

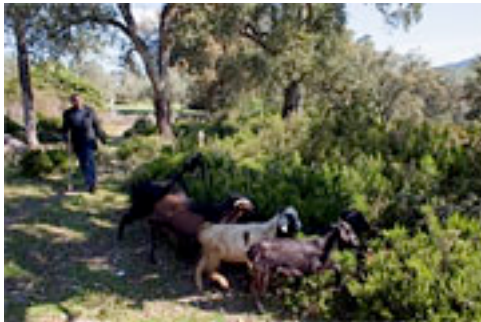


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UN forms partnership with Mediterranean countries to save region's forests



Dar Fatma Forests, North Tunisia

6 April 2011 – In an effort to save forests in the Mediterranean region from damage exacerbated by the impact of climate change, the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization ([FAO](#)) has formed a partnership that will tackle the threats facing the woodlands and draw attention to their value.

The partnership brings together 12 institutions and organizations, including FAO, and will focus primarily on six countries in the southern and eastern Mediterranean – Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Syria, Lebanon and Turkey, the agency announced during the second Mediterranean Forest Week, which opened yesterday in Avignon, France.

“The Collaborative Partnership on Mediterranean Forests will help raise awareness on the wealth of vital functions Mediterranean forests provide,” [said](#) Eduardo Rojas-Briales, the Assistant Director-General of the FAO Forestry Department.

“These include soil and water protection, landscape values, carbon sequestration and biodiversity conservation. It is urgent that we join efforts to restore and preserve their functions for future generations,” he said.

The Mediterranean Basin loses between 0.7 and one million hectares of forests every year to fires. Economic loss as a result is estimated at €1 billion.

The region faces considerable increase in longer and more frequent droughts and heat waves, resulting in the growing risk of large-scale forest fires as well as more water scarcity, affecting both rural and urban populations.

Total forest area in the Mediterranean region is 73 million hectares, or 8.5 per cent of the region's total land area.

The forests provide a diversity of products such as wood, non-wood forest products including cork, fodder for livestock and aromatic plants and game, all of which are important for socio-economic development and contribute to food security and poverty alleviation in rural areas.

Threats to the forests include climatic change, agricultural expansion, tourism, urban development and other land use practices that are contributing to forest losses.

The partnership is designed to integrate policies and investments at the country level in order to adapt forests to climate change. It is also aimed at developing a joint regional approach to forest management and in particular to wildfire prevention, through the sharing of expertise, knowledge and best practices.

At the local level the partnership will help to promote sustainable forest management among all stakeholders, including local communities, forest owners and managers, farmers, herders, environmentalists, protected areas managers and researchers, according to FAO.

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