
Forests Can Promote Human Health

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There is evidence that forests have positive effects on human health. Walks in the forest enhance the human immune system and can thus, for example, help to fight diseases like cancer. A great diversity of scientific studies and international initiatives are currently focusing on these important findings. In a seminar on Forests and Human Health held on 30 April 2008 in Marrakesh, Morocco, the IUFRO Task Force on Forests and Human Health, ForHealth, together with its partners and other actors in this field, explored possibilities of cooperation between scientists and policy makers working with forest and human health issues.

Forests for fighting cancer and reducing stress

In the scientific seminar presentations, the interdependency of forests and human health was strongly emphasized. The research groups of Dr. Qing Li (Nippon Medical School, Japan) and Prof. Yoshifumi Miyazaki (Chiba University, Japan), for example, produced data on how forest visits can strengthen the human immune system. According to these studies, spending time in the forest increases the activity of natural killer (NK) cells in human beings. Since NK cells can kill tumor cells by releasing anti-cancer proteins, forest visits may have a preventive effect on cancer generation and development. In addition, visiting the forest also has relaxing effects. It significantly reduces the concentration of salivary cortisol, a stress hormone, and lowers the blood pressure and pulse rate.

Conserving forests and biodiversity

Dr. Gladys Norley Ashitey, Deputy Minister of Health, Ghana, particularly stressed the influence of the biodiversity of tropical forests on human health and wellbeing. Consequently, she emphasized the importance of the cooperation between scientific, governmental and private sectors in forest conservation. Stakeholders from the environment, health and nutrition, agriculture, forestry, economic development, culture and education sectors should jointly formulate and



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implement strategies that enhance forest conservation. This will be a necessary step in the promotion of both human health and sustainability of ecosystems and biodiversity.

Promoting partnerships and joint initiatives

At the seminar, Dr. Matti Rousi from the Finnish Forest Research Institute and Deputy Coordinator of the Task Force on Forests and Human Health ForHealth, pointed out that there is a great number of international initiatives on environment and health but very few of them focus particularly on forests. Dr. Rousi suggested to join forces with already established stakeholders, such as COHAB (Co-Operation on Health And Biodiversity), and strengthen the forestry perspective in them. The COHAB Initiative is an international program established to respond to the gaps in awareness and existing policies on issues linking biodiversity with human health and well-being. In his presentation, the Director of COHAB, Mr. Conor Kretsch, met the challenge and outlined the opportunities for partnership between ForHealth and COHAB.

The seminar on Forests and Human Health took place on 30 April 2008 in Marrakesh, Morocco. The seminar was organized by the [IUFRO Task Force on Forests and Human Health](#) in co-operation with the University Cadi Ayyad, SYLVA-WORLD for Development and the Protection of Forests and the Environment, and the IUFRO Secretariat.

*The presentations and posters can be downloaded from the ForHealth webpages:
<http://www.forhealth.fi/pmwiki/pmwiki.php?n=Main.SeminarOnForestsAndHumanHealth>*