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Is wood a sustainable resource?

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Forests cover approximately a third of Europe's land area – 215 million hectares – and have ecological, economic and social functions. Healthy forests are important areas of biodiversity, and they capture and store carbon dioxide (CO₂), which mitigates climate change.

Forests are also recreational areas for all kinds of leisure activities and have long provided important economic resources. In Europe more than three million people are employed in the forest sector and it is estimated to contribute 103 billion Euro to the European economy annually, which is 0.8% of its GDP.

Wood is an important resource for the bioeconomy. There is increasing interest in using it as an alternative to fossil fuels, like coal and oil, and it is also a useful raw material for many traditional and new products, such as furniture, paper and wood-plastic composites (WPC) used in automotive, transportation and building applications.

But environmental groups are worried that expanding the use of wood will increase pressure on forest ecosystems. They have been calling for more forest reserves and sustainable forest management systems.

Sustainable forest management systems aim to preserve the different functions of our forests. They strive for a reasonable economic use of wood, and look for alternative and more efficient ways to use forest resources, while maintaining vital and healthy forests that can also fulfil their other ecological and social functions.

Every year in Europe around 580 million square metres of forest are felled. This is around two thirds of annual wood growth. At these levels, experts say Europe's use of its forest resources is sustainable and with effective management strategies will hopefully remain so.

By Martin Behrens