

## **WCC-2020-Res-127-EN**

### **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, 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 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

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;

#### **The IUCN World Conservation Congress 2020, at its session in Marseille, France:**

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 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 (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. prohibiting timber sourcing from primary and old-growth forests, with the exception of ancient forests only as defined by Resolution 6.046 *Assessing the global applicability of the concept of ancient forests as understood in European forest policy and management* (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.