

Forest Science for Future: World Congress of Forest Research Starts in Curitiba, Brazil

- *First ever IUFRO World Congress in Latin America places focus on cooperation for sustainable development*
- *2500 experts - one fourth of them students - from over 90 countries meet to share latest findings in all fields related to forests and trees*
- *First plenary session highlights potential of forests, trees and forest products to slow down climate change*
- *Call for better uptake of science by policy and decision makers triggers debate on role of forest scientists in the climate crisis*



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(Curitiba, 30 September 2019) Forests and trees cover about one third of the earth's land surface. But how much land will be covered by trees in 10, 50 or 100 years from now? And, in the face of rapid climate change and a growing world population, will forests and trees become heroes or victims in the longer term. From today until October 5, the global forest science community will share the wealth of their knowledge for the future of our planet at the 25th World Congress of the International Union of Forests Research Organizations (IUFRO) in Curitiba, Brazil.

"Having the first IUFRO World Congress in Latin America is a great opportunity to raise the global visibility of the Latin American forest science community. Almost one third of the participants come from Latin America, mainly from Brazil, and they will present their work at this Congress", said Professor Mike Wingfield, President of IUFRO. "Their research will contribute to providing deeper insights into important and critical issues related to forests and forest products and their sustainability in the region."

"In line with the Congress theme 'Forest Research and Cooperation for Sustainable Development', the event represents a cornerstone in the cooperation of the global IUFRO community with scientists and research institutions in Latin America. IUFRO is grateful to the Brazilian Forest Service and Embrapa Florestas, both important IUFRO member organizations, for organizing and hosting our Congress," Professor Wingfield said.

Worldwide cooperation across disciplines, institutions and sectors is vital when it comes to tackling existential threats such as human-induced global warming. Only last week, the United Nations Climate Change Summit, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report on oceans and the cryosphere, and the massive worldwide youth protests for immediate climate action again voiced an urgency to act. In light of this, the first Congress plenary session¹ brought together scientists and representatives of key stakeholder groups to jointly raise awareness on the potential of forests to mitigate climate change.

Session keynote speaker Dr. Werner Kurz, Senior Research Scientist with the Canadian Forest Service and a lead author of this year's IPCC Special Report on Climate Change and Land noted: "The big contribution of forests in tackling climate change is still not fully recognized. In fact, we cannot achieve climate goals without the contribution of forests. Sustainable forest management and the use

of long-lived wood products can contribute to the efforts of removing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and achieving net zero emission. Efforts to expand, protect and sustainably manage forests are needed to increase carbon sinks, while also supporting biodiversity and people's livelihoods." But Dr. Kurz also warned that "Perhaps the biggest new challenge for the forest management community will be to address the impacts of climate change on forests, and the resulting feedbacks, such as increases in emissions from forest fires."

What is needed is a mix of all forest-related actions informed by an understanding of local conditions, ranging from sustainable forest management and forest conservation to forest landscape restoration and afforestation. But the focus must not be limited to storing carbon in the forest where it can be at risk: the sustainable production and use of wood products to store carbon and replace emission-intensive materials such as concrete or steel are also part of the mitigation portfolio. However, while forests can contribute to increasing sinks, achieving net zero emissions requires significant transformations in all sectors – particularly emission reductions in the energy and transport sectors – and through people's consumer behaviour.

The session triggered an important debate on what forest scientists can actually do to contribute more effectively to abating the climate crisis. This discussion, underpinned by the results of a comprehensive pre-Congress survey², will certainly continue during the entire Congress and beyond.

"As scientists, it is not our role to advocate directly for policy changes. What we can and will do is to share the results of robust research findings, underpinned by peer review, so as to identify risks and provide solutions and sustainable options for the future of the world's forests" said IUFRO President Professor Mike Wingfield. "However, we need to ensure that findings are being taken up by decision makers and the broader public and that the necessary steps will be taken to reduce global crises such as climate change. For this, it is crucial to present the best possible science in an accessible language and to engage with policy makers and political processes. This will allow the world's decision makers to 'unite behind the science and then take real action', as Greta Thunberg has recently demanded," he added.

¹ *Plenary session speakers:*

- Werner KURZ (keynote). Senior Research Scientist at the Canadian Forest Service (Natural Resources Canada) in Victoria, BC.
- Peter SAILE. Senior Advisor Forests to the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), Germany.
- Pablo PACHECO. Global Forest Lead Scientist, WWF Global Science
- Andrea M. VÁSQUEZ FERNÁNDEZ, The University of British Columbia, IUFRO Student Award for Excellence in Forest Science Winner.
- José Carlos DA FONSECA JUNIOR. Executive Director at Brazilian Tree Industry (Ibá), representing the International Council of Forest and Paper Association (ICFPA).
- Thais LINHARES JUVENAL. Senior Forestry Officer, Team Leader Forest Governance and Economics, FAO Forestry Department
- Moderator: Gerald Steindlegger, ISS-Integrated Sustainability Solutions

² *Pre-Congress survey:*

The plenary session built on the outcomes of a global pre-Congress survey in which more than two hundred scientists, students and representatives from governments, the private sector, intergovernmental organizations and NGO participated. A summary of the survey can be downloaded here: : <https://www.iufro.org/fileadmin/material/media/science-meets-stakeholder-survey-results.pdf>

XXV IUFRO World Congress: <http://iufro2019.com/>

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The **International Union of Forest Research Organizations (IUFRO)** is the only worldwide organization devoted to forest research and related sciences. Its members are research institutions, universities, and individual scientists as well as decision-making authorities and other stakeholders with a focus on forests and trees: <https://www.iufro.org/>