SPOTLIGHT

IUFRO Spotlight is an initiative of the International Union of Forest Research Organizations. Its aim is to introduce, in a timely fashion, significant findings in forest research from IUFRO officeholders and member organizations to a worldwide network of decision makers, policy makers and researchers.

IUFRO will encapsulate, and distribute in plain language, brief, topical and policy-relevant highlights of those findings, along with information on where/how to access the full documents. The ***IUFRO Spotlight*** findings will be distributed in a periodic series of emails as well as blog postings.

Forests: Medicine for Body and Soul

By Hannu Raitio, Coordinator of IUFRO Task Force ForHealth
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Imagine a doctor who, rather than advising the usual: "Take these pills daily for the next two weeks," says instead: "Take long walks in the forest daily for the next two weeks. That should get you back to normal."



Okay, that's a bit fanciful. But, it may not be too big a stretch.

There is a growing body of scientific research that suggests forests and other natural, green settings can reduce stress, improve moods, curtail aggressiveness and – possibly – even strengthen our immune systems.

Medical and health care costs are a skyrocketing financial burden in many, if not all, countries around the world – often funded through taxation or other common responsibility arrangements.

Policy makers are increasingly looking at prevention as a cost-effective alternative to medical treatment. Anything that has the potential to reduce those costs – including long walks in the forest – deserves a long, hard look.

For example, numerous studies have shown that people recover faster and better after stressful situations in natural, green environments. Blood pressure, heart rate, muscle tension and the level of stress hormones are reduced in green environments and ADHD symptoms in children are similarly reduced when they play in green settings.

Now, in a 2011 publication: ***Forests, Trees and Human Health,*** 160 scientists from 24 European countries, with contributors from Asia, Australia, Canada and the United States have delved deeply into the question of whether forests and forest management help in the promotion of healthier lifestyles and improved mental health.

The publication's focus is primarily on health priorities defined within Europe, however it also draws on research from North America and elsewhere and has worldwide relevance.

While continued research is needed to further our knowledge in this area, it seems clear right now that anyone involved in making policy decisions in the medical, social, natural resources, forests or urban land-use planning areas cannot afford to ignore the relationship between a green environment and human health.

For more information about ***Forests, Trees and Human Health,*** please go to:
http://www.springer.com/life+sciences/forestry/book/978-90-481-9805-4

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Suggestions for reports and findings that could be promoted through IUFRO Spotlight are encouraged. Please send them to: Gerda Wolfrum, wolfrum(at)iufro.org. To be considered, reports should be fresh, have policy implications and be applicable to more than one country.

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.
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