



FOREST RESTORATION POLICY IN FRANCE

POLICY COHERENCE ACROSS FOREST-RELATED POLICY AREAS AND POLITICAL LEVELS



SUPERB
Upscaling Forest Restoration



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Forest policy in Europe operates within a complex, multi-sectoral and multi-level policy framework. To effectively implement and scale up forest restoration efforts—such as those outlined in the EU Nature Restoration Law (EU-NRL)—achieving a certain level of coherence across forest-related policy areas (e.g., nature conservation, climate, agriculture, and rural development) and political levels (EU and national/subnational) is essential.

As part of the EU Horizon 2020 SUPERB project, Task 5.1 of Work Package 5 offers valuable insights into the issue of forest restoration policy coherence. Specifically, it examines coherence at the national level across forest-related policy areas (horizontal coherence) and across national and EU levels (vertical coherence). The analysis of horizontal coherence is based on a survey of national forest policy experts in the relevant countries, while the vertical coherence analysis involves a detailed review of EU forest restoration policies and regulations, as well as national forest regulatory frameworks.

This report briefly outlines the key findings for **France**, where forest restoration is seen as a vital approach to promote climate adaptation and biodiversity protection in forests.



HORIZONTAL FOREST RESTORATION POLICY COHERENCE IN FRANCE

In France, a broad range of sectoral policies of relevance for active and passive forest (biodiversity) restoration practices have been identified in the course of the policy mapping. **The French Forest Code** constitutes the key overarching legal framework for forest management in France. It aims at (i) ensuring the sustainable management of forests and their natural resources, (ii) contributing to the biological balance by considering climatic changes and phenomena, (iii) developing employment qualifications, (iv) strengthening the wood production sector's competitiveness, and (v) satisfying the social demand for forests. To reach those objectives, it stipulates various regulations such as mandatory reforestation of harvested sites within four years after the final cut and regarding the creation of biological reserves in public forest land. At the same time, the non-legally binding **Forest-Wood National Program 2016-2026** (Programme National de la Forêt et du Bois (PNFB; Decree n°2017-15) inter alia aims at increasing resource mobilization in French forests (12 million m³) thereby fostering synergies between forest management and industries through information-based policy instruments.

As regards nature conservation and environmental policy in France, the **Environmental Code** contains most of the acts and decrees related to the environment, such as rules concerning the preservation of natural resources, including forests, the monitoring of hazardous activities, and environmental assessment and public information on projects. Consisting of seven books and divided into two parts (legislative and regulatory), it stipulates regulations for the (non-) management of different types of protected areas (e.g., Article L331-1 – L331-28) and for the introduction and dissemination of exotic invasive species into the natural environment (Article L411-5 to L411-7). The latter issue is further supported by the non-legally binding **Action Plan for the prevention of the introduction and spread of exotic species (2022-2030)** set up by the Ministry of Ecological Transition, which applies information-based instruments to inter alia raise awareness among key land use stakeholders.

Aside from resource mobilization for economic development and environmental objectives in forests, the role of forests and timber products to reach carbon neutrality objectives is highlighted both in the legally binding **Climate and Resilience Law** (Article L121-2), which

entered into force in 2023, and the non-legally binding Low-Carbon National Strategy 2020 (Stratégie Nationale Bas-Carbone - SNBC). By providing predominantly economic incentives (e.g., Low Carbon Label) and informational instruments, policies inter alia aim at promoting timber processing on EU territory to optimize carbon storage benefits and to foster the role of French forests and the forest sector in reaching carbon emission reduction objectives.

Regarding cross-sectoral policy objectives on forests, strong synergies can be identified between forest policies (e.g., **2016 Forest-Wood National Program**) and climate policies (**Low-Carbon National Strategy**). While the first aims at strengthening the economic efficiency of the sector, the latter aims at increasing carbon sequestration and the substitution of alternative construction materials. Both sectors link their sectoral objectives to an increased mobilization of wood resources by providing economic and information-based instruments. In addition, regarding energy production, the multi-year energy programming and the **National Strategy for Biomass Mobilization** highlight the role of woody resources (particularly industrial residues) in sustainable energy production. This links another sectoral objective to an increased mobilization of wood resources. However, despite apparent cross-sectoral synergies, the wood and timber market situation in recent years has led to an increased use of wood and timber for energetic purposes regardless of the quality. This has resulted in trade-offs regarding the purpose of use between wood utilization for (sustainable) energy production and for the sequestration of carbon in long-lasting wooden products. At the same time, it is likely that the increased cross-sectoral competition for wood resources does not go without further implications for nature conservation objectives.

Despite the less pronounced emphasis on forest (biodiversity) restoration in French (land use) policies, national policies are predominantly in line with EU policies. While the proposed **Nature Restoration Law** from the Commission, as well as other EU policies as part of the **European Green Deal** (e.g., Biodiversity Strategy to 2030), list a broad range of measures to restore (forest) ecosystems, public (forest) policies in France almost exclusively promote the reforestation of stands and their adaptation to climate change.

A key political enabler for large-scale restoration in France is the high reactivity of the state regarding the restoration of disturbance-affected areas and the linkage of public subsidies to private insurance schemes. A societal obstacle is seen in the reluctance of some forest landowners to receive recommendations from external stakeholders (e.g., researchers, policymakers, civil society) on how to improve sustainable forest management and restoration practices.

Table 1: Key forest restoration policies and legislation in France.

Name	Entry into force	URL
Climate and Resilience Law (Loi climat et résilience : l'écologie dans nos vies)	2021	https://www.ecologie.gouv.fr/loi-climat-resilience
Action Plan for the prevention of the introduction and spread of exotic species (2022-2030) (Plan d'action	2017	https://www.ecologie.gouv.fr/sites/default/files/20220315_EEE_VDEF.pdf

pour la prévention de l'introduction et de la propagation d'espèces exotiques (2022-2030))		
French Environmental Code (Code de l'environnement français)	2000	https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/codes/texte_lc/LEGITEXT000006074220/
Forest-Wood National Program 2016-2026 (Le programme national de la forêt et du bois 2016-2026)	2017	https://agriculture.gouv.fr/le-programme-national-de-la-foret-et-du-bois-2016-2026
French Forest Code (Code Forestier)	2012	https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/codes/texte_lc/LEGITEXT000025244092/
National Strategy for Biomass Mobilization (Stratégie nationale de mobilisation de la biomasse)	2020	https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/codes/id/LEGISCTA000033053785/2020-08-25

VERTICAL FOREST RESTORATION POLICY COHERENCE

The provisions of the French Forest Code (Nouveau Code Forestier) on forest set-asides comprise several measures to ensure the conservation of forest areas. Article L122-8 mentions the protection of habitats through Natura 2000, while Article L124-1 establishes that forests under different protection regimes, such as national parks, nature reserves, or forests classified for protection, must preserve typical forest types. Article L124-3 reinforces this approach in Natura 2000 sites with approved contracts or management documents, while Article L124-5 limits logging in areas where sustainable management is not guaranteed. Article L141-1 allows the classification of forests as "protection forests" for ecological or public welfare reasons, prohibiting land use changes according to Article L141-2. Article L212-2-1 promotes the identification of areas that can be set-aside as biological reserves to preserve or restore natural heritage, under the authority of responsible ministers and in consultation with local entities. Finally, Article L341-5 authorizes the denial of land clearing permits if it compromises the biological balance, species preservation, or the well-being of the typical and endangered populations.

The provisions of the French Forest Code related to the deadwood management emphasize the management and removal of non-living woody biomass to prevent fire hazards and ensure forest health. Article L121-1 mentions the state's role in maintaining the biological

balance in forests, which can implicitly relate to the enhancement of deadwood stocks to support forest resilience and biodiversity. Article L131-7 requires forest owners to clear slash, branches, and debris (including deadwood) after logging or windthrow to reduce fire risk which could possibly result in a reduction of standing and lying deadwood stocks in forests. In this context, Article L131-10 defines undergrowth clearance as the removal of plant fuels, including deadwood, to prevent the spread and intensity of forest fires.

The provisions of the French Forestry Code that relate to uneven-aged and mixed-species forest management approaches emphasize the importance of species diversification and sustainable forest regeneration. Article L121-1 underscores the state's commitment to fostering forest resilience through species diversification, natural regeneration, and adaptation to climate change, while balancing the age structure of forests to meet timber industry needs. Article L121-6 conditions public aid for forest development on adherence to species diversification thresholds, ensuring long-term forest sustainability. Article L122-2-1 further recommends species diversification for different environments, emphasizing the need to adapt forest management practices to changing climatic. Article L153-1-1 regulates the use of genetically suitable plant material to protect the genetic resources of reforested tree species. Lastly, Articles L341-2 and L342-1 provide exceptions for certain clearing activities, particularly in young or succession and pioneer forests, ensuring that these activities align with broader forest management goals without fundamentally altering the forest structure.

Clearcutting is not generally banned, nor limited, in the French Forest. Obligatory reforestation within a specific time frame and specified restocking levels after clearcuts exists only implicitly in forest management plans. Article L124-6 of the French Forest Code contains the sole legislative reference to clearcuts (*coupes rases*), stipulating that restocking is mandatory within five years if there is no evidence of sustainable management (i.e. if natural forest regrowth is not 'satisfactory'). It also applies in disputes and relies on similar regional thresholds adapted to forest plantations: e.g., for pine (4 ha in forest areas of 10 ha in Gironde, Landes, Lot-et-Garonne, Pyrenees-Atlantiques) or Douglas fir forests (2 ha in forest areas of 1 ha in Morvan).

The Article L341-5 of the French Forestry Code implicitly addresses the protection of forest birds by allowing the refusal of land clearing when it threatens the biological balance of a region, including the preservation of animal species and ecosystems. While the provision does not explicitly mention forest birds, it emphasizes the importance of maintaining habitats critical to the survival of various forest-dwelling species.

KEY FINDINGS

French forest restoration policies and legislation addresses key aspects that could support the implementation of forest restoration activities. However, the strong focus of policy programmes on wood resource mobilization for climate mitigation might pose a barrier to forest restoration efforts. This could hinder progress toward key forest restoration goals outlined in the EU Nature Restoration Law (EU-NRL), such as increasing the share of mixed and uneven-aged forests and enhancing forest connectivity.

RECOMMENDATIONS

For successful implementation and scaling of forest restoration, it will be crucial to leverage synergies across forest-related policy areas while addressing critical trade-offs. This can be achieved, for example, by better harmonizing economic interests with nature conservation goals and requirements.





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