



The 125th Anniversary Congress on 18-22 September 2017 in Freiburg, Germany, will offer a wide selection of scientific sessions highlighting innovative research and interdisciplinary research approaches of relevance to forests, and focus on the transfer of scientific knowledge on critical global forest-related challenges to national and international political agendas. In a series of “Congress Spotlight” articles individual sessions shall be showcased to give a foretaste of the richness and scope of research findings that will be presented at the Congress. Keep updated at: <http://iufro2017.com/>

IUFRO 125th Anniversary Congress Spotlight / Division 7 - #49 / August 2017

Citizen scientists around the world take to the woods in an effort to improve the health of forests

The coordinator of a session on citizen science planned for the IUFRO 125th anniversary Congress is aiming high.

He hopes the session will inspire discussion about the merit and potential of a global initiative on invasive forest pest monitoring, with special emphasis and resources for countries with developing economies.

The focus is on invasive species because people are major drivers of their spread. Consumer demand drives globalization and the international trade in ornamental plants, which is a major contributor to the invasive problem.



Involving the public in the scientific process is a primary objective.
(Photo Pixabay)

“There are simply not enough scientists studying invasive forest pests and pathogens, especially in much of the world with developing economies,” said Joseph Hulbert, of the Forestry and Agriculture Biotechnology Institute in Pretoria, South Africa and the session coordinator. “The more observers and forest protectors we have, the better chance we have of detecting a new problem early enough to control it.

Citizen science is a growing phenomenon because it is increasingly recognized as a method to facilitate research at broad scales with relatively low costs and it provides an avenue for outreach and education. Scientists are now designing projects and studies that completely rely on public participation. There are many citizen science projects globally, but there are not many global initiatives, Hulbert noted. He is hopeful the Congress session will change that.

“There is exceptional merit in engaging the public in invasive species monitoring, but citizen science is about more than that,” he said.

“Involving the public in the scientific process is a primary objective. Participating in research teaches us rigor, thoughtfulness, thoroughness, and care. Engaging the public in research can increase scientific literacy, foster critical thinking, inform more decisions, and improve citizenship.

“Everyone has a little bit of scientist in them. It is why we are curious. Citizen science initiatives are opportunities to release that inner scientist,” Hulbert added.

As an example of how citizen science works and its benefits, he points to the Observatree project in the UK where, in 2016 many volunteers surveyed and submitted pest and disease reports. Of 800 reports submitted, 300 turned up priority tree pests and diseases.

Models of citizen science, from the UK, Europe, the US, New Zealand and South Africa will converge and share their experiences and methods of public engagement using the Congress as a showcase.

Many of the presentations will speak of the different audiences they engage and will explain how citizens – adults and children – are provided with basic training enabling them to be effective observers, how they are equipped with the knowledge to collect data, report issues or take action. The title of the session is **“Early detection and monitoring of invasive forest pests and pathogens with citizen science”**.

The September 18-22 Congress in Freiburg will celebrate IUFRO’s 125th anniversary. Founded in 1892 in Eberswalde Germany, IUFRO has grown to unite more than 15,000 scientists (who cooperate in IUFRO on a voluntary basis) in almost 700 member organizations in more than 120 countries.

IUFRO promotes global cooperation in forest-related research and enhances the understanding of the ecological, economic and social aspects of forests and trees. It disseminates scientific knowledge to stakeholders and decision-makers and contributes to forest policy and on-the-ground forest management.

About 2000 scientists from 89 countries are expected to attend the Congress. The Citizen Science session in Freiburg will be one of 172 scientific sessions that will cover a wide array of topics dealing with various aspects of forest research.

See you at the IUFRO 125th Anniversary Congress in Freiburg, Germany!
Look out for [#IUFRO2017](#) on Twitter and [@iufro2017](#) on Facebook!

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. Visit: <http://www.iufro.org/>

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