



8 may 2020

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Europaforum Northern Sweden's views on the EU's new forest strategy - the importance of a regional dimension that rewards already sustainable regions and industries

Europaforum Northern Sweden (EFNS) is a network for politicians at the local and regional levels from Norrbotten, Västerbotten, Jämtland Härjedalen and Västernorrland. EFNS is a meeting place and a knowledge arena for discussion and analysis of the impacts of EU policy on northern Sweden. EFNS monitors European issues to influence EU legislation, the EU's strategies and action programmes and the EU's budget. The objective of EFNS is to safeguard the interests of northern Sweden both in the European arena and in relation to the national level in matters with a clear European perspective.

THE EFNS POSITION IN BRIEF

- The EFNS welcomes the EU's new forest strategy but highlights the importance of considering the large regional variations within the EU when it comes to available forest, forestry and biodiversity.
- The EFNS emphasizes that the forest sector in northern Sweden is important and employs around 22 000 people with a value added of around 22 billion kronor. The forest also has other vital values in terms of human recreation and outdoor life. The biological, economic and social values of the forest are crucial for a thriving countryside in northern Sweden.
- The EFNS stresses the importance of a continuing consideration and improvement of forest management in a manner that benefits the biodiversity of the forest while utilizing the forest-based resources in correspondence with its net-growth.
- The EFNS stresses that the Swedish active forestry, with an increased and sustainable use of forest biomass, is necessary in order to reach the EU climate and energy goals.
- The EFNS emphasizes that the role of forests for climate change mitigation cannot be assessed based on narrow considerations of carbon flows within individual forest stands or over a short period of time. When assessing forest management practices impact on biodiversity, a landscape perspective over a longer time period should be applied.

Northern Sweden and the forest in the green transition

With the aim to make Europe the first climate neutral continent by 2050 the European green deal sets the agenda of the coming work within the EU, and the new EU forest strategy is one of the new initiatives. With an area of 222 564 km², where 97 % of the productive land area is covered with forest, northern Sweden is one of the most forest dense regions in Europe. Northern Sweden plays a key role in the green transition that is required to achieve the climate and renewable energy goals of the EU. In addition to hydro and wind power, an active and sustainable forest management delivering increasing quantities of biomass to the society substituting material and energy based on fossil fuels is of key importance.



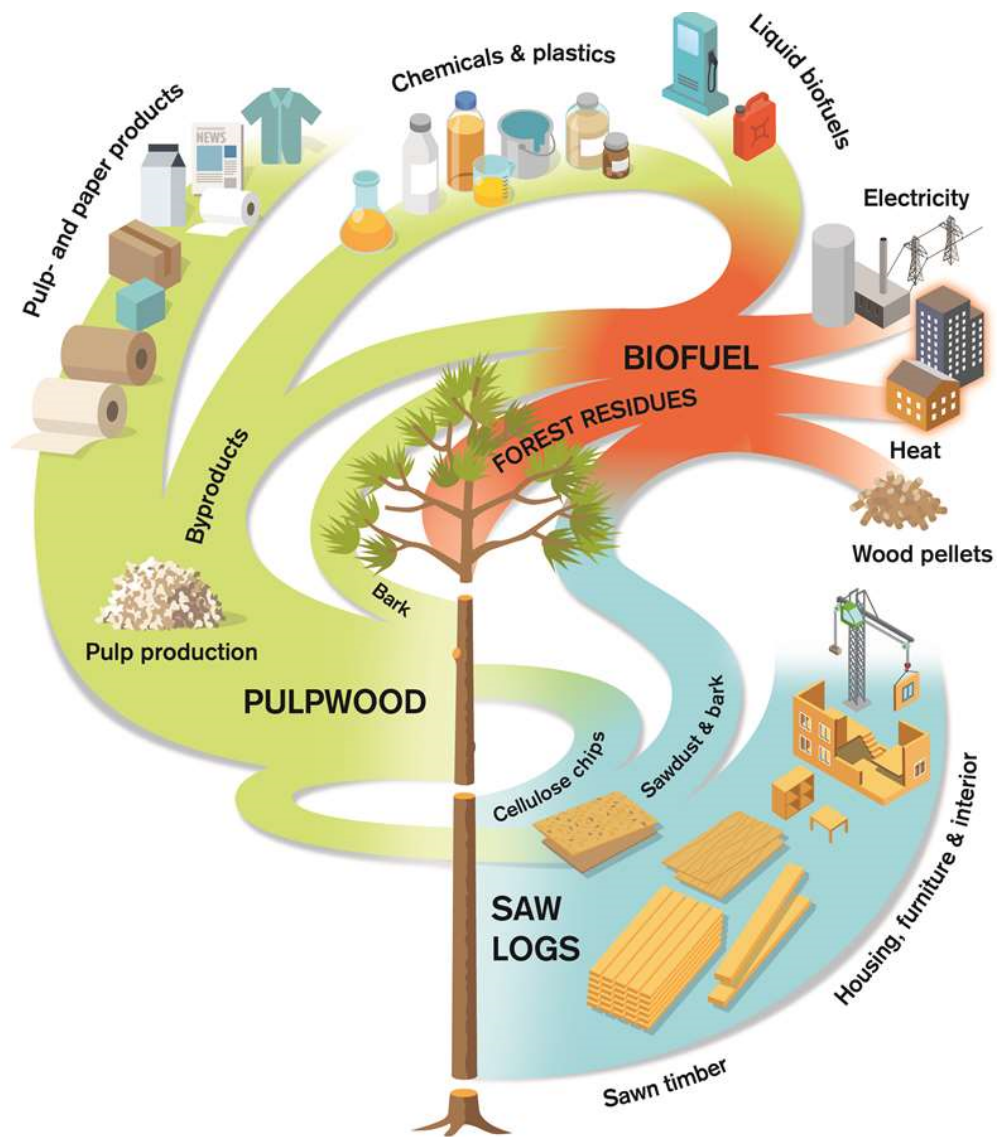
Sweden is the world's third largest exporter of forest industry products. These products are already today substituting products and energy based on fossil fuels all over EU. As a result of this industrial activity, large amounts of byproducts are available that can be processed into new biobased products such as green chemicals, bioplastic, smart packaging and transport fuels. Northern Sweden's forest industries are supported by world leading forest R&D and climate smart innovations. Over the last 100 years the standing volume in Swedish forests has almost doubled and carbon stocks in forests and forest soil have quadrupled. At the same time, more than 4 billion cubic meters of timber have been felled and delivered to the society. Sustainable forest management has in other words proven to have a positive impact on climate change mitigation. In addition to the managed forest, Sweden has protected larger forest areas than 21 other EU countries. The Swedish bioeconomy is dominated by forestry and forest products. Bioenergy produced from forest industry by-products is one of the main pillars of our energy system. The environmental concern in today's forestry is a strength for the growing bioeconomy. In Sweden, conflicting goals in forest bioeconomy and sustainable forestry are mitigated by increased forest growth, voluntary depositions of forest, sustainability certification and the protection of biodiversity.

For rural areas, forests are crucial from an economic, a biological as well as a social aspect. The forest industry in northern Sweden employs around 22 000 people today and the value added is around 22 billion kronor. The forest is also a place for outdoor life, tourism and recreation in line with "allemansrätten" – the right of public access where both landowners and visitors have obligations and rights. With active forestry and a smart use of forest products the forest can also play a crucial role in mitigating climate change.

The forest's environment and climate benefits, carbon binding and substitution

Through carbon sequestration, growing forests absorb increasing amounts of carbon dioxide in the trees and the ground. When trees are harvested, carbon stock is moved into the society substituting products and energy based on fossil raw materials. The Swedish forestry act provides a guarantee that the growing stock continuously increases since every harvested tree is replaced by two or three new ones. It is forests that grow and are cultivated that provide the best climate benefit. Growth will over time slow down and so will carbon assimilation and after some time this forest will become a slow carbon emitter. If an analysis of the carbon cycle of a forest is limited to a short time period or a single stand, the interaction over time and space might be overlooked, and misleading conclusions are the consequence. Swedish forest can continue to store increasing amounts of carbon in the forest and at the same time deliver increasing volumes of wood to the society. Methods and tools for sustainable forest management and nature adapted forest managements practices are improving over time with the goal to maintain and improve biodiversity.

Swedish forestry is driven by the demand of timber and pulp wood used for long lasting wood products such as buildings and furniture and for the production of paper and packaging (see figure below). As a result of these industrial activities large amounts of forest industry by-products are available, which are used mainly for energy generation today. These by-products can in the future potentially be upgraded to biochemicals, bioplastics and transport fuels.



Forestry on EU level

There are no legal grounds for common forest policies on an EU level but there are EU laws that have a direct or indirect effect on forests and forestry. Swedish forestry is regulated by a national forest act that stipulates that forestry management shall integrate extensive environmental considerations while giving production goals and environmental goals equal status. At the same time, you have an obligation to take consideration to nature, cultural heritage, reindeer husbandry and other interests. This act can be used for inspiration in the development of a new European forest strategy.

Sustainable forestry is crucial to reach climate neutrality by 2050. Well managed growing forests delivering raw materials for useful, biobased products and energy to the society substituting fossil raw materials is the way forward. This needs to be better recognized in new strategies and initiatives in order to abate the insecurity around different views of sustainable forestry.



The EU has declared high ambitions for the establishment of a circular and biobased economy. Northern Sweden's production and upgrading of forest biomass coupled with the capacity for R&D are important resources for the whole union. The EU provides important research funding and should for the coming programming period strengthen forest bioeconomy as a priority to further develop its competitiveness.

The Europaforum Northern Sweden believes that a European forest strategy and related strategies must consider the various regional conditions within different parts of the EU. Initiatives derived from the EU should be pervaded by a firm regional dimension that reward sustainable regions and industries, promote productive coordination and synergies and subsequently strengthen the forests multifunctional values and contributions to the joint environment- and climate objectives.

Adopted at Europaforum Northern Sweden on May 8, 2020

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