



# FOREST RESTORATION POLICY IN ITALY

## 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 provides a brief overview of the key findings for **Italy**, where forest restoration efforts in urban areas are a top priority on the political agenda.



# HORIZONTAL FOREST RESTORATION POLICY COHERENCE IN ITALY

In the Italian political and economic agenda, the forest sector occupies a marginal role. It is characterized by high institutional fragmentation and centralized decision-making processes dominated by Public Forest Administrations (Secco et al., 2018). Public forest policy in Italy has been closely interconnected with mountain development policy. The Forest Law of 1923 still serves as the fundamental national regulatory framework for the forest sector. Subsequent forest policies are based on multifunctionality criteria, with a particular emphasis on watershed protection, erosion control, and (fuel-)wood production. Command-and-control measures have traditionally been the primary policy instruments and continue to be the dominant approach for policymakers in managing mountain resources.

Following the Royal Decree 3267/1923, approximately 87.1% of the forest area in Italy falls under the hydrogeological constraint, known as 'Vincolo Idrogeologico.' Timber harvesting activities in these areas are subject to a fairly strict system of control. Additionally, the National Act on Landscape Protection (Decree 42/2004 'Codice dei beni culturali e del paesaggio') designates all forests as being under general landscape protection (Article 142), with certain forests listed for their special cultural value and subject to an even stricter system of control (Article 136). Approximately 34% of the forest area in Italy is located within national or regional protected areas. Furthermore, a recent decree (34/2018) has introduced a fourth category of protection for so-called old-growth forests ('foreste vetuste'), where all timber harvesting operations are prohibited. The management of all forests is based on natural regeneration, and the conversion of forest areas to other land uses is forbidden. In special cases, conversion may be allowed through a complex system of authorization, but compensative plantations are required. The policy and legal framework prohibit large-scale clear-cuts in all these forests, effectively imposing the concept of 'continuous forest cover.' Only plantations of fast-growing trees (such as poplar) in plain areas (i.e., forests not subject to the 'Vincolo idrogeologico') can be clear-cut without authorization.

According to official statistics, approximately 95% of the forests in Italy are located in mountainous and hilly areas. The legal prohibition of (large-scale) clearcutting and conversion of forests to other land use systems, restrictions on forest road construction and the utilization of forest tractors, and other stringent regulations are imposed on 92.4% of the forest land (ISFA, 1985).



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

Name	Year of adoption	Entry into force	URL
Law on Forest and mountain areas (1923) (R.D.L. n. 3267/1923, law Serpieri)	1923	1924	<a href="https://www.normattiva.it/uri-res/N2Ls?urn:nir:stato:regio.decreto:1923-12-30;3267">https://www.normattiva.it/uri-res/N2Ls?urn:nir:stato:regio.decreto:1923-12-30;3267</a>
National Act on Landscape Protection (Decree 42/2004 'Codice dei beni culturali e del paesaggio')		2004	<a href="https://www.beniculturali.it/mibac/multimedia/MiBAC/documents/1226395624032_Codice2004.pdf">https://www.beniculturali.it/mibac/multimedia/MiBAC/documents/1226395624032_Codice2004.pdf</a>
National Recovery and Resilience plan – 240M euros for planting 4.4 million trees in 14 metropolitan cities (comes with guidelines for afforestation and minimum requirements of 1 ha and 1000 trees per hectare)	2021		<a href="https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/2021/05/07/21G00070/sg">https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/2021/05/07/21G00070/sg</a>
Strategia Forestale Nazionale (Italian National Forest Strategy)	2021	2022	<a href="https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/2022/02/09/22A00834/sg">https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/2022/02/09/22A00834/sg</a>
Strategia Nazionale per la Biodiversità al 2030 (Italian Biodiversity Strategy)	2023	2023	<a href="https://www.mase.gov.it/sites/default/files/archivio/allegati/biodiversita/2_snb_2030_marzo_23.pdf">https://www.mase.gov.it/sites/default/files/archivio/allegati/biodiversita/2_snb_2030_marzo_23.pdf</a>
National framework law on protected areas 394/1991 (and consequent regional legislation in all regions and autonomous provinces)	1991	1991	<a href="https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/gazzetta/serie_generale/caricaDettaglio?dataPubblicazioneGazzetta=1991-12-13&amp;numeroGazzetta=292">https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/gazzetta/serie_generale/caricaDettaglio?dataPubblicazioneGazzetta=1991-12-13&amp;numeroGazzetta=292</a>

# VERTICAL FOREST RESTORATION POLICY COHERENCE

The provisions of the Italian Forest Law related to the protection of forests (incl. set-asides) include both explicit and implicit measures. Article 7, Section 4, explicitly requires regions to regulate forest management activities in line with conservation measures for habitats and species of European and national interest, applying these to protected areas and sites within the Ecological Network under Directive 92/43/EEC. Article 7, Section 13 also explicitly establishes guidelines for identifying and protecting ancient forests, aiming to create a National Network of Ancient Forests. Article 8, Section 2, explicitly prohibits forest conversions that cause environmental damage. Article 7, Section 5, while not explicitly mentioning the creation of protected areas, implicitly contributes to forest protection by prohibiting clear-cutting and the conversion of high forests, promoting natural regeneration and ecological stability.

The Italian Forest Law includes explicit provisions related to deadwood management, particularly in Article 7, Section 7, which explicitly promotes the retention of standing and lying deadwood as part of the re-naturalization of forests. This provision encourages the presence of deadwood without compromising forest stability, particularly in terms of wildfire resistance. Additionally, Article 13 explicitly calls for the conservation of species dependent on dead woody biomass, mandating regions and autonomous provinces to promote the retention and set-aside of habitat trees.

The Italian Forest Law includes both implicit and explicit provisions related to the promotion of uneven-aged and mixed-species forest management. Article 7, Section 7, explicitly prohibits the replacement of native species with exotic species, promoting the reforestation with and the protection of rare and native species. This may encourage mixed-species forests and supports continuous forest cover management. Article 8, Section 4(b) further provides an explicit focus on reforestation with native species of local and certified origin, aiming to reconnect fragmented forest ecosystems. Lastly, Article 13, Section 3, implicitly supports forest biodiversity by recognizing National Biodiversity Centers, which focus on the conservation of diverse forest species.

The definition of the maximum allowable size of a clearcut area is a key point of consideration for regional authorities in 19 Regional and two Autonomous Provinces. They set regulations to define, sometimes at the provincial level, the minimum rotation age and the maximum size of clearcuts for each forest management type (simple coppice, coppice with standards, composed coppice; even-aged, uneven-aged and irregular high forests, for different species). In general, and exceptional cases, in high forests of light-demanding species in areas without serious soil erosion problems, the maximum allowed size of a clearcut area is 2 ha. However, there are no specific rules at national level on this point.

## KEY FINDINGS

Italian forest legislation and policies place significant emphasis on the importance of forest restoration, recognizing it as a crucial strategy for enhancing ecosystem resilience and promoting biodiversity. These policies highlight the role of restoration in addressing environmental challenges, such as soil erosion in mountainous, climate change and habitat loss, while also supporting sustainable forest management practices

## 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.

# REFERENCES

Secco, L., Paletto, A., Romano, R., Masiero, M., Pettenella, D., Carbone, F., & De Meo, I. (2018). Orchestrating forest policy in Italy: Mission impossible? *Forests*, 9(8), 468.

