



Annual Meeting, Padova, Italy
22-24 September 2026

Here Comes the Sun:
State and civil society dealing with forest genetics,
nursery production in implementing the New EU
Restoration Law



Daive Pettenella



TESAF Dipartimento Territorio
e Sistemi Agro-Forestali



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Paper organization

- The European Union initiatives supporting the use of forest nursery production and plantation investments
- Nature Restoration Law: not a sectoral investments but a transformative policy
- A key underlying issue of the NRL: the State-private partnership
- Final remarks



These slides can be download from the web (search with «pettenella»)

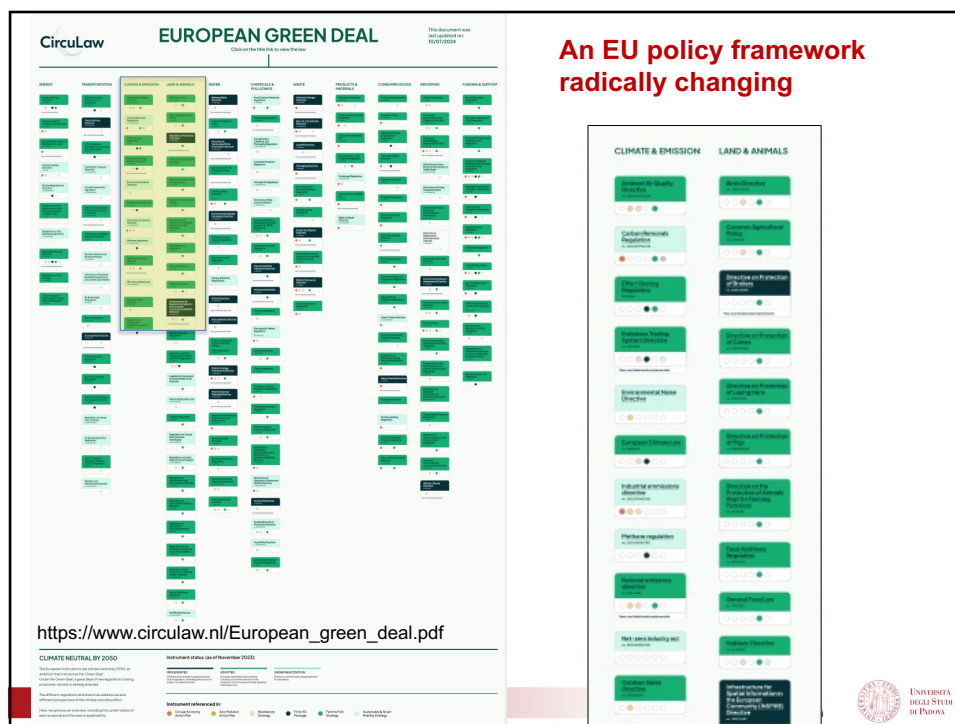
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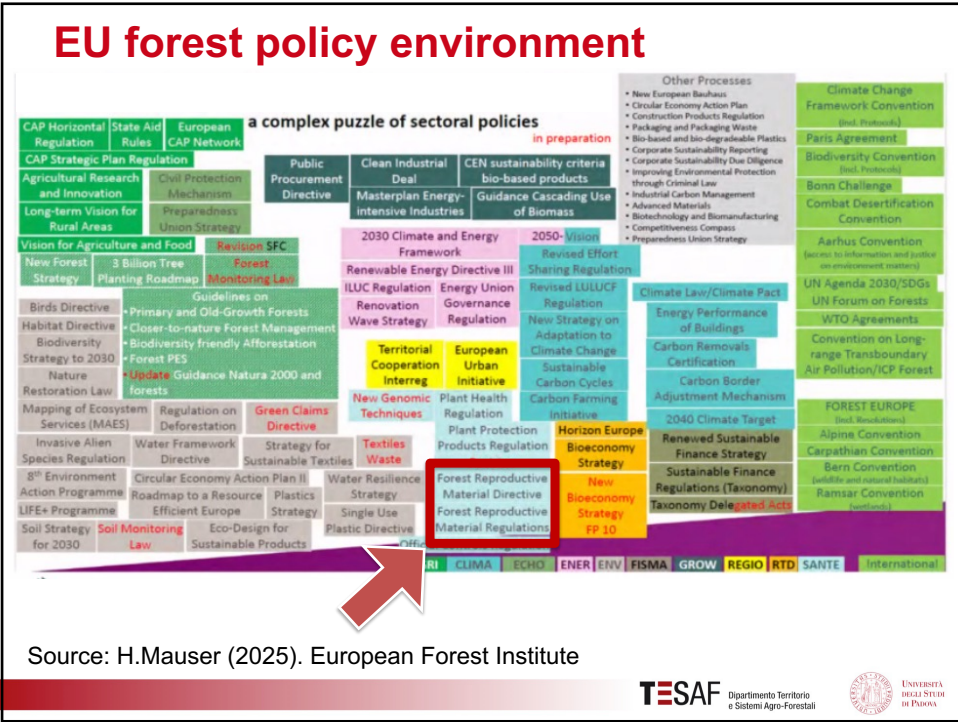


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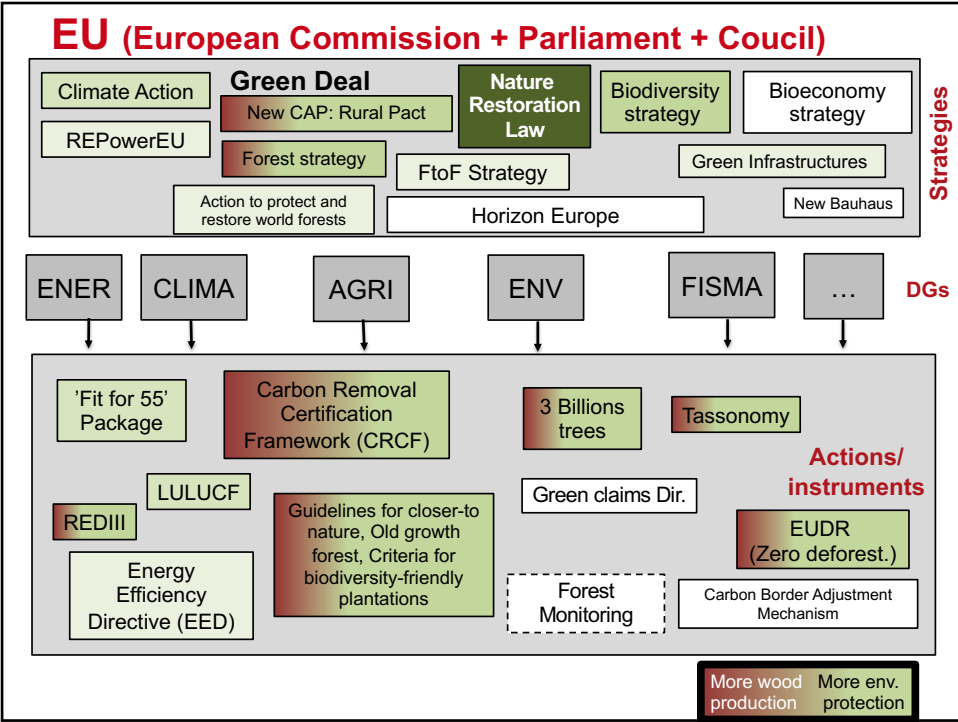
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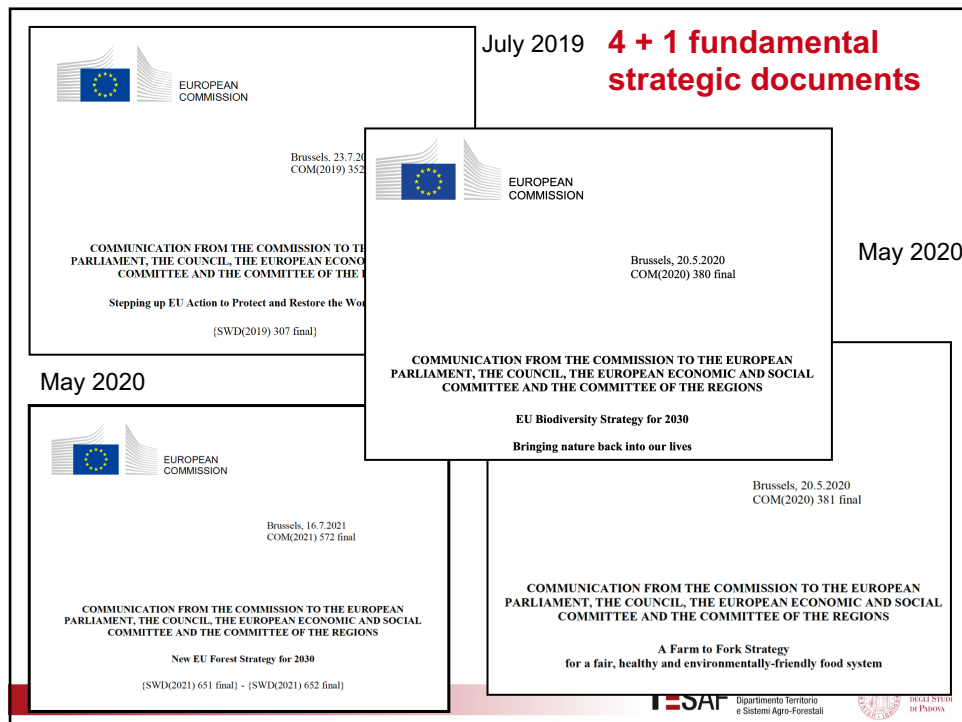




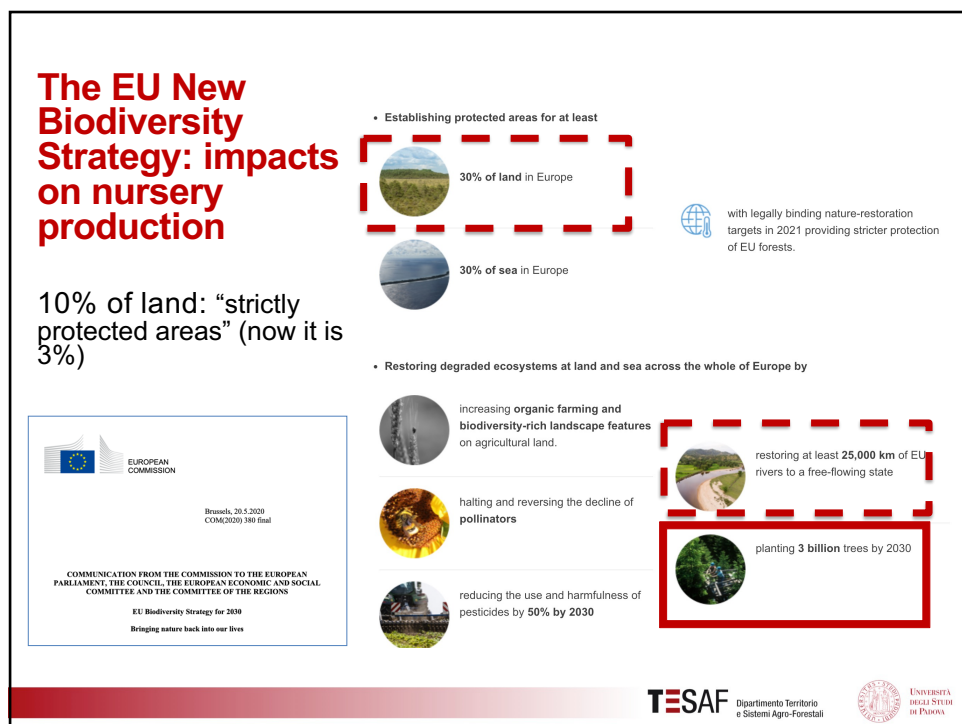
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The 3 Billion Tree initiative

Home > Strategy > Biodiversity strategy for 2030 > 3 billion trees

3 Billion Trees

Register your tree >



Our goal

The EU has committed to [planting 3 Billion additional trees](#) before 2030. This pledge is part of the plan to tackle the protection and [restoration of nature](#).

To achieve this ambitious target, we need everybody on board, to plant trees and make sure that they grow over time. Tree planting requires everyone involved to work together and the success of the pledge depends heavily on grassroots initiatives. Individuals, landowners, nurseries, associations, companies, and public bodies, such as cities and regions are all encouraged to participate in the initiative.

Why plant more trees?

 Climate change A mature tree can absorb over 22 kg of CO₂ per year on average. Urban green spaces also help to address the Urban Heat Island effect.	 Fresh air, clean water Trees help reduce and remove pollution by filtering air particles, releasing oxygen, purifying water and reducing noise.	 Biodiversity Attract wildlife, including pollinators, by providing nesting and hibernating spaces. Green infrastructure can connect artificial and natural areas – linking forests, farmland, wetlands – which encourages biodiversity.	 Prevent floods and droughts Trees stabilise river banks, regulate water flows, and retain and store excess rainwater – this also reduces flooding in urban areas.
 Protect and restore nature Planting native, climate adapted species, respecting ecological principles, would have a positive impact on the EU's 431 threatened native tree species.	 Trees are beautiful Urban green areas in particular provide space for recreation, social exchange, educational purposes and reconnecting people with nature.	 Save money All these advantages generate economic benefits, by reducing the need to treat water and soil.	 Better farming Trees provide shelter, protecting soil and crops from the effects of rain and wind. And farmers can supplement their income with tree-sourced products.

https://environment.ec.europa.eu/strategy/biodiversity-strategy-2030/3-billion-trees_en

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3 Billion trees

Modified 21 Oct 2025
Image © Silvia Della Costa

EU Policy and reporting > 3 Billion trees

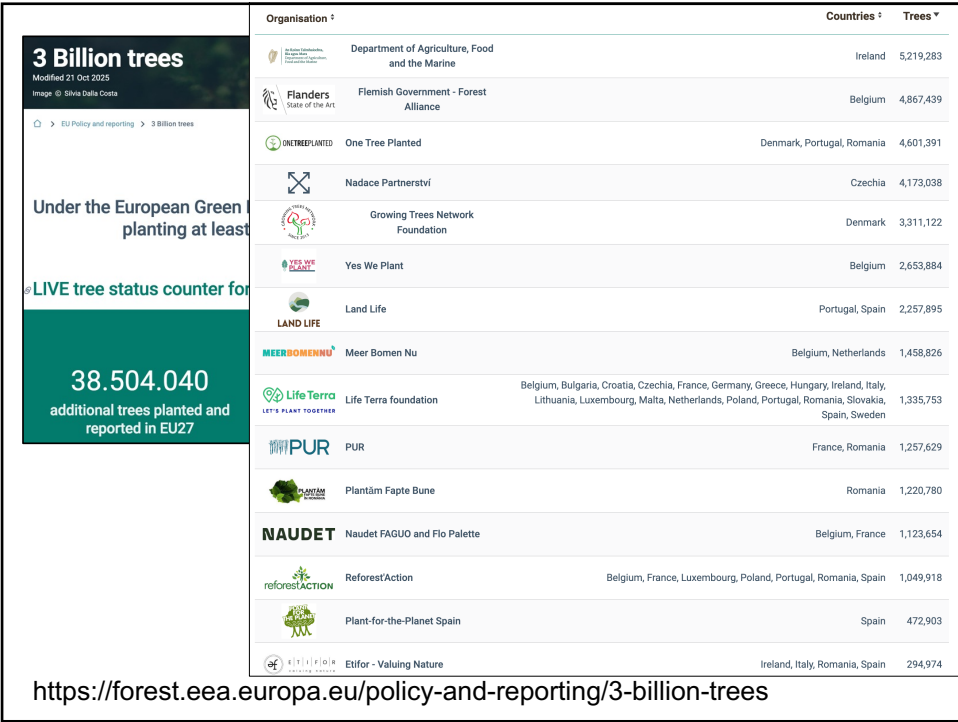
Under the European Green Deal, the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 commits to planting at least 3 billion additional trees in the EU by 2030

[LIVE tree status counter for EU:](#)

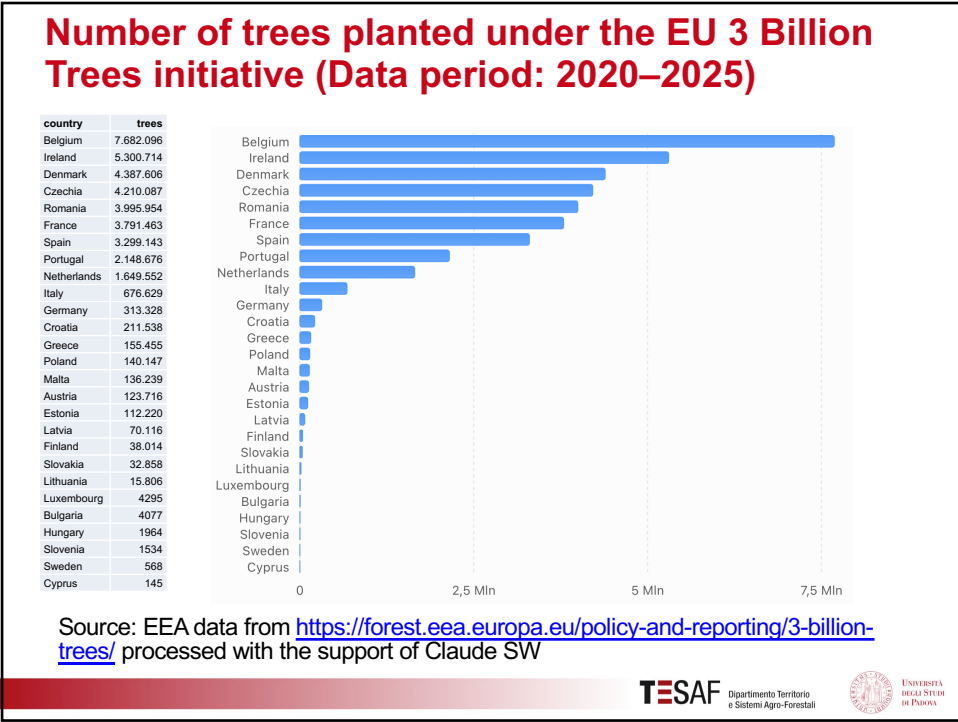
38.504.040 additional trees planted and reported in EU27	87 Active organisations	27 Participating EU countries
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<https://forest.eea.europa.eu/policy-and-reporting/3-billion-trees>

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New ideas from recent strategic documents

Biodiversity Strategy (2020)

- At least **30%** of the EU territory **under protection**; **10%** of this area under **strict protection**
- **3 Billion** of trees **planted** in 2030

Farm to Fork Strategy (2020)

- approval of the **Carbon farming initiative (including the forestry sector)** → «*generation of tradable carbon certificates*» to be sold in the European Trading System → **Carbon Removals and Carbon Farming Regulation** (CRRF - 2024/3012)

3 sectors considered by the Carbon Removals and Carbon Farming Regulation



PERMANENT STORAGE

E.g. Bioenergy with Carbon Capture and Storage (BECCS), Direct Air Carbon Capture and Storage (DACCS), biochar



CARBON FARMING

E.g. **Af-/re-forestation, improved forest management**, agroforestry, soil carbon sequestration, peatland restoration. No avoided deforestation



CARBON STORAGE IN PRODUCTS

E.g. Use of wood-based materials in construction, long-lasting Carbon Capture and Utilisation (CCU)

Planting and harvesting trees to move outside the forest (i.e. in the construction sector) the Carbon associate to credit generation

Source: EC DGEnv

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Forest Strategy (2022)

- The EC will «*propose a **legally binding instrument for ecosystem restoration**, including forest ecosystems, by the end of 2021*»

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The EU Nature Restoration Law Reg. 2024/1991: thanks Mrs Gewessler!

Leonore Gewessler, Austrian Minister of Environment, with her vote, allowed the approval of the Nature Restoration Law in the final meeting of the European Council on the 17 June 2024



The motivation

Europe's ecosystems are in decline

80%+

of EU habitats are in
poor condition

70%

of soils are in an
unhealthy state

10%

of bee and butterfly
species are
threatened with
extinction

Reverse biodiversity loss, strengthen climate resilience (droughts, floods, wildfires), and meet EU commitments under the Kunming–Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework.

Every €1 invested in restoration returns at least €8 in economic and social benefits (European Commission estimate).

The EU-wide targets

20%

of the EU's land and sea areas under restoration measures by 2030

Jointly achieved across all 27 Member States

100%

of ecosystems in need of restoration covered by 2050

Until 2030, Member States prioritise restoration measures within Natura 2000 sites.

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In general: **3 billion additional trees**

planted at EU level by 2030 — a Union-wide contribution target, not individually apportioned to each Member State.

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Tailored obligations by ecosystem type



Agricultural land

Improve 2 of 3 indicators: grassland butterflies, cropland soil organic carbon, high-diversity landscape features.



Forests

Increasing trends for deadwood, forest connectivity, uneven-aged stands, forest bird index and carbon stock.



Peatlands

Restore 30% by 2030 (1/4 rewetted), 40% by 2040, 50% by 2050 (1/4 rewetted). No obligation on farmers/landowners.

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Targets for cities and rivers

Urban green space

No net loss of urban green space and tree canopy cover by 31 Dec 2030 (2024 baseline)

Increasing trend in green space required from 1 Jan 2031 onward

Integration of green space into buildings and infrastructure encouraged

River connectivity

25,000 km

of rivers to become free-flowing by 2030, by removing obsolete man-made barriers to surface-water connectivity (dams, weirs, culverts).

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Timing: general deadlines

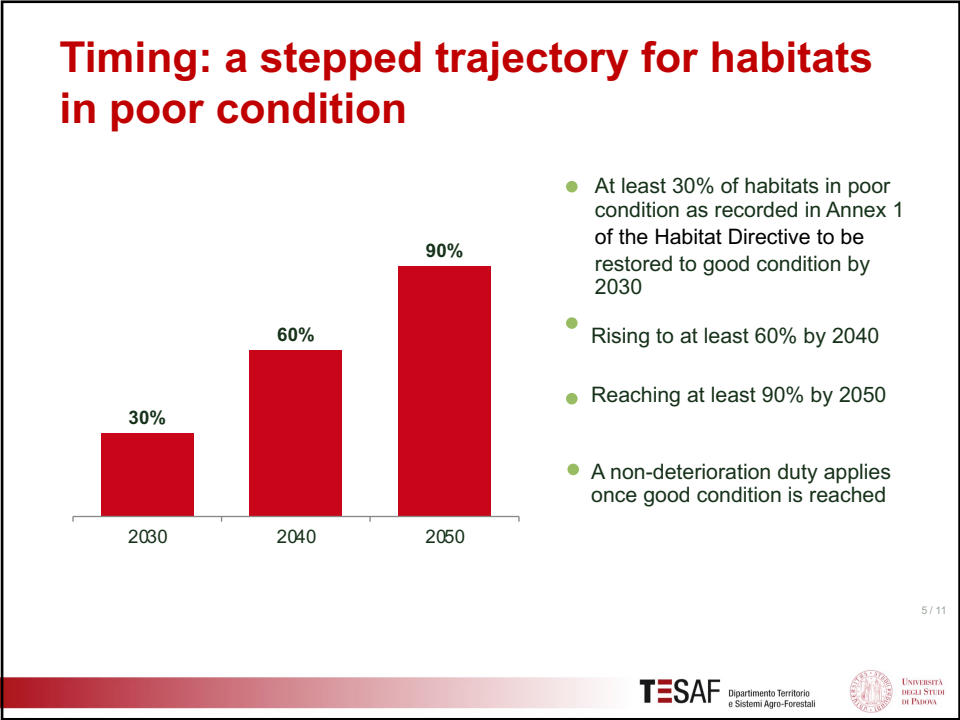
From proposal to binding law



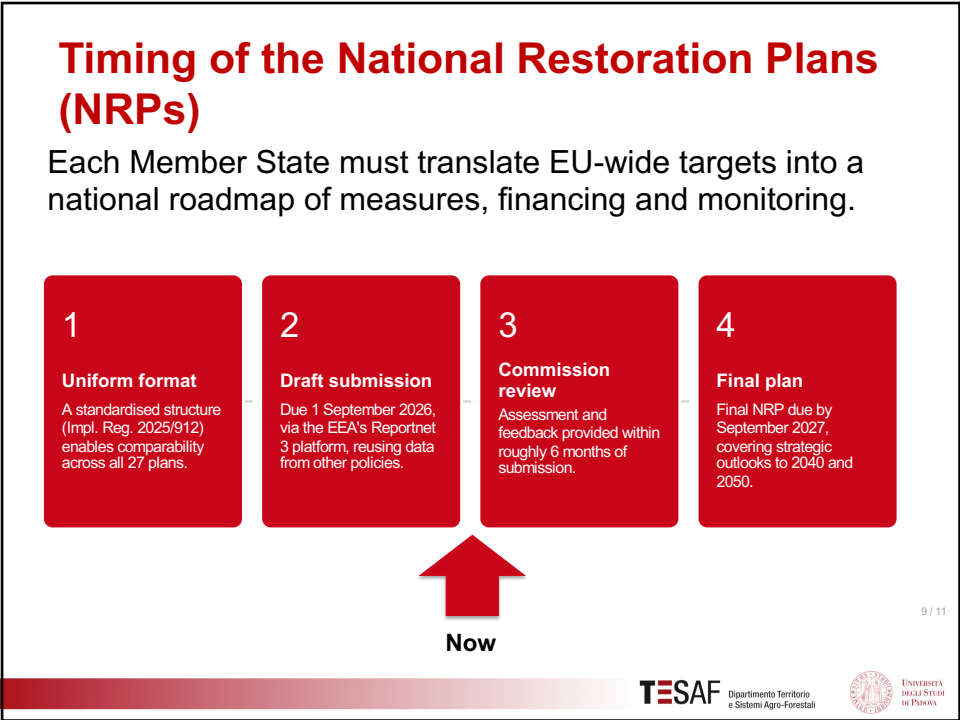
Directly applicable in all 27 Member States — no national transposition law required, unlike an EU Directive.

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Pollinators and additional tree planting

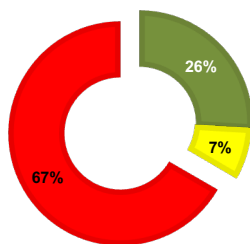
- **Reverse the decline**
 of wild pollinator populations by 2030 at the latest —
 addressing decades of documented decline in bee, butterfly
 and other insect abundance.
- **3 billion additional trees**
 planted at EU level by 2030 — a Union-wide contribution
 target, not individually apportioned to each Member State.

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Where implementation stands today

Draft NRPs submitted on time (1 Sept 2026):
 Bulgaria, Ireland, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Portugal, Spain
 + Austria (45 min. past the deadline)



Estonia and France have recently submitted their plan (the Italian one is ready and has only to be signed by the Minister)

- The Commission has 6 months to assess draft plans and support Member States rather than launch immediate infringement proceedings.
- A regulation-wide review, including socio-economic impacts on agriculture, fisheries and forestry, is scheduled by 2033.

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Forest-related contents of the draft NRP presented till now to the EC

Country	Forest cover	NRP issues related to forest planting
Spain	~37%	It is one of the historical leaders for spontaneous reforestation . The plan focuses on resilience to forest fires and the restoration of Mediterranean forests (oaks and cork trees), converting marginal areas.
France	~32%	It has recently secured the protection of more than 157,000 hectares of forest. The plan aims to promote natural regeneration (e.g. la Arc-Châteauvillain integral reserve). Important role of post-fire planting
Austria	~46%	Very high alpine forest cover . The focus is not on planting new trees, but on diversifying species (introducing more deciduous trees than the traditional spruce monocultures affected by the bark beetle).
Estonia	~54%	Country with very high forest density . The top priority is the restoration of drained peatlands within the forests, reducing the impact of commercial cutting of the wood supply chain.
Portugal	~36%	It has seen a strong increase in recent biomass. The plan focuses on converting intensive eucalyptus plantations in favour of fire-resistant native species. Important role of post-fire planting
Bulgaria	~35%	Focus on the ecological connectivity of mountain forest corridors and on the protection of primary and old-growth forests that are still intact.
Ireland	~11%	Historically one of the least forested nations in the EU, but with a strong recent growth trend. The plan calls for the creation of thousands of hectares of new non-commercial native forests . 71,450 hectares of land have been identified, prioritizing 27,452 ha of public areas.
Netherlands	<10%	Severe lack of space . The plan focuses on the revitalization of small forest habitats (e.g. the Kronenbergse Bos) by introducing litter-rich species to combat soil acidification.
Luxembourg	~34%	Focus on conservation, improvement of existing state-owned forests and increase urban green spaces adjacent to forests.

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Why are so many countries lagging?

- **Federal structure:** need to consult regional authorities (Germany, Italy, ...)
- Intense **cross-sector coordination** (especially with farming and forestry sectors)
- The time required for public **consultation processes**

A basic problem: the NRL requires **a €65 billion annual implementation budget.**

The EC has yet to publish the **legally required report** setting out how the estimated costs of implementing the NRL will be covered.

However, there is a clear underlying assumption: the NRL is expected to be financed through a **revision and reprioritisation of the existing regulatory and funding framework**, rather than through additional budgetary allocations.

An open question is **how and how much to involve private capitals.**

Some interesting experiences

Ireland: The €3.15 billion **Climate and Nature Fund**: Ireland has set up a €3.15 billion strategic sovereign wealth fund. The peculiarity lies in the origin of the money: the fund is fed using the temporary surplus **from taxes on large corporations**. This "countercyclical" fund ensures that native afforestation and peatland restoration projects will receive constant cash flows, protecting green investments from any cuts to the budgets of future governments.

France: The national **Fonds Vert** is financing the protection and improvement of its 157,000 hectares of State-owned forest through its this fond, **integrating State resources intended for the ecological transition of local communities.**

All EU Countries: funds from the **Life program**

Italy, Portugal and Spain: **National Recovery and Resilience Facility** used in recent past for forest restoration project; not anymore available.

Four forms of private finance

Philanthropy: flexible and suitable for projects with little commercial return, but often discontinuous.

Corporate/CSR finance: potentially substantial, but vulnerable to reputational incentives and greenwashing.

Impact investment: seeks both ecological impact and financial return; difficult where ecosystem benefits are not monetizable and perceive in the long-term.

Blended finance: public resources reduce risk and crowd in private capital.

.. and the **the next frontier**: (biodiversity and credit)
credits and their markets

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The next frontier: credits and markets

Carbon credits and biodiversity credits may mobilise additional capital, but **they are not automatically equivalent to ecological restoration**.

Restoration, offsetting and carbon removal should remain conceptually and operationally **distinct**.

Market instruments **should support NRL priorities** rather than determine them.

Robust **baselines, additionality, permanence, leakage** controls and independent verification are prerequisites.

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Why public finance remains indispensable

Restoration generates **many public goods**: biodiversity, water regulation, climate resilience, landscape value and risk reduction.

The **social value of restoration is often greater** than the private value that a landowner can capture.

Purely **market-led finance** may favour **large, visible and low-risk projects** rather than the most ecologically necessary ones.

Public funding should cover **public-good components** and **de-risk projects** without replacing genuinely additional private finance.

In this context the most relevant funds are those coming from the traditional second pillar of the Common Agricultural Policy (funds of the Second Pillar (2023-2027) for afforestation investments)

France: total expenditure on forestry measures in the Second Pillar exceeds **400 M€**.

Ireland: in addition to the national sovereign wealth already mentioned, Ireland allocates about **110 M€** specifically from the Second Pillar to afforestation. The target of the current programming aims to support the planting of about 8,000 hectares per year, for a total goal that is close to 35,000-40,000 hectares in total by the end of the programming.

Italy: CAP funds allocated for has allocated about **500 M€** for New forest plantations with the targets of creating about 10,000-12,000 hectares of new forest plantations (both permanent and short-cycle) and agroforestry systems.

Portugal: Portugal has allocated about **150 M€** euros for forest plantations. The goal is to convert over 20,000 hectares of intensive eucalyptus plantations in favour of native species (oaks and maritime pines).

Spain: It has programmed over **330 M€** for forestry investments under rural development. However, considering the severe droughts of recent years, Spain has reduced the share of expenditure on pure afforestation in favour of restoration and fire prevention. The target is the improvement and restoration of more than 250,000 ha of degraded soils and existing forest ecosystems.

At the end of the NRP approval process, these CAP funds could become one of the most significant tools for implementing the NRP, provided that farmers are willing to take part...

Key takeaways for discussion

- The Regulation sets legally binding, time-bound, ecosystem-specific targets — a shift from voluntary commitments to enforceable obligations.
- National Restoration Plans are the operational bridge between EU targets and site-level science: monitoring indicators, spatial mapping and measure design all need scientific input.
- Implementation is still in its early, data-scarce phase — comparative, quantitative assessment across countries will only become possible once plans are finalised and published.
- Open questions for research: baseline data quality, monitoring methodologies, and reconciling restoration with agricultural, forestry and energy policy.

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The governance challenge of the cycle seed selection and collection-nursery production-plantation

- The governance of this cycle may involve **public** policy and administrative **authorities, landowners, companies** (like private nurseries and planting agents), **NGOs**, and **investors**.
- These actors have **different objectives, risk perceptions** and time **horizons**.
- The governance challenge is therefore not simply “public versus private”, but **how to cover the costs, coordinate** actors, make them **accountable** measuring **ecological outcomes**.

Who actually “produces” restoration?

Public authorities: set targets, priorities, standards, safeguards and monitoring requirements.

Landowners: control land and bear opportunity costs and long-term management risks.

Companies: provide operational capacity, technology and investment.

NGOs and foundations: mobilise finance, volunteers, local knowledge and public engagement.

Investors: can provide additional capital where reliable revenue or risk-sharing mechanisms exist.

The roles for the State

The State, in coordination with private actors, has a responsibility as:

- **Regulator:** defines what qualifies as restoration.
- **Planner:** identifies ecological priorities and spatial strategies, targets for reproductive material production.
- **Financier:** pays for public goods and non-commercially viable actions.
- **Standard developer:** support the development of standard e certification schemes, registers and logos.
- **Buyer of outcomes:** links part of payments to verified ecological performance.
- **Long-term coordinator:** ensures continuity beyond individual projects or funding cycles.

Public forest nurseries: strategic infrastructure

- Public nurseries **need not compete with private** nurseries; they can provide **strategic capacity**.
- **Specific roles/competences:** native species, appropriate provenances, rare species, genetic conservation and emergency supply.
- Public capacity can act as a “**provider of last resort**” where demand is uncertain or **commercial returns are low**.

The optimal system is likely a network of public and private (profit and non-profit): gene selection + germplasm conservation + public nurseries + private nurseries + seed networks

NGOs: major potential, but accountability matters

NGOs can mobilise private donations, volunteers, local communities and rapid delivery capacity.

Visible targets such as “one million trees” are useful for mobilisation but can oversimplify ecological performance.

Key questions: where, which habitat, which species, why planting, survival after 5–10 years, and who maintains the site?

Independent monitoring is essential when NGOs, donors and public authorities all have different incentives.

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From projects to landscapes

- The most effective unit of intervention is often the landscape or ecological network rather than an isolated parcel.
- Aggregate neighbouring landowners, municipalities, NGOs and businesses under a common restoration programme.
- Benefits: ecological connectivity, economies of scale, shared nurseries/procurement, common monitoring and lower transaction costs.
- This also helps small landowners participate in restoration markets and public programmes.

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A possible governance architecture

Public organizations at State and regional level → support against verified results, targets, standards, safeguards and monitoring

Independent science/monitoring → genetic selection, research on nursery and planting technology, developing monitoring techniques

Public + private finance → grants, risk-sharing, investment and philanthropic capital

Nurseries + seed networks → ensure appropriate planting material

Delivery organisations → implement restoration, re/afforestation programs

Territorial restoration platforms → integrate landowners, NGOs, firms and municipalities

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Four principles for an effective public–private model

ADDITIONALITY — private finance should add resources rather than replace public budgets.

ECOLOGICAL INTEGRITY — pay for restoration outcomes, not merely for planting a certain number of trees.

PERMANENCE — include long-term management, monitoring and maintenance.

PUBLIC ACCOUNTABILITY — delegation of delivery must not become delegation of responsibility.

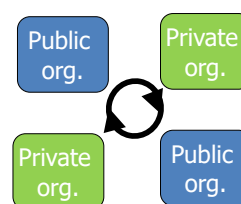
CIRCULAR SUBSIDIARITY

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Circular subsidiarity

Action for public goods is the responsibility not only of public bodies, but is based on the **mutual recognition of responsibilities**, skills and operational capabilities between the various subjects, public and private

→ sharing of responsibilities in **co-creation, co-programming, and co-management** (PPP: Public-Private Partnership)



Issues related to public entities assuming functions inconsistent with their institutional nature

Two examples:

- Some **State forest enterprises** (see the influential lobby of EUSTAFOR):
 - they request to have access to public incentives,
 - they advocate a reduced responsibility in land restoration,
 - they compete in the timber market, without necessarily contributing to market stabilisation.

EUSTAFOR position paper: Preserving forests, jobs, and local economy: EUSTAFOR's call for balanced and sound land protection approaches

18/03/2025

To fulfil the targets on land protection set by recent EU climate and nature legislation, state-owned forests are often considered to be the most obvious solution. European State Forest Management organizations (SFMOs), now and in the past, have proven to follow the highest sustainability standards in forest management, including the preservation of valuable habitats and species. Out of 55.5 million hectares of state forests managed by EUSTAFOR members, more than 17 million hectares are protected by national nature conservation laws, almost 11 million hectares are serving as protective forests, and another 11 million hectares have been designated as Natura 2000 sites. However, **additional setting aside of public forests only to meet the ambitious land conservation targets cannot be the approach nor can reaching these targets be the primary role of state forests.**

Issues related to public entities assuming functions inconsistent with their institutional nature

Two examples:

- Italy: the country has a dedicated section of the armed force (controlled by the Ministry of Defence), the **Carabinieri Forestali**, which is responsible for data collecting and elaborating of the National Forest Inventory and for managing around 130 State-owned nature reserves.



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Take home messages

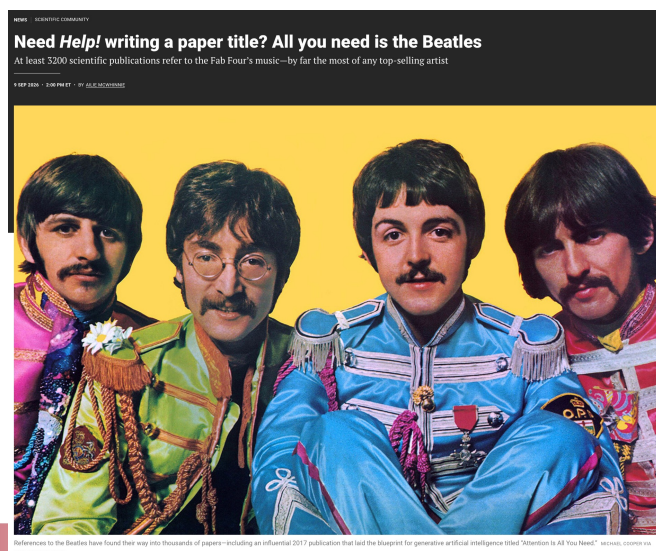
- In the near future, restoring degraded land, converting farmland to forest, greening cities **will require large quantities of adapted forest reproductive material**.
- In most EU countries, **public financial resources** allocated to these objectives **are not clearly defined** — with the exception of the CAP — and **private resources** are **not adequately mobilised**.
- The **State** should strengthen its role as **regulator, coordinator, financier and guarantor** of outcomes, leaving to the **private sector** — both for-profit and non-profit — those activities where this proves **more efficient and effective**.
- The implementation of the NRL can, and should, become a **new model of collaborative environmental governance** based on the principle of **circular subsidiarity**.
- As part of a broader **paradigm shift towards a sustainable circular bioeconomy**, the NRL can provide a **strategic reference framework** for our work on forest genetic resources and efficient nursery production.

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Here Comes the Sun: State and civil society dealing with ...

Science

It is perhaps the most optimistic song by the Beatles. It fits perfectly with the idea of a positive paradigm shift in the governance of the NRL



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Alternative options

(you are free to use them for your papers or presentations!)

- **With a Little Help from Our Friends:** It builds on the **idea of cooperation among scientists, nursery professionals and policymakers** and on the notion that the right trees and the right genes are our best allies.
- **Get Back (To Where You Once Belonged):** The concept of “returning to our roots”, fits particularly well with the very idea of restoration: **restoring nature while making use of native improved genetic material.**
- **Across the Universe:** it reminds us the vastness of biodiversity and the **richness of our genetic heritage.**
- **The Long and Winding Road:** it is particularly well suited if focus on **the challenges ahead, the complexity of the regulatory framework**, or the long journey that lies ahead for the forestry sector in implementing the law.

Only for my Italian
colleagues:

*Speriamo di non
essere tentati di
ricorrere, nei nostri
lavori sull'Italia, a
“La locomotiva” del
maestro Guccini.*

