
UNECE/FAO Team of Specialists on Boreal Forests

Inaugural online meeting, 21 October, 15:00-17:00 CET

MEETING REPORT

OFFICIAL OPENING

The meeting took place on 21 October 2020 at 15:00 CET via online platform KUDO, which provided interpretation in Russian and English. The Secretariat took notes of the main points and decisions taken. The list of participants is attached in Annex II. 27 experts from 8 countries took part in the meeting. Countries represented include: Austria, Canada, Finland, Lithuania, Norway, Sweden, Russian Federation, and the United States of America. Organizations that attended include: the International Boreal Forest Research Association (IBFRA), the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the Sustainable Forestry Initiative and the International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis (for a comprehensive list of all organizations, please see Annex II).

The meeting was opened by the Acting Chief of the UNECE/FAO Forestry and Timber Section, Mr. Gianluca Sambucini. He noted that the Team of Specialists (ToS) on Boreal Forests is well positioned to exchange experiences and best practices, strengthen ties between science and policy interface and raise the visibility of boreal forest. Before opening the meeting officially, Mr. Sambucini tabled the proposed agenda of the meeting for discussion. The team agreed with the agenda and adopted it. The final version of the agenda of the meeting is included in Annex I.

ELECTION OF LEADERSHIP

The team unanimously elected Mr. Darren Sleep (Canada) as the team leader and Mr. Vladimir Dmitriev (Russian Federation) as deputy leader. Both will hold office for a term of two years if the team's mandate is extended during the next Joint session of the ECE Committee on Forests and the Forest Industry and the FAO European Forestry Commission in 2021.

UPDATE ON THE PROCESS SO FAR

Documentation: background paper shared with participants ahead of the meeting

The Secretariat gave a short update about the process so far, including outcomes of a preparatory meeting held virtually on 23 April 2020, and reminded participants about the objectives, activities and outputs of the ToS, as specified in its Terms of Reference contained in ECE/TIM/2019/2.

Following the presentation, the Secretariat handed over the chairing to the newly elected team leader, Mr. Sleep for the remainder of the meeting.

FUTURE DIRECTION OF WORK

Mr. Sleep recognized the wealth of experience that each ToS member is contributing to this team, which should be harnessed to address key challenges facing boreal forests around the world. Recognizing that not

all participants of the meeting are elected ToS members, he invited participants to identify one key theme and output that the team should focus on in the short term and medium term.

Participants overwhelmingly highlighted that the ToS is well positioned to strengthen the interface between science and policy by linking science to practice and developing a science-policy dialogue.

In addition, participants stressed the need to improve communication on boreal forest issues and counter any misinformation that come from unconfirmed sources. There was a general agreement that one of the first outputs could be a communications document about the boreal forest, informed by science, addressing issues like forest restoration, putting forward a definition of the term “boreal forest”, addressing some of the misinformation out there, assessing statistics, communicating about the potential of boreal forests etc. An important aspect therein could be to clarify the definition of “boreal forest” and corresponding terminology.

There was also general agreement that forest restoration is an important topic and relevant to boreal forests across the region. FAO, as co-leading organization of the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration, can provide support e.g. through dissemination of communication materials.

Brief summary from the discussion:

Sweden:

- Opportunities to link the ToS’s activities to ongoing activities on forest landscape restoration within larger international processes, such as the UN Decade on Ecosystem Services and the EU Green Deal and Horizon2020
- Support to the IBFRA Insight Process should also be included in the work programme

Russian Federation:

- Definition of the term ‘boreal forest’ needs to be agreed upon
- ToS should focus on the following topics: impact of climate change on boreal forests, including carbon accumulation, forest adaptation to climate change, forest fires; and the contribution of boreal forests to relevant economic issues
- Suggestion to get each ToS member to prepare a collection of research articles on most interesting issues and topics

Canada:

- ToS is not a scientific body, it develops products and services based on research that could inform policy makers
- Need to work on defining what boreal forests are, and what they are not, including ‘Primary Forests’ definition - work done by FAO in this regard could be helpful

United States of America:

- A possible outcome of ToS could be a general assessment of boreal statistics, issues, and information, which could be important for driving science across different countries and research institutions
- Definitions – common language is really important for further work in this area
- Suggests broadening the scope of relevant economic issues to focussing on livelihoods, especially of rural and indigenous people (beyond development of economic activities)

Finland:

- Potential positive contribution of boreal forests needs to be promoted and highlighted – rather than just speaking about challenges and problems (e.g. the fact that Boreal forests are part of the solution to global climate change; and possibilities of forest-based (circular) bioeconomy (for communications outputs)
- As boreal forests tend to be in sparsely populated areas, it is important to stress issues related to the bioeconomy

Norway:

- Ensure output (e.g. communications product) builds upon existing research
- ToS should not DO science, but for sure incorporate it and build upon it

Update from IBFRA and upcoming events

The president of IBFRA, Mr. Florian Kraxner, highlighted the strong ties between members of IBFRA and this ToS, affirming that the IBFRA community is ready to support the work of the ToS. He further updated the ToS about the ongoing process of finalizing the current 70-page report of the IBFRA Insight Process funded by Sweden on the topic “*Sustainable boreal forest management: challenges and opportunities for climate change mitigation*”. The peer-review process by outside experts will start soon, and the report is expected to be published in early 2021. Mr. Kraxner invited members of the ToS to come forward if they would like to be part of the peer-reviewing process, highlighting that Ms. Maureen Whelan (Canada) acts as the Secretary of IBFRA and can support in this regard.

In addition, Mr. Kraxner reported that IBFRA and the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences have submitted two side event proposals to the XV World Forestry Congress, which will take place from 24 to 28 May 2021. If the submission is accepted, Mr. Kraxner will invite the ToS to be an active part in the organization of the side event. In the short-term, the Secretariat will follow up with Mr. Kraxner to understand how the ToS could support the side event.

Ms. Maria Sokolenko (Russian Federation) noted that the ToS should also collaborate with other Teams of Specialists, the Joint Working Party on Forest Statistics, Economics and Management and the intergovernmental processes of the joint ECE Committee on Forests and the Forest Industry and the FAO European Forestry Commission, which is preliminary planned to take place in November 2021 in Turkey.

Conclusions and possible topics for a first output (short-medium-term)

- Possible output: communications document about boreal forests
 - Informed by science
 - Assessing the definition of “boreal forests” and understanding what their reach/impact is (e.g. managed forests, protective forests)
 - Addressing restoration
 - Highlighting the great potential of boreal forests in e.g. mitigating climate change, providing renewable resources etc.
 - Countering misinformation about forestry practices and forest management in the boreal biome
 - Assessing statistics and compiling existing research from all jurisdictions
 - Providing clear messages to policy-makers
 - Including socio-economic aspects linked to the livelihoods of rural and indigenous people
 - Including a well-developed glossary of terms and terminology
- Support to IBFRA
 - Supporting the organization of a possible side event during the XV World Forestry Congress in May 2021/ another relevant event (e.g. some ToS members could be on a panel/webinar to discuss the results of the IBFRA Insight report)
 - Supporting the peer-review process
 - Supporting the peer-review and dissemination of the IBFRA Insight report

NEXT STEPS

- Leader and deputy leader will work with the Secretariat to develop a workplan and timeline over the coming weeks and circulate with the ToS for comment and discussion in early December 2020
- Further discussion of the work plan and timeline at the next meeting
- Decision on the possible topics for a first output (short-medium-term)

DATE AND PLACE OF NEXT MEETING

The team did not make a final decision on the date of the next meeting, but indicated that another meeting in early 2021 would be beneficial. Given the ongoing quarantine restrictions and limitations on international travel, the team agreed that it will take place online.

ANNEX I

Meeting agenda:

**Welcome by Chief of the UNECE/FAO Forestry and Timber Section,
Mr. Gianluca Sambucini**

Round of introductions by participants

Item 1. Adoption of the agenda

Item 2. Election of the Team Leader and Deputy Leader(s)

Item 3. Update by the Secretary, Ms. Leonie Meier

Coffee break

Item 4. Discussion about the future plan of activities

- Feasible and expected goals, deliverables and outcomes for the coming year;
- Activities that could be implemented in the short- to medium term, and important meetings that the ToS could contribute to.

Item 5. Date and place of the meeting

Item 6. Wrap-up and closure

ANNEX II

List of Participants

First Name	Last Name	Organization
Milica	Apostolovic	UNECE Secretariat
Peter	Blombäck	Swedish Forest Agency
James	Brandt	Natural Resources Canada, Canadian Forest Service
Natalia	Demidova	Northern Research Institute of Forestry
Vladimir	Dmitriev	Federal Forestry Agency of Russia
Kalle	Eerikäinen	Metsähallitus Forestry Ltd.
Zbignev	Glazko	Ministry of Environment
Aleksey	Ilintsev	Northern Research Institute of Forestry
Gerben	Janse	Swedish Forest Agency
Polina	Kinigopulo	All-Russian Research Institute of Silviculture and Mechanization of Forestry (ARRISMF)
Taneli	Kolström	Natural Resources Institute Finland Luke
Florian	Kraxner	IIASA
Aleksandr	Kryshen	Forest Research Institute of the Karelian Research Centre of the Russian Academy of Sciences
Elizaveta	Kushnir	Saint Petersburg Forestry Research Institute
Ivan	Nedbaev	Saint Petersburg Forestry Research Institute
Knut	Oistad	Norwegian Institute of Bioeconomy Research NIBIO
Guy	Robertson	US Forest Service
Talha	Sadiq	Natural Resources Canada (NRCan)
Gianluca	Sambucini	UNECE Sectetariat
Andrey	Shirin	Russian Academy of Sciences
Kenichi	Shono	FAO
Anatoly	Shvidenko	International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis
Darren	Sleep	The Sustainable Forestry Initiative
Maria	Sokolenko	Federal Forestry Agency of Russia

Johan	Svensson	Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences
Tatu	Torniainen	Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry
Maureen	Whelan	Canadian Forest Service
Christopher	Woodall	US Department of Agriculture, Forest Service
Povilas	Žemaitis	The Lithuanian Research Centre for Agriculture and Forestry (LAMMC)