



## Commonwealth Forestry Conference - Final Communiqué August 18<sup>th</sup>, 2021

The Commonwealth is home to 2.4 billion people, contains 813 million hectares of forests and 394 million hectares of other wooded land, and consists of 54 independent countries. From August 16<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> 2021 420 delegates from 54 countries are attending the 20th Commonwealth Forestry Conference hosted on-line from the University of British Columbia in Vancouver, Canada. Delegates wish to share the following insights from the Conference:

Commonwealth forestry leaders appreciate that forests are increasingly recognized for their contribution to effective and efficient solutions to some of the world's most pressing crises. In this critical year of international meetings of conventions of climate change, and biodiversity, delegates to the Commonwealth Forestry Congress encourage decision-makers to:

**Acknowledge, highlight, and recognize** the critical economic, social and environmental contributions of forest ecosystems to human well-being:

**Understand** that cross-sectoral and landscape-level approaches to forest management are crucial to sustainable development:

**Recognize** the broad array of opportunities and challenges facing different communities within the Commonwealth and worldwide, and the need to meet the needs and aspirations of the full diversity of people with interests in forests; delegates specifically:

1. Encourage the continued adoption of landscape approaches where local populations, especially Indigenous peoples, are fully engaged with decisions about their forests and where balanced approaches to achieving the multiple benefits from forest lands are carefully negotiated;
2. Urge cooperation, reduced duplication of effort and cross-sectoral collaboration between all parties, both governmental and civil society, implicated in decision-making on forests;

**Recalling** that the forestry institutions in Commonwealth countries have considerable professional competence in multi-functional forest management and have existing plans and strategies that need to be considered in designing forest-related initiatives;

The participants in the 20th Commonwealth Forestry Congress emphasize that:

1. **Forestry initiatives are playing an increasing role in efforts in mitigating and adapting to global climate change.** The CFC strongly encourages forest institutions to ensure that initiatives to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and sequester carbon should be undertaken in ways that are consistent with the broader goals of sustainable forest managements.

2. **Forests are a key element in the transition towards circular, bio-based economies.** The CFC welcomes this growing role of forests in meeting global energy and material needs and sees this as providing greater impetus for sustainable forest management.
3. **Fires are increasingly threatening forests and their dependent communities** globally, due to a combination of global climate change, historical forest management, and fire exclusion and suppression. The CFC highlights the need for governments and citizens to prioritize proactive fire management over reactive fire response. The CFC urges governments to embrace the leadership and knowledge of Indigenous and local communities. The CFC also encourages proactive management to help reduce fuel loads, diversify forest structure and composition at the stand and landscape scale, and reintroduce cultural and prescribed fire management, where appropriate, to maintain fire-dependent forest ecosystems.
4. Many countries are actively engaging in **managing forests in partnership with Indigenous peoples and local communities** for tangible and intangible benefits. The CFC strongly encourages Commonwealth countries to pursue these initiatives and to develop inclusive forest governance arrangements that are adapted to local contexts and draw on traditional and local knowledge.
5. Forests are home to 80% of the World's terrestrial biodiversity and we continue to lose biodiversity at an alarming rate. The CFC encourages an **increased consideration of biodiversity conservation as a major objective of sustainable forest management.**
6. The CFC applauds major **global initiatives to restore degraded and deforested landscapes** but recommends that increasing attention is given to ensuring that restoration efforts are adapted to local contexts and are planned with adequate inputs from local communities.
7. The CFC applauds the **increased attention given to urban forestry** and notes the physical and mental health benefits that are provided by urban trees and forests. Delegates note the importance of involving **urban communities as important stakeholders in all initiatives related to sustainable forest management.**
8. The CFC notes with concern that "learning poverty" remains unacceptably high in many Commonwealth countries and that it is expected to increase as a result of the pandemic. The CFC recognizes the **importance of both formal and informal education in forestry,** particularly for younger generations, and this will be hindered if learning poverty is not reduced. These are our future forest managers, and it is crucial that they are well-equipped intellectually to address the many environmental and social challenges that they will face.