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Sustainable, innovative forest use for Europe

EU research project SIMWOOD launched to mobilise untapped reserves of timber

Munich – Europe has more than 117 million hectares of forest, but the sustainable utilisation especially in privately owned woods falls short of its potential. The ever-increasing demand for wood for material and energy applications is becoming more and more difficult to meet. In response, the EU project SIMWOOD (Sustainable Innovative Mobilisation of Wood) was recently launched with the aim of promoting a more efficient use of the available supply of wood and bolster Europe's forestry and wood industry. The EU is funding the project with about EUR 6 million over a four-year period. Coordinator is Roland Schreiber from Bayerische Landesanstalt für Wald und Forstwirtschaft (LWF: *Bavarian State Institute of Forestry*).

SIMWOOD aims to improve wood mobilisation by utilising an integrated approach. Besides topics like forest ownership and forest harvesting techniques, the project partners attach particular importance to the participation of existing local interest groups and the impact on a forest's capacity to provide other ecosystem services. SIMWOOD will record existing socio-economic, technical and ecological barriers and identify solutions for wood mobilisation and analyse them with regard to the objectives set in the 14 model regions of the project. In addition, through a series of pilot projects, SIMWOOD is testing promising solutions and initiatives in close cooperation with local stakeholders. With the aid of the "MOBILISER" online information system, which will be developed under the project, SIMWOOD partners will evaluate the effect of the new approaches and improve them as needed. This will give forest owners, foresters and SMEs access to information and recommendations relating, for instance, to forest management and harvesting techniques for their region. With the "MOBILISER", decision-makers for forest policy and scientists throughout Europe will be able to evaluate the effect of national and EU programmes for wood mobilisation and follow regional developments.

Value added for Europe's industry

Industry and the job market should also benefit from SIMWOOD. "A better utilisation of forests is one solution for meeting the growing demand for wood in Europe," explains Schreiber. "It is estimated that 853 million cubic metres of timber and 585 million cubic metres of wood for energy will be needed in 2030. The provision of such quantities represents a challenge for the forest and timber industry." The timber industry in Europe alone currently comprises about 600,000 companies such as sawmills and furniture manufacturers with four to five million employees altogether and an annual sales of EUR 550 billion. For them, a reliable local source of raw materials represents a guarantee for stable growth.

14 model regions throughout Europe

The project consortium comprises 28 partners from Germany, Belgium, Finland, France, Great Britain, Ireland, the Netherlands, Portugal, Sweden, Slovenia and Spain. They will investigate the optimum forest use in 14 model regions in the EU. The consortium also includes two European research institutes - the Joint Research Centre and the European Forest Institute. SIMWOOD is supported by the Bavarian Research Alliance, which is responsible for the administrative project management and will participate in public relations activities.

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