

PRESS RELEASE

The EU's use of biomass for renewable energy is undermining its nature restoration goals

EP vote on September 13 is opportunity to protect and restore forests in line with EU nature legislation.

Brussels, Sept, 1, 2022 – **Biodiversity and ecosystem function of the EU's forests will be on the table on September 13, when MEPs vote on a [proposal](#) by the Environment Committee that would largely remove forest biomass from the RED III. A vote to adopt the proposed reform would be an important step toward realizing the nature restoration goals set out in the EU's [Biodiversity Strategy](#).**

Burning forest wood and other biomass provides the largest source of energy input that is counted toward the EU's renewable energy targets, though its share on an energy output basis is lower due to the inefficiency of burning wood for energy. Currently, about half the wood harvested in the EU is burned for energy, putting increasing pressure on forest ecosystems. Because almost any wood can be burned, lucrative renewable energy subsidies for biomass have made it profitable to strip all the material out of forests, which is particularly damaging to ecosystems and biodiversity, according to the European Commissions' Joint Research Centre. Partly due to demand for biomass, the amount of industrial logging and clearcutting is increasing in Europe.

"The increasing use of biomass to meet the EU's renewable energy targets has been a disaster for the EU's forests," said Zoltan Kun, a forest ecologist with Wild Europe. "If policymakers are serious about protecting and restoring forests, they'll vote on September 13 to end bioenergy incentives and subsidies that are accelerating forest harvesting."

Logging for biomass is occurring even in the EU's flagship protected zones, the Natura2000 areas that are set aside to be biodiversity reserves. Examples range across the EU including [Estonia](#), where the EU has brought an [infringement action](#) against the government for allowing harvesting in protected areas, to Romania, where ancient beech forests are being logged to make wood pellets that are bagged and sold around Europe. The EU counts most energy from wood-burning, even home heating, toward its renewable energy targets. Unregulated and illegal logging for home heating is expected to increase in light of current increase in fossil fuel costs.

"The Joint Research Centre identified biomass harvesting as a specific threat to biodiversity and ecosystem function, particularly the harvesting of 'coarse woody debris', which includes the majority of logging residues burned for energy. We are increasingly seeing whole trees harvested and burned for energy," said Kun, referring to a [report](#) published earlier this year by the NGO coalition the Forest Defenders Alliance.

The issue of protections for forests from biomass logging has been particularly contentious. Acknowledging that the “sustainability” criteria in the RED II were not adequate to protect certain biodiverse, old growth, and carbon-rich forests from being logged for biomass, the European Commission [proposed](#) reforms that would make wood harvested from such forests ineligible under the RED. This has drawn the attention of the EU biomass and international [wood-pellet industry](#), which is [lobbying](#) intensively against the proposal. A coalition of [NGOs](#) working for reform of the EU’s biomass policies supports the more comprehensive proposal by the Environment Committee, which would eliminate energy from burning most forest wood as counting under the RED.

Forest Defenders is a group of NGOs from all over the world that work on forest protection. The more than 100 NGOs that have endorsed the [petition](#) calling for forest biomass to be taken out of the RED II; and a core group of NGOs that have endorsed the “forest principles,” a prescription for an EU forest policy that would protect biodiversity and climate.

For further information please see

https://forestdefenders.eu/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/Backgrounder_forest-biomass.pdf

Media contact:

Mary S. Booth, PhD | +1-413-404-6324 | mbooth@pfpi.net