



The 125th Anniversary Congress on 18-22 September 2017 in Freiburg, Germany, will offer a wide selection of scientific sessions highlighting innovative research and interdisciplinary research approaches of relevance to forests, and focus on the transfer of scientific knowledge on critical global forest-related challenges to national and international political agendas. In a series of “Congress Spotlight” articles individual sessions shall be showcased to give a foretaste of the richness and scope of research findings that will be presented at the Congress. Keep updated at: <http://iufro2017.com/>

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Environment vs. economy: Mapping the forest environmental frontier

To some, the forests mean combatting illegal logging and associated trade, avoiding deforestation and degradation, conserving biodiversity and protecting wilderness.

To others, the forests mean timber as a renewable raw material for uses such as construction and bioenergy, forest-based climate change adaptation and mitigation and transitioning toward a forest-based bioeconomy.

“These issues can be termed the global forest environmental frontier,” said Dr. Georg Winkel, Head of the European Forest Institute’s Resilience Research Programme in Bonn, Germany.

“All the issues are interrelated and relate to a global controversy that asks how we can keep and manage the world’s forests to satisfy both ecological and socio-economic needs now and in the future,” he said.



Photo by Geoff Roberts, Australia

Dr. Winkel is coordinator of a session entitled ***The Global Forest Environmental Frontier – What has changed, what has remained unchanged, how will the future look?*** at the IUFRO 125th Anniversary Congress in Freiburg, Germany in September.

Forests mean many different things to many different people and are managed for many, often conflicting, societal needs and claims, he said.

“At the core, however, the questions are: what role do forests play as a natural resource? What are the current and future prospects? And how has the environmental debate relating to forests and forestry evolved in the last decades and in different regions of the world?”

“It’s a debate that involves different scientific disciplines, policy sectors, political-administrative settings, societal groups and economic players in a variety of regional settings,” he said.

In terms of discourse analysis, delineating the frontier has, in his opinion, become more complex since the 1980s when, in several forest regions across the planet, to talk about the frontier would have meant talking about open conflict between the forest sector and environmental groups.

While this has not entirely gone away, Dr. Winkel said the debate today is much more multi-faceted and much less 'black and white'.

"Take the issue of the forest-based bioeconomy. Many see this as part of a solution for critical environmental problems such as climate change mitigation," he said. "At the same time, the bioeconomy is still about harvesting wood that can have significant trade-offs with ecological aspects, as an example, biodiversity conservation."

Elaborating on this evolution of the frontier, its shifting boundaries and finding common denominators for the changes, will be at the heart of his Congress session.

While he finds it difficult to have a clear vision of what, in terms of the frontier, will transpire in the future, he sees at least three possible scenarios.

"These are only possible options," he cautions. "They're not built on any substantial data; simply looking at current debates and developments. They're just three possible ways of thinking about what might happen."

- The frontier built upon fundamentally different human values and interests towards forests will persist, but the topics and venues will change over the years. This, he went on to say, is what we've seen over the last decades;
- The frontier will disperse and get permeable as socio-economic interests and environmental beliefs become less and less divisible. This, he said, refers to the necessity to integrate environmental values in sustainable business development. For instance, a forest bioeconomy needs to be sustainable and must have a social license to operate. There could be increasing pressure to demonstrably integrate environmental values in forest products and ecosystem services value chains and thus be seen as a sustainable business as the economy transforms away from non-renewable resources.
- The frontier will fade away because either the environmental beliefs will vanish or, through technological change, the necessity to use forest biomass will decrease. This scenario is the 'wild card' option. "It's really hypothetical," Dr. Winkel said. "Societal values always change. No one can really know how these values will develop in the future. As for the possibility of technological change, again it's totally hypothetical and assumes a major unforeseeable change that shifts demand – something like coal replacing wood as an energy source in the 18th-19th centuries.

"It will be quite interesting," he concludes, "to see how our presenters evaluate the future of the frontier at the Congress in Freiburg."

The September 18-22 Congress in Freiburg will celebrate IUFRO's 125th anniversary. Founded in 1892 in Eberswalde Germany, IUFRO has grown to unite more than 15,000 scientists (who cooperate in IUFRO on a voluntary basis) in almost 700 member organizations in more than 120 countries.

IUFRO promotes global cooperation in forest-related research and enhances the understanding of the ecological, economic and social aspects of forests and trees. It disseminates scientific knowledge to stakeholders and decision-makers and contributes to forest policy and on-the-ground forest management.

About 2000 scientists from 89 countries are expected to attend the Congress.

The Forest Environmental Frontier session in Freiburg will be one of 172 that will cover a wide array of topics dealing with various aspects of forest research.

See you at the IUFRO 125th Anniversary Congress in Freiburg, Germany!
Look out for [#IUFRO2017](#) on Twitter and [@iufro2017](#) on Facebook!

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. Visit: <http://www.iufro.org/>

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