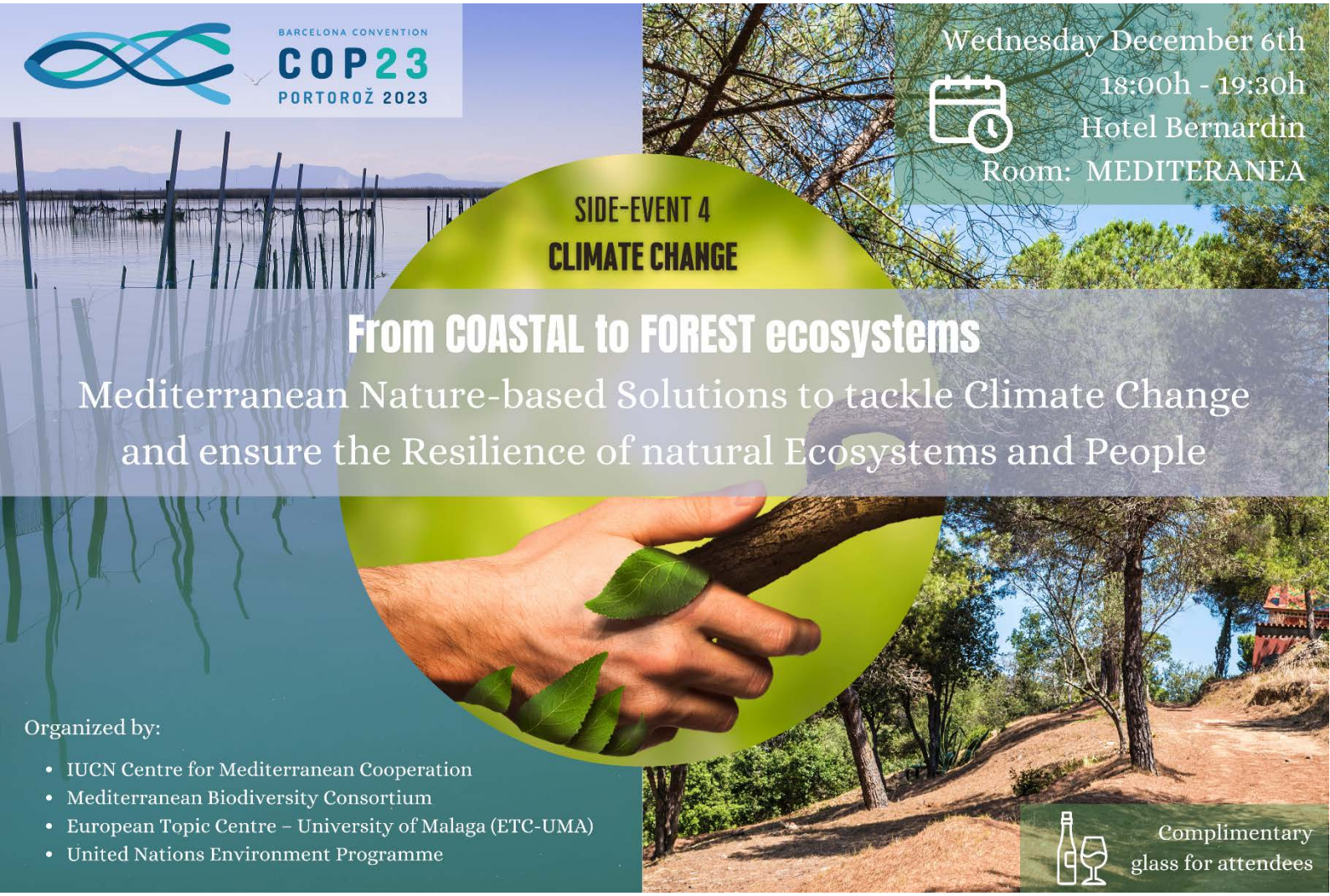
Green transition in the Mediterranean: from decisions into actions

Moving from plans and programmes to concrete actions to ensure a prosperous and sustainable Mediterranean



SESSION REPORT

COP23 SIDE EVENT / CLIMATE CHANGE

Co-organized by IUCN-Med, Mediterranean Biodiversity Consortium, ETC-UMA and UNEP

6 December 2023 – 18:00 to 19:30 hrs

Grand Hotel Bernardin - Room MEDITERANEA I

Portoroz, Slovenia

Proyecto cofinanciado por el Fondo Europeo de Desarrollo Regional (FEDER)
Una manera de hacer Europa

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INTRODUCTION

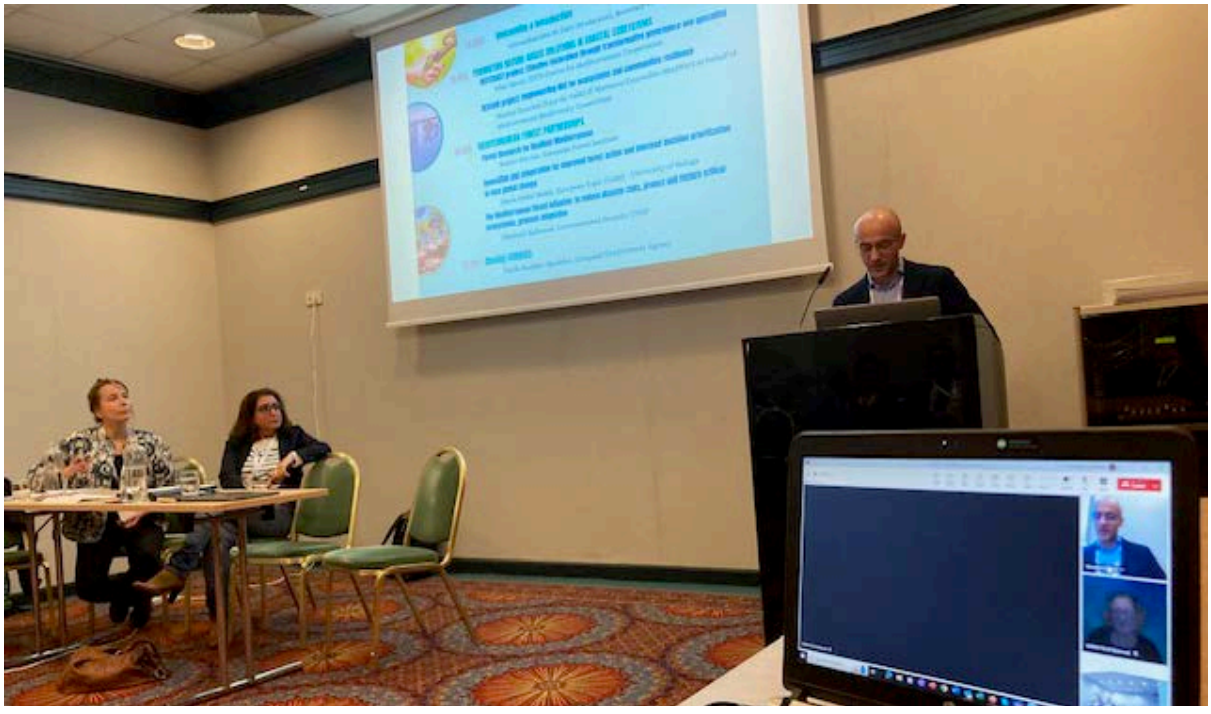
By Giovanbattista de Dato, Secretary of FAO Silva Mediterranea

In the Mediterranean region, exacerbated climate change impacts are posing a fundamental threat to ecosystems and people in more than 20 different countries. However, Mediterranean ecosystems, when in good condition, contribute to crucial services for leveraging socio-ecological resilience at various scales.

Nature-based Solutions (NbS) are actions to protect, sustainably manage, and restore natural and modified ecosystems that address societal challenges effectively and adaptively, simultaneously benefiting people and nature. Improving the knowledgebases on ecosystems and on their condition as well as developing and testing NbS such as **effective protection, restoration, and better management of natural resources** are important tools **to ensure ecosystem services**. Urgent collaborative efforts are required more than ever to halt the rate of ecosystems' degradation associated to increasing global pressures in the Mediterranean Basin.

A stronger focus on implementing and upscaling NbS by all sectors in society to respond to the common need to reduce socio-ecological risks and secure a sustainable future for Mediterranean people and its unique biodiversity was addressed during the session. Nature-based Solutions address societal challenges through the protection, sustainable management and restoration of both natural and modified ecosystems, benefiting both biodiversity and human well-being. Nature-based Solutions are underpinned by benefits that flow from healthy ecosystems. They target major challenges like climate change, disaster risk reduction, food and water security, biodiversity loss and human health, and are critical to sustainable economic development. Ongoing work building the knowledgebase around major ecosystems in the Mediterranean, namely forests and initiatives guiding effective conservation and restoration efforts across ecosystems, from coastal to inland systems in the region, as key to increasing the (eco-)systemic and human resilience of the region facing global change effects were presented.

Transboundary cooperation initiatives across the Mediterranean showcased the present multistakeholder approaches and joint actions in place to better understand the condition of ecosystems and, on this basis, to prioritise conservation work, bearing in mind global and regional commitments together with the challenges of implementation and uptake at several scales. The discussion aimed to help identify enablers to promote effective cooperation in widely implementing regional knowledge and NbS on the ground and across boundaries. Different ways to ease the uptake of such solutions by key stakeholders and institutions to guide priority conservation and restoration actions as a response to combined biodiversity, climate and socio-economic challenges were presented, including financial opportunities in place.



PROMOTING NATURE BASED SOLUTIONS IN COASTAL ECOSYSTEMS

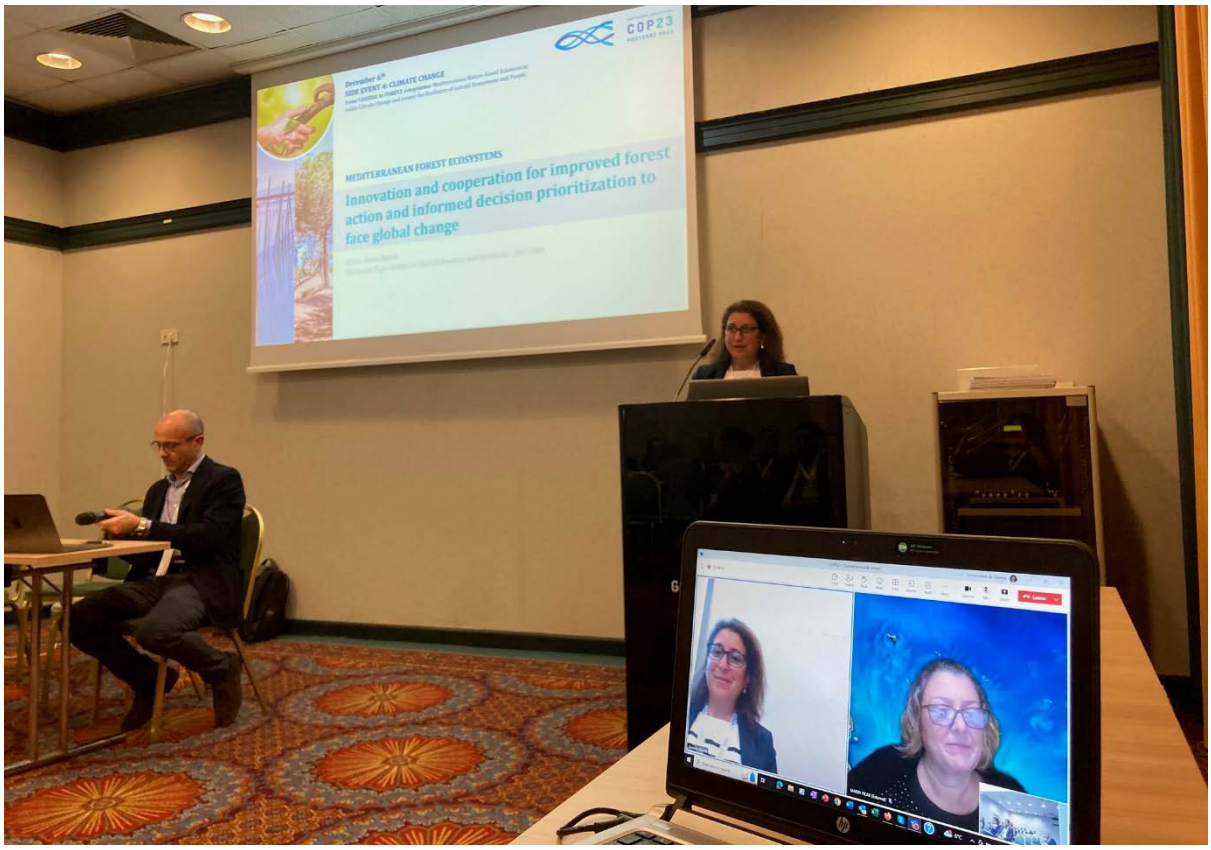
RESTCOAST project: Effective restoration through transformative governance and upscaling

By Pilar Marín, Marine and Coastal Project Officer, IUCN Centre for Mediterranean Cooperation (online)

In the short to medium term, restoration policies are to play a significant role in advancing the Green Transition in the Mediterranean region. This role extends beyond addressing the state of natural resources and degraded areas; it also encompasses the preservation of numerous endangered species. The RESTCOAST project, which is looking at coastal restoration across various basins, offers a wide perspective to overcome existing hurdles and upscale coastal restoration interventions with great emphasis on the integration of Nature-based Solutions (NbS).

The International Union for Conservation of Nature Centre for Mediterranean Cooperation (IUCN-Med) presented its work within the RESTCOAST project, underscoring the importance of effective governance in ensuring the success of restoration activities. The Guidance for using the IUCN Global Standard for Nature-based Solutions together with nine governance criteria promoted through the collaboration with 37 partners present in eleven countries, with a roadmap and concrete recommendations to the nine participating pilot sites, where governance was measured.

Furthermore, bearing in mind the outscaling and upscaling of the project, IUCN-Med will work in synergy with the project with parallel efforts within the framework of the Barcelona Convention and the SAPBIO roadmap 2021-2026. In particular, RESTCOAST's database of coastal restoration projects under development considers around 200 parameters referring to scientific information including habitat types and other, with more than 500 records included to date. This database can complement the ongoing inventory of Mediterranean marine ecosystem restoration projects by SPA RAC. This initiative is also directly related to the POST-2020 SAP BIO Action 12 related to Restoration to support restoration of ecosystems providing key services, and those degraded and expected to become increasingly critical in a changing climate, such as wetlands and shallow seashore habitats among others. It also relates to UNEP/MAP Mid Term Strategy 2022-2027 Outcome 2.1 aiming at improving ecosystem resilience through restoration of those with best regeneration potential.



From COASTAL to FOREST ecosystems: Mediterranean Nature-based Solutions to tackle climate change and ensure the Resilience of natural Ecosystems and People – COP 23 side event – Portoroz, 6 December 2023

Restoration can provide a low carbon footprint solution for climate adaptation and disaster risk reduction in threatened coastal ecosystems, with governance standing out as a pivotal concern in this context. Natural-based Solutions (NbS) play a pivotal role in adapting to the challenges posed by climate change through the delivery of essential ecosystem services. Nowhere is this more critical than in coastal areas, which stand at the forefront of climate change impacts. Recognizing the urgency, the transition from pilot sites to upscaling becomes imperative, emphasizing the need for broader ownership and engagement.

By intertwining restoration efforts with local communities, the importance of sustainable development and the stability of the region come to the forefront. The shift towards restoration goes beyond mere conservation and protection; it entails promoting active restoration practices that enhance ecosystem health and secure resilience. This collaborative approach, where restoration goes hand in hand with people and communities, is fundamental to building a sustainable future in the face of climate challenges.

RESCOM project: Implementing Nature-based Solutions for ecosystems and communities resilience

By Marianne Courouble and Marion Douchin, on behalf of the Mediterranean Biodiversity Consortium (CMB).

RESCOM is the Mediterranean Biodiversity Consortium's first project recently launched, which aims to promote the implementation of nature-based solutions (NbS) for the benefit of local populations, in coastal vulnerable natural areas in the Mediterranean, where we find some of the most fragile ecosystems which are often treated in "silos" (sea, coasts, forests, small islands and wetlands). RESCOM combines capacity building, knowledge-sharing activities, technical assistance and concrete NbS actions on the ground in six pilot sites in the region, to be implemented in concertation with national and local stakeholders over a four-year period.

This innovative project offers a new collaborative, multibiome (different ecosystems) and dynamic approach, through the combination of the knowledge, know-how and networks of the CMB partner organisations (including MedWet, MedPAN, the Initiative for the Small Mediterranean Islands (PIM), the International Association of Mediterranean Forests (IAMF). Tour du Valat, WWF-France and IUCN-Med with the support of the Conservatoire du littoral). The objective is to gain in efficiency in solving the interlinked challenges of

conservation and sustainable development in the Mediterranean and increase the resilience of different ecosystems in an acute climate change context. The project is financed by the French Global Environment Facility (FFEM) and the MAVA Foundation.

Main coordinated actions by RESCOM focus on capacity building and raising awareness, a Think and Do Tank for collaborative thinking to translate at regional level global concepts like NbS into local actions, with the results to be used to launch a call for small projects to reach other Mediterranean sites together with advocacy actions for their integration into public policies at different levels. In parallel, concrete ecological restoration actions are to be tested in 6 pilot sites in Morocco, Tunisia, Montenegro, Albania, Turkey and Italy, to demonstrate the environmental and socio-economic benefits of NbS.

Mediterranean people and economies are more than ever severely impacted by climate change and biodiversity loss. Focusing on implementation of nature-based solutions, among which protected areas, according to this integrative / multi-biome approach should be widely promoted and upscaled at all levels of stakeholders to ensure a sustainable future for the unique natural and human ecosystems of the region currently under threat.

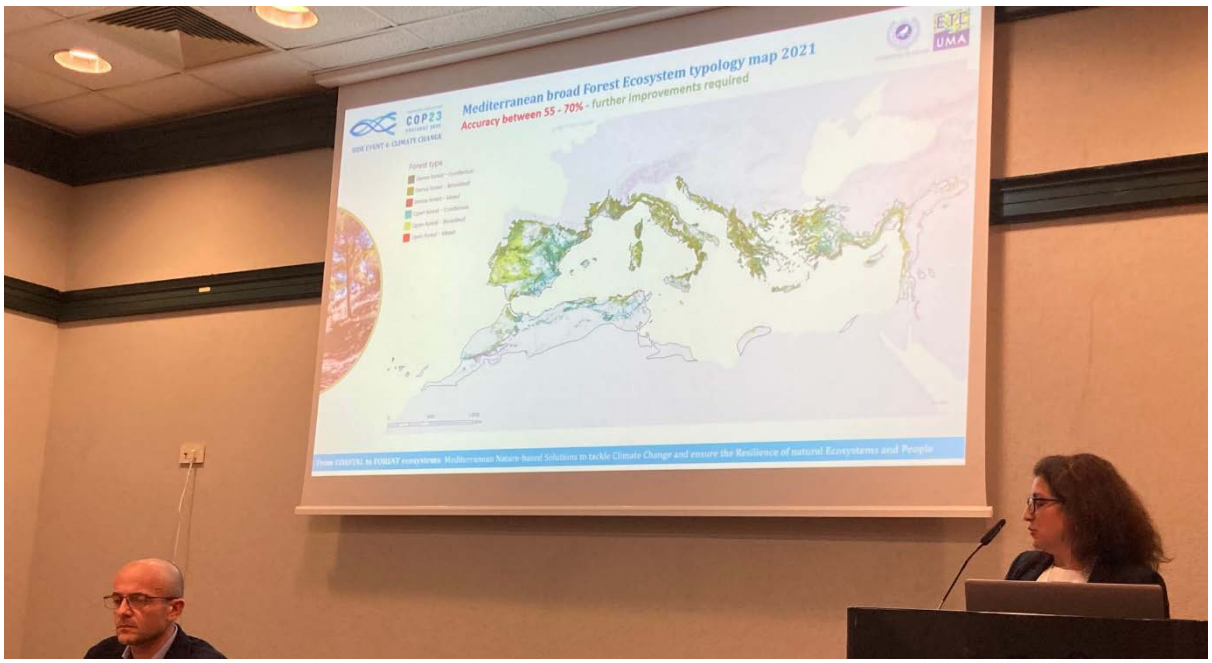
MEDITERRANEAN FORESTS PARTNERSHIPS

Innovation and cooperation for improved forest action and informed decision prioritization to face global change

By Dania Abdul Malak, Director, European Topic Centre on Spatial Analysis and Synthesis – University of Malaga (ETC-UMA)

The first Mediterranean wide forest typology baseline achieved through long lasting cooperation efforts between ETC-UMA, and major EU and Mediterranean institutions, namely EEA, FAO, and EFI Med, was presented. The North-South-East Mediterranean cooperation, the capacity building efforts through forest data hackathons and voluntary data contributions, and the innovative technological solutions associated to the use of remote sensing and artificial intelligence in the last years thanks to funding from the LifeWatch Enbic2Lab project and the European Environment Agency was showcased. The organization of an international workshop held in Malaga in June 2023 provided the opportunity to discuss new forest data and existing gaps in the development of such Mediterranean Forest Typology map, to be addressed in partnership in the coming years.

The development of this Mediterranean Forest knowledge baseline is an initiative that could be uptaken by national and Mediterranean institutions to ensure setting workflow mechanisms across institutions and



From COASTAL to FOREST ecosystems: Mediterranean Nature-based Solutions to tackle climate change and ensure the Resilience of natural Ecosystems and People – COP 23 side event – Portoroz, 6 December 2023

countries and guide priority forest conservation and restoration actions facing biodiversity and climate challenges in the region.

Technological and methodological innovation and cooperation with a multistakeholder approach in forest mapping and their condition assessment can help fill the gaps to effective prioritization of conservation measures in the Mediterranean. Collaboration among scientists, policy makers, forest professionals and other stakeholders including local communities and an open dialogue is crucial to conserve forestry resources and enhance their management so that climate change impacts can be mitigated.

Sharing experiences and transferring both traditional and innovative approaches to forest monitoring, management and restoration in the Mediterranean can provide the best pool of current knowledge and help the urgent transfer of conservation and restoration priorities across the region. As a needed first step, understanding where Mediterranean forests are located and the identification of a standard typology is a necessary milestone towards informing targeted policy and action building on evidence, taking into account in particular the 2024 – 2027 Strategy for the Sustainable Management of Mediterranean Forests adapted to foreseeable climate scenarios. This Mediterranean Forest knowledge base, using Copernicus and satellite images together with local samplings through collaboration among 16 Mediterranean countries, provides the evidence from where to ensure and increase biodiversity and connectivity; where to work for climate and water regulation and socio-ecological resilience based on species distribution; conserve and restore timber and non-timber provisioning benefits; facilitate pollination and the maintenance of particular habitats.

Questions from the audience enquired about the sources of data used to develop the map, in particular Turkey. Participants were informed of the different sources used, ranging from Satellite multispectral data from Sentinel-2 and ASTER Digital elevation model with land use land cover and forest databases from different sources. Furthermore, data on forest typologies were extracted from many sources including the European Vegetation Archives (EVA), data shared from various researchers, ministries, and country national agencies. The information collected was then completed with samples provided by the participants in a forest data Hackathon in 2022 and 2023 led by ETC-UMA and the overall result was subjected to machine learning parameters to run the model and obtain a proof of concept. The methodology used for this Mediterranean Forest Typology map can be consulted here.

The collaborative work developed to date, led by ETC-UMA, will be further developed, validated and used to guide forest conservation actions around the Mediterranean basin through the newly approved EUROMED project StrategyMedFor for the upcoming three years.

The Mediterranean Forest Initiative: to reduce disaster risks, protect and restore critical ecosystems, promote adaptation

By Elizabeth Sellwood, Senior Programme Manager, Environmental Security United Nations Environment Programme, UNEP

Still under a co-creation process, this initiative responds to the increasing pressures on forests, as proved by the intensity and amount of forest fires with the consequent loss of biodiversity, human lives and green infrastructure in service for natural risks prevention including floodings. It advocates for an enhanced management of forest ecosystems, more investment in fire prevention and management to restore these threatened habitats. The initiative builds on existing, strong regional political commitments and scientific consensus in support of regional action to address transboundary climate risks and restore ecosystems for enhanced resilience.

The Mediterranean Forest Initiative (MFI) builds on longstanding environmental and scientific networks in the Mediterranean, including but not limited to the UNEP-Mediterranean Action Plan system and Silva Mediterranean which provide established platforms for cooperation. MFI means to draw on UNEP's and partners' experience of ecosystems restoration, climate adaptation and biodiversity conservation in the region – including work on Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM) in the Mediterranean and UNEP's portfolio in the Western Balkans.

UNEP's partnership with the EU on climate, environment, peace and security, now in its second phase, provides a solid basis for advancing environmental peacebuilding in the region. The UN Decade on Restoration offers a very good opportunity to restore this previous ecosystem. For this, partnerships are critical, and so several UN entities like the UN Environment Programme, Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR) are working with national governments, researchers and other organizations to scale up actions across the region. The Mediterranean Forest Initiative is being designed with the above points in mind, considering:

(1) The critical role of forest ecosystems in climate mitigation and adaptation,

(2) Threats posed to Mediterranean forests by climate change and land use change,

(3) Opportunities to protect the environment and deliver sustainable development objectives in the Mediterranean through transboundary adaptation collaboration and sharing of regional best practices, including traditional knowledge and advanced technologies, and

(4) Opportunities for trust-building in the Mediterranean region.

The MFI offers a platform and an integrated approach to forest management and seeks to address land use changes and the impacts of climate change by promoting the conservation and sustainable management of

forests, the restoration of degraded forest landscapes as well as wildfire prevention in the Mediterranean, facilitating capacity building and knowledge transfer across the region. A consultation process to answer the needs of the countries to co-design a process leading to scale up will be implemented during the first months of 2024.

KEY TAKE AWAY MESSAGES

By Cécile Roddier-Quefelec, Lead expert Ocean Governance, Mediterranean Regional Cooperation, European Environment Agency (EEA).

The main conclusions at the end of the session were summarised as follows:

- Collaborative governance mechanisms are more effective for restoration, which needs of different competencies to gather multiple stakeholders and elements in a “eco-complex” region.

- A holistic and overall vision of Mediterranean ecosystems, where the connections between marine, coastal and terrestrial realms are considered, is crucial to achieve effective conservation / restoration and a reduction of the pressures that cause their degradation and increase the vulnerability of the people in need of these ecosystems’ services and goods to survive.

- Nature-based Solutions can be scaled up through various mechanisms, including international and Mediterranean Conventions, and should be done both through pilot actions as well as transferring mechanisms.

- Innovative tools and processes can enhance the production of knowledge bases to support policy, and taking them to regulatory processes, contributing to the science for policy approach.

- Sharing experiences and platforms can sustain complementarity and minimize duplication of efforts, assisting in the transfer of knowledge between data rich areas in the North towards the South with a ONEMED vision.

- Innovation at technology and methodological levels can help fill the existing gaps and address at the same time governance challenges with a multidisciplinary approach for the benefit of a more socioecologically resilient Mediterranean.

The meeting was closed with a hint on coming meaningful events and initiatives where these messages could be addressed and brought to further collaborative action, such as the Mediterranean Forest Week to take place in Barcelona, Spain in October 2024, the coming RESTCOAST and WaterLANDs joint meeting in the Netherlands in April 2024, the new EU legal context provided by the new Forest Strategy for 2030 and the Nature Restoration Law extended to the South and East Mediterranean through specific programmes and funding to be available, in addition to current processes underway by the Barcelona Convention.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ADDITIONAL MATERIALS

Agenda – Portoroz, 6 December 2023

Joint Presentation

From COASTAL to FOREST ecosystems:
Mediterranean Nature-based Solutions to tackle climate change and ensure the Resilience of natural Ecosystems and People

From COASTAL to FOREST ecosystems: Mediterranean Nature-based Solutions to tackle climate change and ensure the Resilience of natural Ecosystems and People – COP 23 side event – Portoroz, 6 December 2023

Summary session methodology

As UNEP MAP partner organization, ETC-UMA submitted a proposal for the organization of a COP23 side-event focusing on Mediterranean Forests, as follow up to the international workshop held in Malaga on 2 June 2023 in the frame of the ERDF funded project EnBiC2-Lab o develop an Environmental and Biodiversity Climate Change Lab through the integration of databases and services related to water, soil, air, fauna and flora. UNEP MAP accepted this proposal as part of a wider session with other Mediterranean institutions under the topic of climate change, and the title: From COASTAL to FOREST ecosystems: Mediterranean Nature-based Solutions to tackle climate change and ensure the Resilience of natural Ecosystems and People.

The joint event was held on 6 December 2023 at the COP23 venue in person in Room MEDITERANEA I at the Hotel Grand Bernardin in Portoroz, Slovenia, co-organized with other regional organizations, in particular IUCN-MED, MedWet and Tour du Valat as representatives of the Mediterranean Biodiversity Consortium, UNEP, FAO Silva Mediterranea as invited moderator, and the European Environment Agency as invited speaker for the conclusions. The European Forest Institute was due to participate but could not be present finally. From ETC-UMA, the event was financially supported through the Enbic2Lab project to showcase the work on forests, and by MedWet for the catering offered.

The session, delayed due to the late ending of the previous COP plenary session, was introduced by the moderator (Giovanbattista de Dato/FAO Silva Mediterranea), who briefly presented speakers following a series of preliminary preparatory meetings held online among the co-organizers of this side-event.

Speakers were requested to provide their presentation in advance to ETC-UMA (lead contact towards the COP23 organizers) - 4/5 slides. To compensate for potential delays, speakers were asked to prepare for a 10/12 min. intervention, though 15 min. per speaker was allocated in the public agenda.

A template ppt helped to integrate all ppts in one and facilitate transitions and the work of the moderator, avoiding unnecessary use of time in locating ppts as the session was designed to last 1 hour and 30 minutes.

Time-keeping was supported by one of the co-organizers to ensure a smooth running of the session and a balanced distribution of time available among speaking delegates.

The COP23 organizers provided IT support for remote connection and projector's display. The IUCN-Med speaker participated online with the remaining speakers attending the event in person. A trial session was held prior to the meeting.

A brief report with key messages and recommendations was agreed to be drafted by ETC-UMA for dissemination after the meeting by the side event co-organizers.

This report was prepared by ETC-UMA with the kind support of the speakers and other colleagues from the co-leading organizations the IUCN Centre for Mediterranean Cooperation; the Mediterranean Biodiversity Consortium represented by MedWet and Tour du Valat; and the United Nations Environment Programme, and collaborators from FAO Silva Mediterranea and the European Environment Agency in the preparation of the methodology, the moderation and holding of the side-event and follow-up actions.

A big thank you goes to the Coordinating Unit for the Mediterranean Action Plan of the United Nations Environment Programme Secretariat team for supporting the logistics for a successful implementation prior and during the event.

Photos by Sonsoles San Roman / ETC-UMA.