

Barents Forest Forum 2021 - Chair's summary

Day 1. Chair: Pål Vidar Sollie, Director General, Ministry of Agriculture and Food, Norway

Forests have played an important role for the social, environmental, and economic development in the Barents region as long as there have been settlements.

During this session we have learned about the importance and the potential of the emerging bioeconomy in the region – in numbers and in good examples on how to utilise the resources.

Forests remains an important contributor to the national GDP in the region and offers a multitude of services and products

To strengthen the role of forests in the development of the circular bioeconomy in Barents region and elsewhere, I would like to highlight the following:

Firstly, continue to focus on Innovation – and maybe make a more structured approach to the topic. Innovation is crucial because we need to do more with less: using forest resources efficiently, intelligently, and sustainably

In a green transition, technical innovations are needed both in research and business development. However, technical innovation is not enough; social innovation and innovative governance structures are also vital for a green transformation to take place. At the national and international level, a systemic, informed, and envisioned view of the bioeconomy-based future is needed, it should consider the ecological, economic, and social functions of forests.

Secondly, focus on people, employment, recruitment, and gender equality in the sector. This are necessary factors for a socially fair and green transition. Actions could include both capacity building and upgrading the skills of existing forest workers and recruiting and training new workers.

My third point is addressing the topic of the second session of Barents Forest Forum: Securing the long-term health of the forest resources in the region.

Neither innovation nor human skills will be sufficient to secure a green transition if we are failing to adapt to climate change and secure resilient forest resources for the future. Forests in Barents region, and in other parts of Europe face unprecedented challenges due to climate change. These challenges require urgent action from private sector, local, regional and national governments.

If we want a sustainable future, our forests are key.

Day 2. Chair Anne G Delphin, Chair of the Working Group on Barents Forest Sector WGBFS (2020-2021)

Climate change and natural disturbances could bring many of our forests to a tipping point where they can no longer provide the ecosystem services that we demand of them. The development in the Barents region is particularly challenging since the average temperature in the Arctic has increased faster than the average temperature on the rest of the planet.

Today's topic is huge and complex. Nevertheless, we felt strongly that we should focus on climate change, forest disturbances and adaptation during the Barents Forest Forum 2021. We basically think these issues will occupy our attentions for decades to come and should be a priority in international cooperation on forests in the Barents region and elsewhere for the future.

The immediate and most obvious response of boreal forests to global warming is the displacement of plant habitats and, ultimately, forest-growing zones to the north, which may affect the species composition of forest ecosystems

Other consequences of global climate change for boreal forests are: (1) an increase in outbreaks of pest insects; (2) changes in biological diversity; (3) deterioration in moisture availability; (4) an increase in the number of forest fires; (5) changes in the growing stock; (6) accessibility and quality of wood.

We need to increase the resilience of forests to possible climate change scenarios through changes in forest composition and structure, these includes integrated forest management to foster biodiversity, increase tree species and genetic diversity to increase the resistance and promote structural diverse forests.

The situation requires that we improve forest fires safety –both on occurrence and spread. And not to forget, fire prevention. We need to improve measures aimed to increasing the capacity of forest ecosystems to absorb carbon.

We need to improve monitoring and scientific support for key forest management activities in the region to detect development and enhance the early action.

We need to improve the regulatory framework for forest management and protection to establish adaptation measures effectively. We need to develop forest training programs that better incorporate understanding of the influence of climate on forest conditions and dynamic.

The challenges are immense. We can only solve this together. Barents cooperation can only provide a modest contribution, but all actions count. Barents cooperation can provide an arena for information exchange, knowledge sharing and cooperation in our efforts to secure resilient forests in the region.