamic gene conservation units, it was agreed to mention more clearly that seed stands also qualify as gene conservation units if their meet the minimum requirements. It was pointed out that the EUFGIS information system does not

attempt to include all seed stands as there are other ongoing efforts to document seed stands and tree breeding material in Europe (e.g. the TREEBREEDEX project).

Concerning the chapters on the minimum size of a gene conservation unit and target tree species and populations, the text was adopted with minor editing suggestions. In the chapter on the management of the gene conservation units, it was agreed that the two closing paragraphs on the use of the units and the origin of the material can be deleted since the topics are already clarified in the previous sections.

For the chapter on the monitoring of the gene conservation units, it was considered important to add a sentence clarifying that the data in the EUFGIS information system can be updated at any time and that records of the changes will be stored to build a time series of the data.

Discussion on the data standards

M. Bozzano presented the updated draft of the data standards for further discussion. He noted that all fields have been revised and previous comments have been incorporated as appropriate.

At unit level, the field 'map name' was changed to 'local name' and for the field 'ownership of the unit', an option for 'others' was added.

In the field 'type and function of the unit', the following options were agreed: i) gene reserve forest, ii) biodiversity conservation (habitats and/or species), iii) seed stand, iv) protective forest area (soil, water, timber line, etc), and v) forest area managed for wood production and /or multiple uses and services. Concerning the date of the collection of field data, it was decided to ask only for the year.

At species level, it was decided to include a new field 'national population unit number, if existing' for the countries which assign the unit number differently for various tree species growing in the same unit. It was also decided to ask if the conservation activities are considered as *in situ* or *ex situ*, and to add the option 'unknown' in the field 'origin of the material'.

The field describing the 'predominant silvicultural system' was moved from the unit level to the species level since different tree species can be managed using different systems. The field 'why was the unit established' was changed to 'main reason for carrying out gene conservation for this species'.

The categories of the 'total number of reproducing trees per unit' were revised following the discussion on the minimum requirements. The description of the 'sex ratio' field was revised to allow three categories (predominately males, even sex ratio or predominately females). Requested information on the 'status of long-term viable regeneration' (continuous, sporadic or requires management intervention) and the

'distribution of the reproducing trees in the unit' (in stands, scattered and/or in groups) were also revised. Finally, it was agreed to delete the fields on 'damages to the species' and 'basal area of target species'.

Development of the EUFGIS information infrastructure

M. Skofic presented the EURISCO and SINGER websites as an example of exiting information systems on plant genetic resources. In particular, he demonstrated features that would be also useful to include into the EUFGIS information system (e.g. display of units using Google Maps).

He then continued by explaining the planned database structure supporting the EUFGIS information system. He noted that the database will be finalized as soon as the final version of the data standards has been developed. He also showed the first version of the intranet part of the information system which will be further improved before the training workshops in 2009.

The participants made several questions on the database structure and the intranet. It was also discussed how to ensure user-friendliness of the information system and what kind expectations the participants had for the functionality of the information system.

Experiences in compiling national datasets using the draft data standards

C. Baldwin and J. Hubert made a brief presentation on the FGR documentation efforts in the UK and highlighted their experiences in compiling their national data sets on the gene conservation units. They brought up an example of one unit which is not a continuous area but a cluster of separate gene conservation areas located very close to each other. It was discussed how to the data should be collected and displayed for this kind of units.

The participants then shared their experiences in compiling the data on the unit in different countries. F. Lefevre mentioned that there are a total of 97 designated units in France for different tree species and probably most of them will meet the minimum requirements. L. Yrjänä informed that Finland has 43 units in total. D. Olrik noted that the compilation work has not been started yet in Denmark but that it should a rather straightforward effort.

S. Bordács reported that he has tentatively identified about one hundred potential units in the Hungarian national database. He also noted that it would be useful to have a national module in the EUFGIS information system to allow some modification and translation of text. R. Longauer informed that there are 127 gene reserve forests in Slovakia.

S. Schueler said that the establishment of gene reserve forests was started in Austria in the early 1990s and that there are several hundreds of units at the moment. All of them are being checked and it is likely that not all of them will meet the minimum requirements (because of their small size, for example). In case of Iceland, T. Eysteinsson informed that there is no legal framework for establishing gene conservation units and that the unit are designated by forest management plans. He further mentioned that Iceland has 3-4 units for broadleaves and one unit for each conifer species (seed stands). P. Rotach noted that most of the forests in Switzerland are owned by private forest owners and subsequently there are a very few gene conservation units established in the country.

Wrap-up of the meeting and next steps

J. Koskela noted that inputs of the Expert Group are also needed for the development of a documentation manual for national FGR inventories. The manual is targeted to the national focal points and other professionals who are responsible for FGR inventories and documentation. The contributions of the Expert Group members will be sought through email as this is the last meeting of the group. He concluded by saying that the pan-European minimum requirements and the data standards presented for the EUFGIS national focal points and the EUFORGEN Networks for final comments in early 2009.

With no other matters, J. Koskela thanked the participants for their inputs and closed the meeting.

Second meeting of the EUFGIS Steering Group

Introduction

J. Koskela opened the meeting and introduced the tentative agenda of the meeting which was then adopted.

General project management issues

J. Koskela briefed the project partners on the project management by sharing the feedback received based on the first-year financial and technical reports. He noted that all question from the EC and the reviewers have been addressed and that the EC will release the first payments in December 2008.

The Steering Group members then discussed progress made in carrying out the activities in different work packages and plans for the next year.

WP1: Creation of a network of national FGR inventories (Leader: SNS, Denmark)

J. Koskela reported that a total of 34 countries have nominated their national focal points. Bioversity has contacted additional countries and asked them to nominate their focal point. He also informed the participants that the Memorandum of Understanding is being reviewed by Bioversity's legal experts.

The timing of the final project meeting was discussed but no exact dates were identified. The meeting will be held in Vienna, Austria and it is tentatively scheduled for summer 2010.

Regarding dissemination efforts, J. Koskela reported that the EUFGIS poster was displayed and the EUFGIS leaflets were distributed during the European Forest Week, held in Rome, Italy on 20-24 October 2008. The expected outcomes of the project were also highlighted during the side event on adaptation of forest trees to climate change organized during the same event.

WP2: Development of minimum requirements and information standards for dynamic gene conservation units (Leader: INRA, France)

It was noted that the pan-European minimum requirements and data standards for dynamic gene conservation units of forest trees will finalized after the Ljubljana meeting. The next step will be the development of the documentation manual. J. Koskela informed the project partners that his colleagues at Bioversity are also planning to develop a similar manual for EURISCO. This will also benefit the development of the EUFGIS documentation manual. It was agreed that the

preparation of the case studies will be discussed in detail at the next meeting of the Steering Group.

WP3: Creation of the information infrastructure (Leader: Bioversity International)

The database and the intranet of the information system will be finalized in early 2009 so that they can be presented to the national focal points during the training workshops. The project partners can also test the uploading mechanism before the training workshops. The development of the user manual will be started in 2009 and the helpdesk support will be available for the national focal points after the training workshops. The development of the EUFGIS portal will be also initiated in 2009.

WP4: Building the information system (Leader: SFI, Slovenia)

The requirements and material for the training workshops were discussed. The dates of the workshops were also agreed as follows:

- Central and Western European countries, Vienna, Austria, 24-26 March 2009
- Eastern and South-Eastern European countries, Ljubljana, Slovenia, 21-23 April 2009
- Mediterranean countries, Avignon, France, 5-7 May 2009
- Northern European countries, Copenhagen, Denmark, 12-14 May 2009

WP5: Coordination (Leader: Bioversity International)

J. Koskela reminded the project partners about the reporting deadlines in spring 2009 and summarized briefly the lessons learnt from the first-year reporting process. He also noted that all partners need to obtain an audit certificate to be attached to the second-year report once their cumulative claims exceed 10,000 Euro. He further informed that a new project website is being developed.

Wrap-up of the meeting

The third meeting of the Steering Group will be held organized at Bioversity in Rome in late 2009 or early 2010.

With no other business, J. Koskela thanked the project partners for their inputs and closed the meeting.

Agenda

1 October 2008		
09:00	Opening of the meeting ● Welcome address (Hojka Kraigher, SFI) ● Introduction to the meeting (Jarkko Koskela, Bioversity International)	Slovenian Forestry Institute, top-floor meeting room
09:30	Update to the EUFGIS project ● Outcomes of the 2nd Expert Group meeting, Avignon ● Discussion on general points	
10:30	Coffee/tea break	
11:00	Pan-European minimum requirements for gene conservation units of forest trees (third draft) ● Jarkko Koskela, Bioversity International ● Discussion	
12:30	Lunch	
14:00	Data standards for the gene conservation units (third draft) ● Michele Bozzano, Bioversity International ● Discussion	
15:30	Coffee/tea break	
16:00-17:30	Wrap-up discussion ● Pending or unclear issues regarding the draft documents	
20:00	Meeting dinner	

2 October 2008		
09:00	Presentation of the new EURISCO and SINGER Websites ● Milko Skofic, Bioversity International ● Discussion	Slovenian Forestry Institute, top-floor meeting room
09:30	Draft structure of the EUFGIS information system ● Milko Skofic, Bioversity International ● Discussion	
10:30	Coffee break	
11:00	Front-end design of the information system ● Discussion on useful features, needs of users and user-friendliness	
12:30	Lunch	
14:00	Experiences in compiling national datasets using the draft data standards ● Examples of the national datasets in the UK (others?) ● Discussion	
15:30	Coffee/tea break	
16:00-17:30	Wrap-up and next steps	

20:00	Dinner on your own	

3 October 2008		
08:30	Opening of the meeting ● Introduction to the meeting (J. Koskela) ● General project management issues	Slovenian Forestry Institute, top-floor meeting room
09:00	Progress made in the project activities and revision of the work plan ● WP1: Creation of a network of national FGR inventories (Leader: SNS, Denmark) ● WP 2: Development of minimum requirements and information standards for dynamic gene conservation units (Leader: INRA, France)	
10:30	Coffee break	
11:00	Progress made in the project activities and revision of the work plan ● WP3: Creation of the information infrastructure (Leader: Bioversity International, Italy) ● WP4: Building the information system (Leader: SFI, Slovenia)	
12:30	Lunch	
14:00-15:00	Progress made in the project activities and revision of the work plan ● WP5: Coordination (Leader: Bioversity International, Italy) ● Administrative and financial management ● Next meeting of the Steering Group	