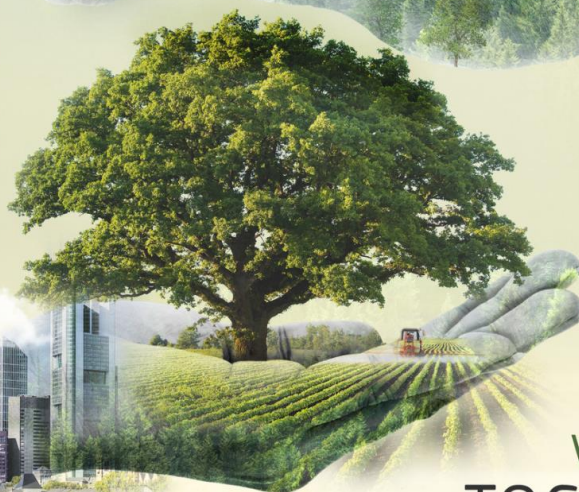




THREE  
BILLION  
ADDITIONAL  
TREES  
BY 2030



#3BillionTrees

WE GROW  
TOGETHER



## Conference: Rooting for #3BillionTrees

20 March 2024, Brussels

### Event Introduction and Background

The "Rooting for #3BillionTrees" conference was organised by DG Environment of the European Commission as part of the EU's "For Our Planet" campaign. The main purpose of the conference was to celebrate progress towards the EU's pledge to plant at least 3 billion additional trees by 2030, learn from successes and challenges so far, and discuss ways to accelerate progress.

#### The conference agenda covered:

1. An introduction from EU Commissioner Virginijus Sinkevičius and Director General of DG ENV, Florika Fink-Hooijer.
2. A high-level panel with representatives from different Member States and stakeholder groups.
3. Case studies presenting natural regeneration and rewilding from three different Member States.
4. Presentations from organisations that have pledged to plant trees under the 3 Billion Trees initiative.

Over 40 organisations, cities, regions and companies have so far joined the 3 Billion Trees pledge, together registering more than 13 million additional trees.

The conference sought to put a spotlight on their efforts while also discussing lessons learned and recommendations for the Commission in order to progress towards the ambitious 3 billion tree target by 2030.

## Detailed Event Overview

### Introduction from DG ENV

Commissioner **Virginijus Sinkevičius** highlighted the potential of the new EU Restoration Law to increase the number of planted trees. While a fraction of planted trees in the EU are in the EU pledge/register, events like this conference help raise awareness and understanding of the importance of biodiversity in forests and the EU 3 Billion Trees Pledge.

**Florika Fink-Hooijer, Director General of DG ENV**, referred to forest planting as a key solution for climate change and to revert forest biodiversity loss while boosting bio-economy. The 3 Billion Trees Pledge is about the right tree in the right place at the right moment to hold biodiversity and fight against climate change.

### High-Level Panel Discussion

The high-level panel brought together ministers and senior officials from Ireland, Belgium, France and Portugal, as well as representatives from the European Landowners' Organisation and the Swedish Forest Industries.

**Pippa Hackett, Ministry of State in Ireland** stated that Ireland has increased forest cover to nearly 12% of the national territory. This is the highest expansion in 350 years, with a target of increased forest cover of 18% by 2050. Over 5 million native trees have been planted since 2020 with financial support through direct payments to farmers. A mindset shift is still needed among some farmers to embrace tree planting.

**Celine Tellier, Wallonia, Belgium** stressed the importance of the 3 Billion Trees initiative for the regional government which is a major contributor to the EU tree counter, reporting over 2.5 million trees so far across 4200km of new hedges and 1.5 million trees. A pragmatic approach based on an online platform with maps showing existing plantations, areas available to trees planting, potential subsidies to support the planting initiatives available to diverse stakeholders has been key to respond to challenges identified.

**Frederik Jobert**, stated that **France** aims to renew 25% of its forests (4.2 million hectares) by 2032 to boost resilience. While there is a political goal to plant 1 Billion trees in France, efforts from the public sector need to be complemented by actively incentivizing private owners. Managing and maintaining existing forests is also crucial. Challenges include lack of resources to ensure a coordinated effort for tree planting, skills shortages and wildlife damage to seeds/saplings.

**Nuno Barza** presented the perspective of **Portugal** which has focused heavily on rural fire prevention and forest land management since devastating fires in 2017. Key elements include financial support to sustainable forest management with closer to nature approach, promote different forest management practices (mosaic) to increase resilience, prevention measures including land abandonment reduction, protecting shelters in villages, and maintaining mosaic landscapes. Economically viable land uses are essential to keep people in rural areas.

**Access to land** for tree planting is a **major challenge** given many competing demands. **Jurgen Tack** from **ELO** referred to their policy document signed with WWF and stated that planting the right tree in

the right place requires support from the right legislation. Prioritisation is needed to avoid taking the most valuable agricultural land while identifying optimal areas for new forests. Planting trees for the right purpose should involve not only planting for biodiversity purposes but also with the objective to ensure the development of economically viable forestry.

**Viveka Beckeman** stated that for the **Swedish Forest Industry** the challenge is the additional trees requirement of the 3 Billion Trees Pledge since 86% of the Swedish territory is forest. Sweden contributes to increase CO2 sink capacity.

### Case Studies on natural regeneration and rewildering:

Three case studies were presented highlighting diverse tree planting and forest management approaches:

**Sweden:** Promoting natural forest regeneration Martin Jensen from Ecoskogs Koket, a Swedish non-profit, argued for greater use of natural regeneration to restore diverse, adaptive forest ecosystems. Clearcutting tends to produce even-aged, low diversity stands while natural disturbance regimes generate more structural complexity. Assisted regeneration and selective cutting can help guide forest development and support biodiversity while salvage logging is needed to modify the physical structure of the disturbed ecosystem. Climate change necessitates diverse, resilient future forests.

**Cyprus:** Areti Christodoulou from the Cyprus Department of Forests presented an example of large-scale post-fire restoration based on a post-fire management plan implemented after major fires in 2016. Actions included salvage logging, anti-erosion measures, targeted reforestation, wildlife habitat enhancements, and long-term monitoring. Restoring key ecosystem functions and services was the priority, promoting natural regeneration wherever viable and seed banks to ensure natural sources.

**Spain:** Sonia Roig from the Technical University of Madrid stressed the importance of promoting adaptive silviculture for climate resilience. Tree planting is just the start of that process - to deliver multiple ecosystem services forests need natural restoration, active management and resilience to adapt to climate change. That requires actions including improved species selection, variable density thinning, underplanting, and creating diverse stand structures can boost resilience. Existing plantations require adaptation to avoid unstable, fire-prone stands. Integrating road breaks, grazing and broadleaf regeneration prepares forests for future disturbances.

### Presentations from Pledging Organisations:

The final conference session featured short presentations from various organisations that have pledged to contribute to the 3 Billion Trees goal:

#### Municipal authorities:

- The Forest Alliance in Flanders has catalyzed a jump from 60 to 600 ha/year of afforestation since 2019 through collaborative efforts and a public monitoring system.
- Forestami in Milan aims to plant 3 million trees by 2030, with 61,000 planted so far. Engaging citizens and linking urban trees and human well-being are priorities.
- Krizevci, Croatia is planting trees to provide shade along new bicycle paths and aims to add trees in public spaces. However, they face bureaucratic obstacles.
- Wallonia's "Yes We Plant" program has mobilized civil society to plant 1.5 million trees, with farmer engagement and school programs as key elements.

**Private companies:**

- EcoTree offers companies and individuals the opportunity to fund sustainable forest management projects with biodiversity monitoring.
- Forestry consultancy EF has an online platform linking funders to vetted tree projects. Over 14,000 people have participated in planting events so far.
- Folia Project is restoring degraded land in Spain through partnerships with local landowners and businesses.
- Land Life Company specializes in reforestation using technology to boost the impact of corporate funding. 4 million trees have been planted in Spain and Portugal since 2020.
- Reforest'Action connects funders to projects through a network of 500 local partners. Monitoring is a key principle to ensure the permanence of the trees.

**Tree Planting Organisations:**

- The Land Art Association focuses on afforestation and natural regeneration in Romania, constrained mainly by lack of funding rather than land or capacity.
- Portugal's Landscape Laboratory combines research, education and local government collaboration to plant trees and green spaces in cities.
- Life Terra is building a European-wide tree planting community, with events in 21 countries so far and plans for a Europe-wide tree planting day.
- Plant-for-the-Planet aims to empower youth worldwide to take climate action, with over 0.5 million trees planted so far. Current focus is a "green wall" to combat desertification in southern Europe, starting with Spain. While planting trees is a challenge, funding to ensure their management is needed and probably more difficult.
- We For All combines tree planting with sustainability education for children. They aim to plant 1 billion trees worldwide by 2030, collaborating to overcome climate-exacerbated challenges.

**Closing Remarks and Future Directions:**

The Rooting for 3 Billion Trees conference showcased an impressive breadth of efforts underway across Europe to protect and restore forests and accelerate tree planting. While major challenges remain, from increasing droughts and wildfires to competing land use demands or funding for tree planting and management of the trees planted, the event highlighted the power of pragmatic collaboration between government, civil society, businesses and individual citizens.

Continued progress will require addressing key barriers around incentives, skills, and funding for long-term stewardship, not just initial planting. Supporting natural regeneration and adaptive, climate-smart forestry practices is also crucial. The Commission can play an important role by providing robust monitoring frameworks, disseminating knowledge, and strategically deploying public funding to leverage private investment and voluntary action.

By shining a spotlight on successful initiatives and facilitating dialogue between diverse stakeholders, conferences like this can help sustain momentum and accelerate the partnerships needed to reach the ambitious 3 Billion Trees goal. With dedication and cooperation, this initiative can make a vital contribution to the health and resilience of Europe's environment and citizens in the coming decades.