

Let us celebrate and protect forests not only on the International Day of Forests

As we celebrate the International Day of Forests on 21 March, we can proudly recall the celebration of the International Year of Forests in 2011, which was proclaimed thanks to the efforts of the Republic of Croatia. At the Fifth Session of the United Nations Forum on Forests, held in May 2005, Croatia initiated the procedure for proclaiming the International Year of Forests, thus demonstrating a high level of respect for forest ecosystems and their importance for the future of our planet. By United Nations General Assembly Resolution 61/193 of 20 December 2006, the year 2011 was declared the International Year of Forests, under the theme "Forests for People and Poverty Eradication." The very idea of an international year of forests was first suggested in 2005 by Croatian Forests Ltd. The company's then spokesperson, Tihana Belužić, proposed the idea of proclaiming a world forests day at the level of the United Nations. Croatian Forests Ltd. conveyed the idea to the Government of the Republic of Croatia, which in the same year initiated the procedure at the United Nations.

Following the International Year of Forests, 21 March was officially proclaimed the International Day of Forests by United Nations General Assembly Resolution 67/200 of 21 December 2012. The day was first celebrated in 2013. Previously, 21 March had been marked as World Forestry Day. Member states of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations, at the Sixteenth Session of the FAO Conference held from 6 to 25 November 1971, supported the marking of World Forestry Day on 21 March each year. At that time, the date coincided with the first day of spring, whereas in the past twenty years the first day of spring has been marked a day earlier, on the vernal equinox.

The International Day of Forests raises awareness of the importance of all types of forests, and on this day countries are encouraged to undertake local, national and international efforts to organize activities related to forests and trees, such as tree-planting campaigns. Each year, a theme is selected for the International Day of Forests. Previous themes were: Our Forests, Our Future (2014), Forests and Climate Change

(2015), Forests and Water (2016), Forests and Energy (2017), Forests and Sustainable Cities (2018), Forests and Education (2019), Forests and Biodiversity (2020), Forest Restoration: A Path to Recovery and Well-being (2021), Forests and Sustainable Production and Consumption (2022), Forests and Health (2023), Forests and Innovation (2024), and Forests and Foods (2025).

On the occasion of this year's International Day of Forests, the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) highlights:

Forests and economies is the theme of the 2026 International Day of Forests, celebrating the essential roles of forests in driving economic prosperity. These roles go well beyond income and jobs from forest production and the trade of renewable raw materials and foods: forests also sustain family and community agriculture, enhance agricultural productivity, and safeguard healthy watersheds. With many countries seeking to move toward a sustainable bioeconomy, forest products offer nature-based solutions as replacements for carbon-intensive materials while generating new economic opportunities. Forests are indispensable for healthy economies – today and for future generations.

Such a message aligns with the views of Croatian foresters that forests should be managed sustainably in order to achieve a balance between people, economies and nature. Nature and forest protection must not become an end in itself, especially if it significantly reduces opportunities for the survival and development of human communities, which is becoming an increasing issue in Croatia due to depopulation. At the same time, development that is not aligned with sustainability but driven solely by capital interests should be approached with caution. Care for forests is also reflected in ensuring that their value, when expressed in market prices, is not diminished, as this would ultimately undermine the work of generations of foresters who have strived to create healthier and higher-quality forests. Therefore, let us show our care for and respect toward forests every day of the year, not only on the International Day of Forests.