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EUROPEAN FORESTS PLAY KEY ECONOMIC AND ENVIRONMENTAL ROLE

European forests are central to climate change mitigation and adaptation as well as for the delivery of environmental services. This role of forests and its potential for further development needs to be fully recognized. This was one of the key messages of the 35th session of the European Forestry Commission (EFC), which took place in Lisbon on 27-29 April.

The conference discussed how the forest sector is crucial for countries' economic and environmental wellbeing. The meeting recognized that the attention on forests is at an all-time high, in particular thanks to the focus of the climate change negotiations on this sector.

Forests are among the world's major carbon sinks. They store a massive 638 gigatonnes of carbon in biomass, deadwood, litter and soil, which is almost equal to the amount of carbon in the atmosphere. Over a quarter of the carbon stored in the world's forests is found in the pan-European region. European foresters looked into ways and means to bridge the gap between the mitigation potential of European forests and their current low share in carbon markets.

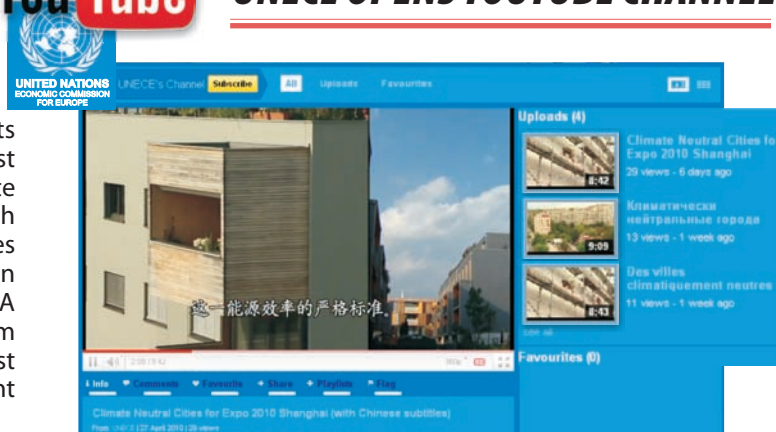
In recent years wood has also become a major source of renewable energy in the region. For instance, in the EU it accounts for half of renewable energy sources. Over the last 20 years European forests supplied 11 billion cubic meters of wood for environmentally friendly products and energy generation. In spite of this, the wood stock in the European region grew by 7% over the same period. This represents a tremendous potential in economic and environmental terms that deserves attention in the development of energy policies.

Forests are also the guardians of our freshwater resources, and provide a wide range of other ecosystem services. For instance, they reduce sedimentation in watercourses and filter pollutants. They also play a key role in reducing risks from natural disasters. These functions are often taken for granted and the role of forest owners and managers in providing these environmental services is generally overlooked. □

For further information, please visit: <http://timber.unece.org/index.php?id=efc-lisbon> or contact: info.timber@unece.org.



YouTube **UNECE OPENS YOUTUBE CHANNEL**



UNECE has just opened its channel on YouTube. The first film on display is "Climate Neutral Cities", which explains what UNECE does to foster energy efficiency in housing in the region. A longer version of the film was presented for the first time at a UNECE side-event at COP-15 last December.

The film is available in the three official languages of UNECE (English, French and Russian). A version with Chinese subtitles is also available. It will be broadcast in the United Nations Pavilion at the Expo 2010 "Better City, better life", which opened in Shanghai on 1 May. □

More films will be added in the coming months, so check out our YouTube channel regularly at: <http://www.youtube.com/user/UNECE>

UNECE SUPPORTS JOINT WORK OF CENTRAL ASIAN COUNTRIES ON REGIONAL WATER RESOURCES MANAGEMENT

Government representatives of five member countries of the International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea (IFAS) and its regional institutions met in Almaty, Kazakhstan, from 20 to 22 April 2010 to discuss steps aimed at improving regional structures and legal frameworks for water resources management and to work on the development of the Third Aral Sea Basin Programme, a regional action plan for 2011-2015.

The meeting was a milestone in the implementation of the UNECE project on regional dialogue and cooperation on water resources management in Central Asia, financed by the Government of Germany through GTZ, in the framework of the Berlin Water Process. The project supports the countries of Central Asia in analyzing needs for the modernization of the legal framework and overall institutional setting for transboundary water management, with a focus on IFAS.

The April meeting followed extensive national consultations by senior representatives of the Executive Committee of IFAS and UNECE experts in all five Central Asian capitals in February- March 2010. On the basis of the outcome of national consultations, the meeting recommended an evolutionary approach to the strengthening of institutions and legal frameworks. A drafting group composed of government representatives will soon start its work on amendments to existing statutory documents of IFAS. Additional major steps are planned to be taken during the implementation phase of the new Aral Sea Basin Programme.

The Programme will cover four areas: integrated water resources management, environmental protection, socio-economic issues, and institutional and legal strengthening. The Programme is expected to contribute to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, improve preparedness to address new challenges, including climate change, and foster integrated water resources management at the national, river-basin and regional levels.



A major challenge is to ensure cooperation with the donor community and international organizations during the development of the new Programme, which is seen as a crucial precondition for its success. The countries of Central Asia have repeatedly stated their readiness to provide substantial resources for the implementation of the Programme, in particular national projects. Regional projects, however, will most likely require significant support from the donor community.

One of the project's first achievements is the establishment of regular dialogue between the IFAS Executive Committee and key donors in Central Asia. A donors coordination meeting to be held in Almaty on 21 May 2010, will allow the donor community and international organizations to share their visions of the new Aral Sea Basin Programme. It will also provide an opportunity to set Programme priorities and involve the experts of key donor organizations more actively in its design and implementation. □



For further information, see:
<http://www.unece.org/env/water/cadialogue/cadwelcome.htm>



Off the Press

ANNUAL REPORT 2010

UNECE's Annual Report 2010 has just been issued. Hard copies are being sent. The Annual Report presents a thorough review of UNECE's accomplishments in 2009 in the different fields of activities. It also highlights some of the main priorities of 2010.

For the first time, a Russian version will be available in the coming weeks. □

The Annual Report can also be accessed online at:
http://www.unece.org/pub_cat/topics/annual_reports.htm