



FORESTS REBORN, a project to restore the quality of forest landscapes

Although only covering 25% of the earth's surface, forests are the most important terrestrial reservoir of biological diversity. Millions of rural people depend on forests for food, medicinal plants and fuelwood. Forests also provide a range of goods and environmental services for those who live far away from them. They store carbon dioxide (which would otherwise contribute to global warming), regulate water runoff and quality (reducing floods and droughts) and produce wood and many non-timber products.

Despite their value to humanity, forests are under threat and half the world's original forests have been lost. Forest areas in most temperate countries are now stable, or even increasing. However, this often masks a loss in the quality of the forests, with diverse natural forests being replaced with plantations of a single species. In the last 50 years, deforestation and forest degradation has occurred at an unprecedented rate in the tropics. Recent estimates put the natural forest loss at 14.6 million hectares (an area the size of Nepal).

In response to this situation, WWF and IUCN promote the following vision for the world's forests:

"The world will have more extensive, more diverse and higher quality forest landscapes. These will meet human needs and aspirations fairly, while conserving biological diversity and fulfilling the ecosystem functions necessary for all life on earth". In line with this vision, the WWF/IUCN forest goal is *"to halt and reverse the loss and degradation of forests worldwide"*.

WWF's Forests for Life programme will take a comprehensive approach to "protect, manage and restore, forest landscape".

Forests Reborn: overall progress

During the last six months, the focus has been on the consolidation of WWF's target on Forest Landscape Restoration (FLR), which includes the Forest Reborn project. This is illustrated by the following examples:

STRATEGY FOR THE CONSERVATION AND RESTORATION OF THE LOWER BULGARIAN DANUBE ISLANDS

Forests for Life is working with WWF's Danube-Carpathian Programme Office and the Government of Bulgaria to implement this strategy for the conservation and restoration of the Danube islands floodplain forests, as part of the Lower Danube Green Corridor. A successful series of meetings and a press conference took place in Sofia at the beginning of October, in order to obtain endorsement for the strategy from the Ministries of Environment and Agriculture and Forestry, and launch an action plan.

The new government in Bulgaria has committed to the Bulgarian Danube island restoration strategy. This signifies that now the implementation strategy can go ahead. The key activities now will consist in refining the economic cost benefit analysis looking specifically at some potential opportunities for income generation through restored natural forest cover. The immediate restoration activities along some of the islands will also start. Finally, the organisation of a meeting between the Bulgarian and Romanian government counterparts is being organised in order to bring the Romanians to adopt a similar strategy to protect and restore their Danube islands as well as their floodplain forest along the Danube.

NATIONAL STUDIES AND A REGIONAL WORKSHOP ON FOREST LANDSCAPE RESTORATION IN EAST AFRICA

Four national studies, including a review of existing initiatives and policy/legal frameworks are nearing completion in four countries - Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda. Key elements of these will be collated into a regional study, and a regional workshop is planned to take place in Mombassa, Kenya at the end of November 2001 where the findings will be presented and discussed. The workshop will also bring together decision-makers and key stakeholders to discuss the importance of FLR, and to draw up a short and long term strategic plan with the aim to begin identifying concrete priorities for FLR in the region over the next few years. Other partners such as the World Bank are being invited to participate in this regional initiative.

ADVOCATING FOREST LANDSCAPE RESTORATION: INTERNATIONAL WORKSHOP

A meeting was held in September to agree on an outline advocacy strategy for FLR up to Rio+10 (World Summit on Sustainable Development, in September 2002 in Johannesburg). As a result of this meeting it was agreed that WWF will organize a workshop at the United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF2) in March in Costa Rica to raise awareness about FLR and to demonstrate positive examples of FLR with the objective of obtaining commitments from governments and aid agencies to support FLR in their countries/ regions. It will also enable the input of specific recommendations by ministers on FLR into the UNFF meetings which will be held directly after this workshop. It is anticipated that a number of case studies of FLR projects will be released, and commitments to FLR will be announced by the Costa Rican government and others.

MULTISTAKEHOLDER DIALOGUE IN MALAYSIA

After a visit to Kinabatangan (Sabah) by the Forests Reborn task force, it was agreed to link the Partners for Wetlands work in this highly threatened watershed to the FLR work. In the last few years, huge tracts of rainforest have been replaced by endless plantations of oil palms. The river is facing pollution and suffocation from the effluents from the oil palm plantations on either side of the river. At the same time local communities are seeing their opportunities reduced. The river floods regularly because of inappropriate tree cover on either side, thus, reducing the financial returns from the oil palms. There is an incentive from the various stakeholders, including plantation-owners to restore at least a protective buffer zone on either side of the river. Specific activities will include mapping, examining innovative approaches to restore forest connectivity (in an area that represents habitat for such species as the Sumatran rhino, elephants and the orang-utans). The work undertaken in Kinabatangan will also be carefully documented and lessons learnt on forest landscape restoration, will be fed up into Forests Reborn.

PROTECTING, MANAGING AND RESOTRING IN CHINA

Members of the Forests Reborn task force visited China to work with WWF's China Programme Office on developing an integrated landscape programme in the Upper Yangtze. The proposed programme includes work on protected areas, sustainable forest management and forest landscape restoration. While some activities on the ground have started, the overall approach is still being refined and will provide a replicable framework for use in other regions. This programme is particularly interesting because of the natural linkages it offers: with freshwater (watershed management), species (restoring panda habitat) and communities (working with local communities to identify options for suitable forest management).

SCOTLAND: LEARNING LESSONS

Progress in Scotland has been made on two fronts:

In terms of ecological restoration: based on fossilized pollen samples, a variety of tree species were identified for the restoration of the Carrifran wildwood. By the end of April, 27 hectares of trees (40,500 trees) had been planted in the Carrifran Wildwood, including oak, ash, birch, willow, montane woodland (first for Scotland), juniper and Scots Pine. As a result of this project, other landowners are now seeking advice on how to restore their land.

Politically: in a very positive move, a coalition of social and environmental groups was asked to join in a "forest forum" by the Scottish forestry commission to represent, in a common voice, the interests of both communities and environment. At the same time a delegation including partners in the Borders Forests Trust was invited by the EU to share their experiences with other EU countries interested in community forestry and restoration.

OTHERS

Other regions in which Forests Reborn is active, or will be involved, include Central America, the Mediterranean, South Asia and New Caledonia.