



Background

Forests and other wooded lands subject to the Mediterranean climate (whose main characteristics are hot, dry summers and wet winters) cover respectively **25 and 50 million hectares in 25 countries of the Mediterranean basin**¹. For convenience, they can be grouped under the term "**Mediterranean forests**".

Vegetation can take various forms: shrubby scrublands with kermes oak, scrub, holm oak, cork oak or downy oak groves, pine forests with Aleppo pine, cedar forests, among others. These types of forests are also present in other countries of the world: Australia, Chile, the United States or Mexico.

The biodiversity of the Mediterranean basin has **exceptional ecological characteristics**. In the case of tree and bush species, for example, the Mediterranean region, which accounts for no more than 1.8% of the world's forested area, is home to **290 forest species** compared with only 135 in the rest of Europe. There are also many endemic species (plants and animals existing only in one geographical area)². These forests are considered **one of the world's biodiversity hot spots**.

These forests have always been the setting for numerous human activities (exploitation of wood and cork, various types of gathering, clearing, hunting, grazing, walking, etc.).

There is very little separation between the economic living space and the natural environment: the dynamics of Mediterranean forests have always been closely linked to the organization of the societies surrounding them.



Mediterranean forests constitute a set of ecosystems with a **fragile balance**. The issues at stake are numerous, depending on the case: economically viable production of wood, cork and other non-wood forest products, prevention of flooding and erosion, protection against desertification, fire risk, carbon storage, preservation and enhancement of biodiversity, mitigation of the effects of climate change, living environment, recreational function, etc.

Mediterranean forests are the subject of **many, sometimes contradictory, expectations** on the part of different social and professional groups: forest owners, stockbreeders, farmers, environmental associations, local elected officials, town planners, managers of natural areas, the general public, etc.



Multiple **human-induced pressures** are undermining the state of biodiversity, including land degradation, fragmentation of natural environments, intensification of agricultural practices, proliferation of invasive alien species, pollution, unsustainable tourism, overexploitation of resources and climate change. These major pressures on biodiversity lead to the destruction of natural environments and consequently of the species that live in them.

¹ Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and Plan Bleu, "*State of Mediterranean Forests*", 2018.

² The Mediterranean Experts Network on Climate and Environmental Change (MedECC), "*Climate and environmental change risks in the Mediterranean region: a preliminary assessment*", 10 October 2019

The effects of climate change are being felt in France through **more intense extreme weather events** (floods, forest fires, heat waves, drought, etc.) and impacts on human health. The high temperatures of the summer of 2019 combined with an exceptional rainfall deficit are an illustration of this.

In the Mediterranean region, average annual temperatures are today about 1.5°C above the pre-industrial revolution (1880-1899) average and higher than global warming trends (+1.1°C). Without additional mitigation actions, **temperature will rise by 2.2°C in the Mediterranean region by 2040** (compared to the pre-industrial period), or even by 3.8°C in some areas by 2100³.

Forests contribute to the fight against global warming by representing a "**net sink**" of carbon with **130 million tons of CO2 equivalent absorbed per year**, i.e. a quarter of France's annual emissions. They also provide other important services to society: absorption and filtering of pollutants, role in the availability of water, protection of goods and people against natural hazards (avalanche, landslide, flooding, coastal erosion)⁴.

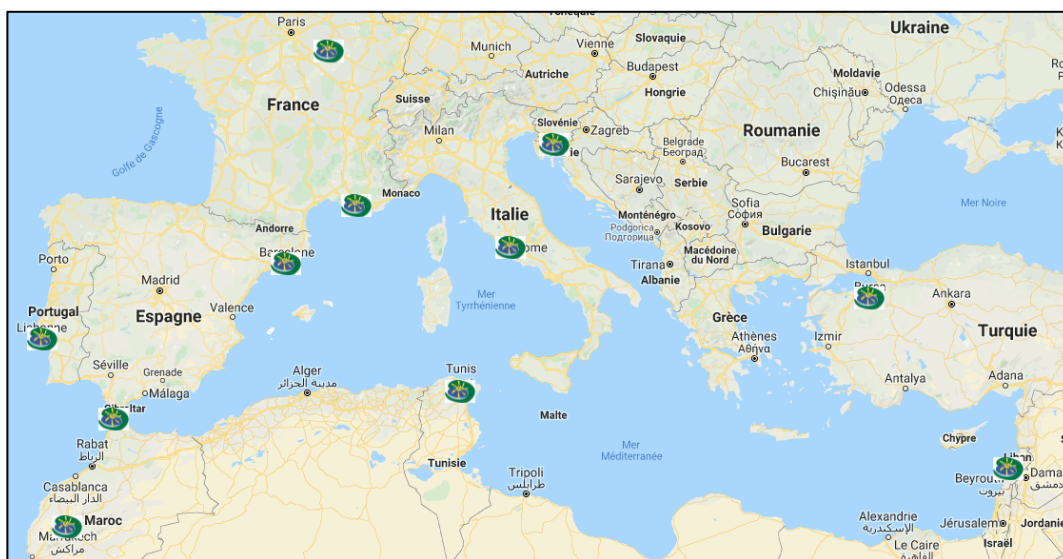
AIFM



In this context, the **International Association for Mediterranean Forests (AIFM)**, created in 1996, aims to facilitate the **exchange of knowledge and experience** relating to these forests and other wooded lands, in a transversal and multidisciplinary manner, at the international level. To this end, AIFM works, among other things, to develop and implement **cooperation programs**.

The aim of these exchanges is to help raise and solve the problems encountered in management and use of these Mediterranean forest areas through joint reflection in order to make the most of them. AIFM advocates that the **specific challenges facing Mediterranean forests be better taken into account in the policies** and actions of international, national and local institutions, as well as those of individuals, in the fields of the **environment, sustainable development and land use planning**.

AIFM has an established network in various fields (foresters, academics, environmentalists, elected officials, civil security, etc.), guaranteeing a diversity of approaches. The association **has 13 administrators established in 9 Mediterranean countries**.



It is partly the result of cooperation projects carried out since the 2000s: Problematic (1999-2001), RECOFORM (2003-2006), Qualigouv (2009-2012), Forclimadapt (2010-2013), Proforbiomed (2011-2014), Medland 2020 (2013-2014), MEDFORVAL (2015-2018) and INHERIT (2018-2022).

AIFM is also co-organizer of the **Mediterranean Forest Weeks**, held respectively in Antalya (Turkey, 2010), Avignon (France, 2011), Tlemcen (Algeria, 2013), Barcelona (Spain, 2015), Agadir (Morocco, 2017) and Broumana (Lebanon, 2019). The next one will take place in 2021 in Sousse (Tunisia).

³ The Mediterranean Experts Network on Climate and Environmental Change (MedECC), "*Climate and environmental change risks in the Mediterranean region: a preliminary assessment*", 10 October 2019

⁴ French Ministry of Ecological and Solidarity Transition, "*The environment in France: synthesis report* ", 2019 edition.



Mediterranean Forests and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

Identified by the United Nations General Assembly, **two SDGs directly target forests**:

- 🌐 **No. 15** "Conserve and restore terrestrial ecosystems, ensuring their sustainable use, manage forests sustainably, combat desertification, halt and reverse land degradation and halt the loss of biodiversity", through the promotion of **sustainable management** of all types of forests (halting deforestation, restoring degraded forests, (b) Enhancing sustainable forest management (e.g., increasing afforestation and reforestation), through the **conservation, restoration** and **sustainable use** of ecosystems and related services, and mobilizing significant resources from all sources and at all levels to finance sustainable forest management and encouraging developing countries to give priority to sustainable forest management, including for forest conservation and **reforestation**.
- 🌐 **No. 6** "Ensuring access to sustainably managed water and sanitation services for all" through the protection and restoration of water-related ecosystems, including forests.

In addition to the SDGs where it is clearly mentioned, the **forest also plays a role in the achievement of the other SDGs** because of the intrinsic links between the different themes, but above all because of the many services it provides to society:

- No. 1 "Eradicate poverty in all its forms and throughout the world";
- No. 2 "Eradicate hunger, ensure food security, improve nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture";
- No. 3 "Enable all people to live in good health and promote the well-being of all people at all ages";
- No. 5 "Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls";
- No. 7 "Ensuring access to reliable, sustainable and modern energy services for all at an affordable cost";
- No. 8 "Promote sustained, shared and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all";
- No. 11 "Ensuring that cities and human settlements are inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable";
- And No. 13 "Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts".

Mediterranean forests not only benefit local communities, but also contribute to the general well-being of the world's population. The United Nations "**Report on Sustainable Development Goals 2018**" states that:

- Land degradation threatens the livelihoods of more than one billion people;
- The Earth's forested areas continue to shrink, from 4.1 billion hectares in 2000 to nearly 4 billion hectares in 2015. Thus, the rate of deforestation has been reduced by 25% since 2000-2005;
- The global Red List Index of Threatened Species is 0.74, indicating an alarming trend of **decline in mammals, birds, amphibians, corals and cycads**. Factors contributing to this decline are habitat loss due to unsustainable agricultural practices, deforestation, unsustainable cultivation and trade, and invasive alien species.



Faced with these figures, it is becoming essential to act for the protection, sustainable management and the restoration of forests and wooded areas, particularly Mediterranean ones.

AIFM is a founding member of the **Collaborative Partnership on Mediterranean Forests (CPMF)**, which brings together some twenty institutions concerned with coordinating their actions in favor of sustainable management of Mediterranean forests and for which the FAO Committee on Mediterranean Forestry Issues "*Silva Mediterranea*" provides the secretariat. AIFM represents civil society among its institutional and research partners. In this capacity, AIFM participated in the drafting of the **State of Mediterranean Forests** and in the preparation of a **Strategic Framework for Mediterranean Forests**. This framework, which takes into account the various issues related to the development of Mediterranean forests along nine strategic axes, was developed in a participatory manner through several workshops and adopted in Tlemcen by the ministers participating in the High-Level Segment of the III Mediterranean Forest Week.



The **Interreg MED INHERIT** project aims at identifying, analyzing and testing measures and policies for the **protection of the natural heritage in the Mediterranean coastal regions** in order to cope with mass tourism **by promoting ecotourism**. The methodology established strengthens transnational coherence and cooperation, the healthy development of under-exploited natural or cultural assets and the harmonization of tourism and natural heritage protection policies. In particular, this project will enable the design and creation of "*INHERITURA*" areas and the establishment of multi-destination sustainable tourism itineraries between them.

The **Consortium of Biodiversity Organizations in the Mediterranean Basin**: the creation of a strategic alliance between Mediterranean partners.

Six organizations dedicated to the protection of nature in its different biomes (coastal and marine areas, islands, wetlands, forests and other wooded lands...) working at the Mediterranean scale have come together to provide a **common platform** for donors to implement **conservation actions** with a greater impact in the region.

It will enable the visibility and impact of projects to be improved at local, national and Mediterranean levels, in order to better meet the **challenges of biodiversity protection**.



Mediterranean forests were represented at the 14th **World Forestry Congress** held in Durban, South Africa in September 2015. AIFM was in charge of organizing a stand at this event, which gave Mediterranean foresters a voice and presented the actions underway. AIFM hopes to be able to implement such action again at the 15th World Forestry Congress in South Korea in 2021.



Mediterranean forests will also be represented at the **World Conservation Congress of the International Union for Conservation of Nature** on the theme "*Nature, our future*" in June 2020 in Marseille (France).