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Economic Commission for Europe Food and Agriculture Organization
Committee on Forests and the Forest Industry European Forestry Commission

**Joint ECE/FAO Working Party on
Forest Statistics, Economics and Management
Forty-first session**

Geneva, 27-29 March 2019
Item 4 of the provisional agenda

Discussion on boreal forests

AGENDA ITEM 4

Note by the Secretariat

Summary

This background paper is intended to provide information on the possible establishment of a Team of Specialists on Boreal Forests and give a short overview on the recent developments related to the topic of boreal forests.

The document includes a copy of the Haparanda Declaration, the mandate from the 76th session of the Committee on Forests and the Forest Industry as well as the draft Terms of Reference.

The draft Terms of Reference of the Team of Specialists on Boreal Forests have been developed in close consultation with those member States that were signatory to the Haparanda Declaration.

The Joint Working Party is invited to discuss the proposed establishment of a Team of Specialists on Boreal Forests and its Terms of Reference and make recommendations accordingly to the joint session of the 77th session of the ECE Committee on Forests and the Forest Industry and the 40th session of the FAO European Forestry Commission to be held in Geneva, Switzerland on 4 - 7 November 2019.

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I. Background

1. At its seventy-sixth session, held on 5-8 November 2018 in Vancouver, Canada, COFFI requested that the secretariat include an item in the agenda of the Joint Working Party on *“boreal forests and the possible establishment of a Team of Specialists on Boreal Forests. In particular, the Committee requested that the secretariat prepare, together with interested parties, the draft Terms of Reference for a possible Team of Specialists on Boreal Forests prior to the Joint Working Party (to allow sufficient time for presenting and discussing the item during the meeting). The Joint Working Party will have to report back to the joint meeting of the ECE Committee on Forests and the Forest Industry (COFFI) and the FAO European Forestry Commission (EFC) on the matter”* (ECE/TIM/2018/2).
2. In response to the above request, the secretariat coordinated with Canada, Finland, Norway, Sweden, the Russian Federation and the United States of America the preparation of a draft Terms of Reference for a possible Team of Specialists on Boreal Forests. The draft Terms of Reference can be found in the annex of this document (Annex A).

II. Introduction

3. Boreal forests grow in high-latitude environments of Canada, Finland, Norway, Sweden, the Russian Federation and the United States of America. Overall, boreal forests in the ECE region cover 30 per cent of the global forest area and possess some unique characteristics. The boreal biome contains more surface freshwater than any other biome in the world, and about one-third of the biome is underlain by permafrost. Boreal trees, soils and peatlands constitute the largest terrestrial carbon pool with 550 Gt C, and thus play a key role in regulating the global climate. Temperature increases in the boreal zone are predicted to be much higher than global averages, and while there will be regions with increased carbon accumulation, in other regions more frequent fires, thawing of permafrost and other climate-related changes will result in considerable losses of carbon and profound changes to ecosystems.
4. The Haparanda Ministerial Declaration on Circumboreal Cooperation on Forests, adopted at Haparanda, Sweden on 26 June 2018, recognizes that countries across the circumboreal region face similar challenges and opportunities, with significant benefits to be gained from increased research cooperation and knowledge-sharing to address complex boreal forest issues (Annex B).

III. Set-up of the session

5. The secretariat will present a short general overview on the ECE/FAO Teams of Specialists, their approval process, and the duration for which they are approved and the process of closing or extending the mandates of existing and new Teams.
6. After the general introduction to the Teams of Specialists, the session will focus on the topic of boreal forests.
7. The discussion will be introduced by two short background presentations:
 - a. Presentation of the context and significance of boreal forests, and the challenges and opportunities faced by boreal countries;
 - b. Presentation on the science-policy interface: cooperation between IBFRA (International Boreal Forest Research Association) and policy-makers from boreal countries.
8. Following the presentations, delegates will be invited to discuss how a possible Team of Specialists on Boreal Forests will add value within the larger framework of circumboreal cooperation, clarifying the Team’s mandates and procedures.

IV. Key questions for guidance and discussion

9. The Working Party is invited to:
 - a. *Discuss the proposed establishment of a Team of Specialists on Boreal forests;*
 - b. *Discuss the Terms of Reference for a Team of Specialists on Boreal forests;*
 - c. *Make recommendations accordingly to the joint session of the 77th session of the ECE Committee on Forests and the Forest Industry and the 40th session of the FAO European Forestry Commission to be held in Geneva, Switzerland from 4-7 November 2019.*

V. Annex

A. Draft Terms of Reference of the ECE/FAO Team of Specialists on Boreal Forests

Reference to the Integrated Programme of Work: Work Area 1, “Data, monitoring, reporting and assessment”, and Work Area 2, “Policy dialogue and advice.”

A. Objective(s)¹

1. Contribute to science and policy exchange on boreal forests, while reducing duplication of effort and encouraging the pursuit of cost-effective approaches for circumboreal cooperation;
2. Increase collaboration with the International Boreal Forest Research Association (IBFRA) and other boreal-related research organizations, in order to strengthen science and policy cooperation with regards to the boreal biome;
3. Improve awareness and understanding of the role of boreal forests play in global issues such as climate change and the bioeconomy as well as in addressing the challenges reflected in the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development.
4. Advise the ECE/FAO Forestry and Timber Section on any matters related to boreal forests.

B. Activities and functions

- Contribute to the exchange of information and experiences on boreal forests;
- Facilitate a science policy dialogue on boreal forest issues;
- Where appropriate, contribute to identifying knowledge gaps that – when addressed – can provide policy responses to domestic and international challenges;
- Work with other international bodies, including the International Boreal Forest Research Association (IBFRA) with a view to achieving coordination of initiatives;
- Collaborate with other ECE/ FAO Teams of Specialists on cross-cutting issues.

C. Expected Major Outputs

The Team of Specialists on Boreal Forests will identify priority issues for the sustainable management of boreal forests, taking into account regional realities and differences. The Team will focus on increasing knowledge and understanding of issues related to boreal forests.

It will:

- Produce (and contribute to the production of) information products that reflect collaborative efforts on boreal forest issues, e.g. in relation to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the UN Strategic Plan for Forests, and the ECE/FAO Integrated Programme of Work;
- Produce, based on existing information, assessment and scoping documents, presentations and other information products describing existing conditions in boreal forests, and identifying important issues and opportunities in their management;

¹ As outlined in the Haparanda Declaration of 2018

- Consultation and advice on boreal-related issues as needed.

D. Background

**Established/
Approved by:** Joint session of the Committee and the Commission, Geneva, Switzerland, 2019.

Duration: From January 2020 to December 2021.

Methods of Work: Annual meeting. Other methods to be determined by the Team.

Reporting: Annually to the Joint ECE/FAO Working Party on Forest Statistics, Economics and Management.

Team leader: To be elected at the first Team meeting.

Communication: The Team leader and the Secretary should ensure close communication and collaboration with the Teams of Specialists on: Monitoring Sustainable Forest Management, Sustainable Forest Products, Forest Products Statistics, Wood Energy, Forest Sector Outlook, Forest Policy, Forest Communication (Forest Communicators' Network), Green Jobs (Joint ILO/ECE/FAO Expert Network). They should also ensure close communication and collaboration with the International Boreal Forest Research Association (IBFRA).

B. Haparanda Ministerial Declaration on circumboreal cooperation on forests

Adopted at Haparanda, Sweden on June 26th, 2018

We, the Ministers responsible for forests and their high-level representatives, from the circumboreal countries of Canada, Finland, Norway, Sweden, the Russian Federation and the United States of America,

Noting that boreal forests grow in high-latitude environments in our respective countries, and that the boreal domain represents about 30% of the global forest area;

Highlighting that boreal forests are important sources of renewable goods and services, and serve as habitat for a unique and vulnerable collection of biodiversity;

Acknowledging that, in addition to local communities relying on the forest sector, boreal forests are home to many indigenous peoples who possess traditional knowledge and rely on forests to provide resources for their livelihoods, income, and cultural and spiritual values;

Reiterating that countries in the circumboreal region are committed to sustainable forest management and report voluntarily on the environmental, social and economic status of their forests according to the criteria and indicators for sustainable forest management under the Montréal Process or Forest Europe;

Recognizing that sustainable forest management in the circumboreal region can play a critical role in achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals, as well as contribute to the implementation of other international outcomes including, as applicable, the Paris Agreement, adopted under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, the Convention on Biological Diversity's Aichi Biodiversity Targets, and the UN strategic plan for forests;

Recalling the Agreement on Enhancing International Arctic Scientific Cooperation, signed at the Fairbanks Ministerial meeting of the Arctic Council, 11 May 2017, and the Barents Euro-Arctic Council Joint Declaration, signed 18-19 October 2017 in Arkhangelsk, Russia, which stressed the importance of cooperation on forest issues in the Barents region;

Further recalling the work on forests and the forest sector by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UN ECE) and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), *inter alia*, through their Integrated Programme of Work;

Noting that boreal trees, soils and peatlands constitute the largest terrestrial carbon pool and that boreal forests, and their sustainable use, can contribute significantly to minimizing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and to limiting further increase of global average temperature;

Expressing concern that the impact of climate change on boreal forests has the potential to alter tree growth and mortality rates, to increase the risk of disturbances such as fires and pests, and to affect soils, peatlands and permafrost systems that store large amounts of carbon, and that these impacts will in turn alter global carbon and methane cycles;

Underscoring that boreal ecosystems are particularly under pressure from a changing climate since temperature increases in high latitudes are predicted to be higher than global average increases, and that ecosystem development and recovery in the boreal forest is typically a slow process;

Emphasizing that forest management strategies to adapt to climate change, when based on sound research and development, build resilience to changes that are often difficult to predict, and that this includes understanding the impacts of climate change and land use on biodiversity;

Noting the evolving discussions on the concept of bioeconomy and HIGHLIGHTING that the further development of forest-based, renewable resources into innovative bioproducts (such as biochemicals, biomaterials and bioenergy) and long-lived wood products (such as residential and commercial buildings made from wood), as well as the ecosystem services healthy forests provide, can make significant contributions to sustainable development and climate change mitigation; and that the increased use of biomass from sustainably managed forests can be a key component of a country's transition to a low carbon economy;

Noting that there are challenges and opportunities related to developing the bioeconomy using biomass from boreal forests, including quantifying the amount of sustainable forest biomass available for bioeconomy activities, and commercializing innovative bioproducts and services;

Stressing the importance of gender equality, local communities and indigenous peoples for sustainable development in boreal forests;

Further stressing the need for a skilled workforce, scientific knowledge, and research and development for the long-term competitiveness of the forest sector;

Recognizing that countries across the circumboreal region face similar challenges and opportunities, and that there are significant benefits to be gained from increased research cooperation and knowledge-sharing to address complex boreal forest issues;

Welcoming the work done by the Circumboreal Working Group (CWG) to enhance discussion and coordination amongst boreal countries; and

Further recognizing the need to support our scientists and managers in circumboreal collaborative research and cooperation;

1. *Encourage* exploring the establishment of a UNECE/FAO Team of Specialists (ToS) on Boreal Forests, noting that such an approach would provide a flexible vehicle for accelerating research and knowledge exchange on boreal forests while reducing duplication of effort and encouraging the pursuit of cost-effective approaches for circumboreal forest cooperation and management;
2. *Recognize* that the establishment of a UNECE/FAO ToS is at the discretion of and dependent upon the approval from the competent governing bodies; and that the role and future of the Circumboreal Working Group would be assessed if and when a ToS is established;
3. *Welcome* the continued support and contributions to these efforts by the FAO and the UNECE;
4. *Also invite* the International Boreal Forest Research Association (IBFRA) to continue to enhance science-policy linkages and knowledge exchange on circumboreal issues, and to collaborate with the Circumboreal Working Group, and the UNECE/FAO ToS on Boreal Forests, if and when it is established.

Haparanda, 26 June 2018