CULTIVATING CHANGE: 20 YEARS OF ACTION FOR ROMANIA'S FORESTS

WWF | 20 ANI ÎN ROMÂNIA



HOW RESPONSIBLE MANAGEMENT, POLICY, PROTECTION AND COLLABORATION ARE TRANSFORMING ROMANIA'S FORESTS AND GOVERNANCE



FORESTS TAKE TIME.
SO DOES LASTING CHANGE

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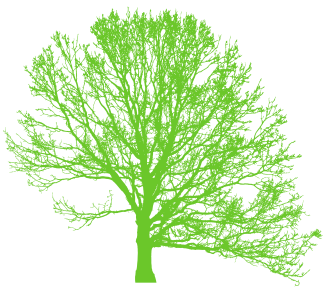
*This is a story of people, science, persistence, and partnerships for nature that go beyond projects and fragmented funding cycles.

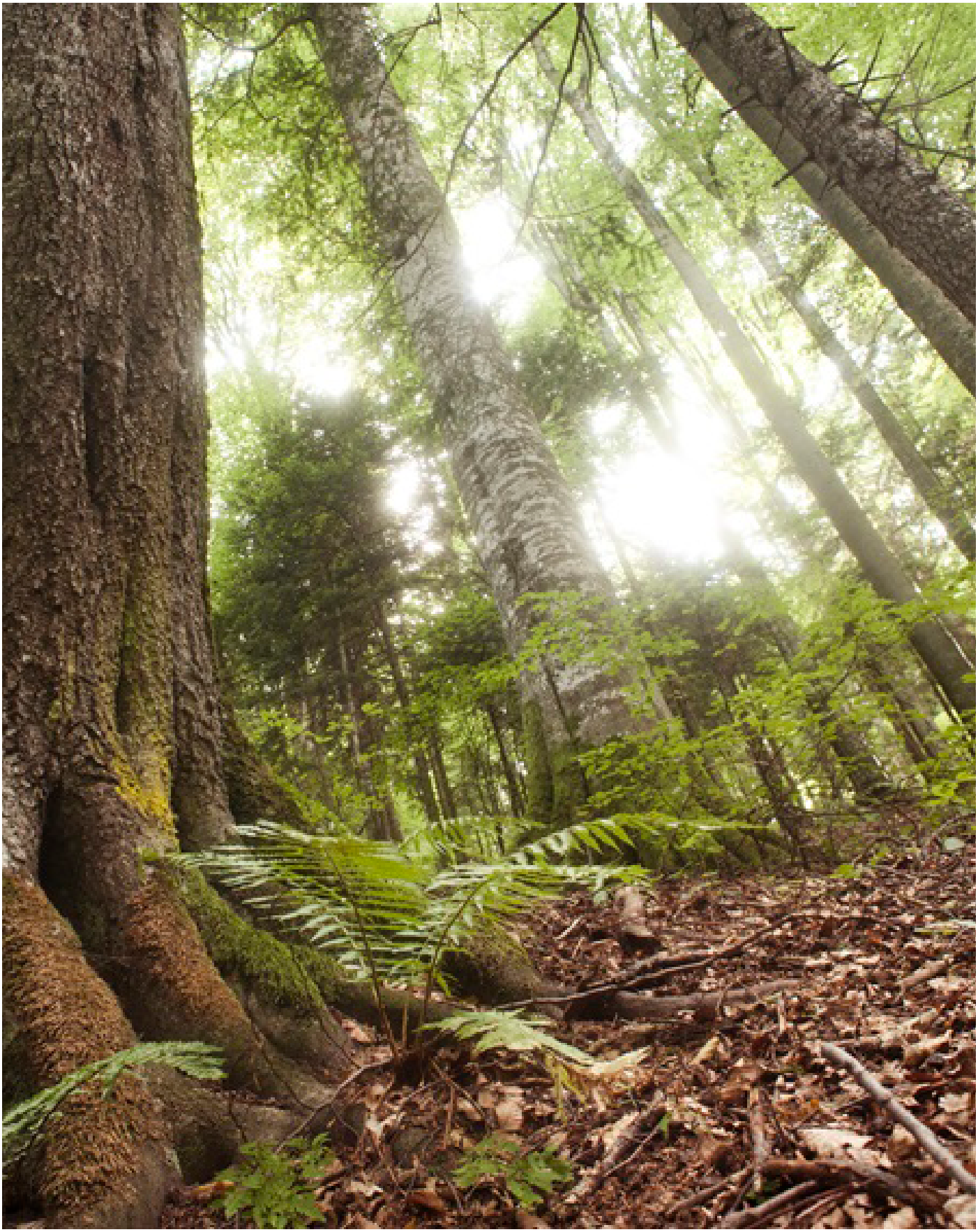




Meaningful change does not happen by itself. It is shaped by the people and organizations who believed in this path — from community leaders and scientists to public authorities, forward-looking companies, and committed individuals. Some of them have stood with us for more than two decades. Others will continue to join, driven by a common goal to sustain responsible forest management and advance a resilient and sustainable future.

TOGETHER POSSIBLE

Forests are quiet teachers. When we learn to understand their inner world, we begin to understand life — and how the world can thrive in harmony. They remind us that lasting change grows slowly, through patience, care, and the shared commitment of a community.



LOOKING BACK, MOVING FORWARD

MESSAGE FROM ORIETA HULEA, THE CEO OF WWF- ROMANIA

> Forests are not only ecosystems — they are foundations of life, stability, and well-being. Our mission has been to safeguard them in a way that sustains biodiversity, supports climate resilience, and contributes to the prosperity of people and communities.
> This is embedded in who we are: a science-based, solution-oriented organization that approaches conservation in an integrated way, acknowledging that environmental, economic, and social realities are deeply interconnected.

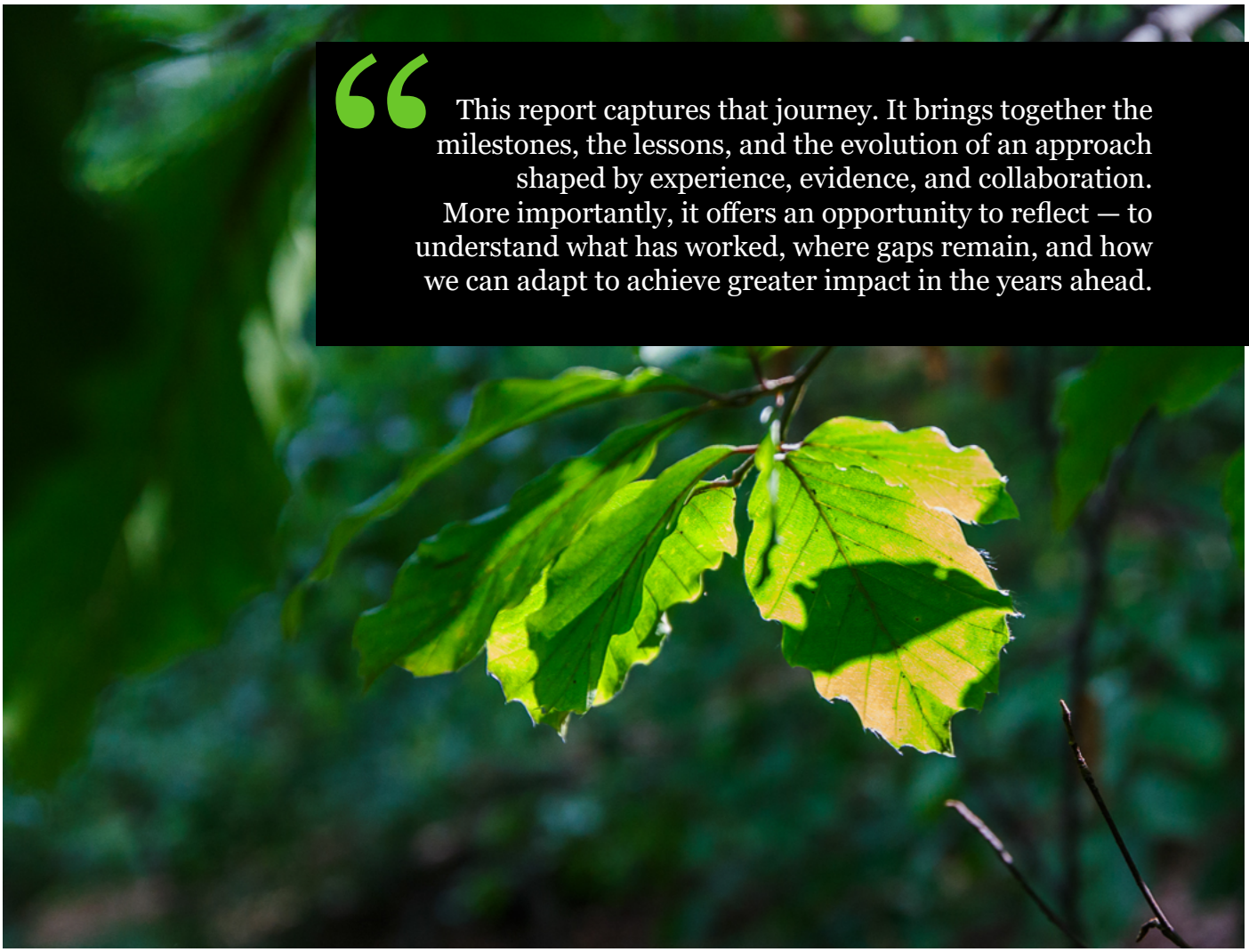


From the beginning, our work has been guided by the belief that lasting solutions cannot be designed in isolation. Forest conservation affects many, and it must therefore be shaped together with all those who depend on, manage, or influence forest landscapes — public authorities, businesses, researchers, local communities, and civil society. Through open dialogue and transparent collaboration, we have sought to reduce pressures on forests while building shared ownership of the solutions needed to protect them.

We chose to work in Romania because of its exceptional natural heritage. As one of Europe's key biodiversity hotspots, the country still hosts forest ecosystems of remarkable ecological value. At the same time, it carries a long-standing tradition of forest management practices rooted in ecological principles — practices that are increasingly relevant today, as Europe and the world look for pathways toward sustainability that integrate nature, climate, and development.

Over the past two decades, we have not tried to do everything. Instead, we have focused our efforts where we believed we could make a meaningful difference. This meant making choices, setting priorities, and engaging in challenges that were often complex and, at times, uncertain.

Not all efforts led to the outcomes we had hoped for. Yet, it is clear that sustained engagement has generated real progress — far beyond what would have been possible without action. Change, especially when it involves institutions, systems, and mindsets, takes time.



> This report captures that journey. It brings together the milestones, the lessons, and the evolution of an approach shaped by experience, evidence, and collaboration. More importantly, it offers an opportunity to reflect — to understand what has worked, where gaps remain, and how we can adapt to achieve greater impact in the years ahead.

Looking forward, our role remains one of connection — linking science with practice, conservation with development, and local realities with broader global ambitions. Strengthening partnerships will be essential, as meaningful change depends on shared responsibility and long-term commitment. The complexity of today's challenges requires solutions that are both inclusive and forward-looking.

We are grateful to all those who have been part of this journey — our partners, supporters, and also those who have challenged us along the way. Progress is not built only on agreement, but also on dialogue, critical thinking, and the willingness to learn.

The work continues. And the future of Romania's forests will depend on the choices we make together nowadays.

Orieta Hulea
CEO, WWF Romania





WHY THIS REPORT?

This report looks back on 20 years of work dedicated to Romania's forests - years grounded in science, sustained by perseverance, and strengthened through dialogue and partnership. It is a story about how steady efforts, shared responsibility, and a common vision can gradually transform the way forests are valued and cared for.

Looking back helps us understand how far we have come. It also invites us to look ahead - to the work that still lies ahead of us. Progress is not a single achievement, but a continuous process. The lessons of these two decades guide the steps still needed to ensure that forests remain a source of life and stability for both people and nature in this part of the world.

Beyond reflecting on past achievements, this report sets the foundations for the work ahead — guiding future priorities, strengthening what works, and addressing the gaps that still stand between today's progress and the lasting resilience of forest landscapes and the communities that depend on them.

More than a retrospective, this report also recognizes the many partners - from public institutions and local communities - to research organizations, civil society groups, and responsible businesses - who have contributed to this journey. It also reflects a renewed commitment to continue the work needed to safeguard Romania's forests for future generations.

ROMANIA'S FORESTS – A LIVING HERITAGE FOR EUROPE

Romania's forests are among the most precious natural treasures in Europe. They form a valuable mosaic of forest landscapes, known for hosting some of the continent's last remaining primeval and old-growth forests, which support an extraordinary diversity of life - from iconic large carnivores to countless lesser-known species. Across six biogeographical regions, these ecosystems provide essential services that extend far beyond national borders.

These forests are also closely connected to local communities that, over generations, have developed a strong relationship with them. This natural wealth is not only a gift of geography, but also the result of forestry practices developed over generations, grounded in ecological understanding and a shared interest among local communities in sustaining forest resources.

Yet, during the transition from a centralized system toward European integration, Romania's forests faced significant pressures and institutional gaps. This period was also marked by a fragmented forest restitution process, unsupported by a coherent administrative framework, while policies struggled to keep pace with evolving social, economic, and environmental realities. Together, these factors weakened enforcement, contributed to localized forest degradation in some places, and undermined the conditions needed for a sustainable forest-based bioeconomy, particularly in regions where restitution created highly fragmented ownership and inconsistent management capacity.



WWF'S ROLE IN THIS JOURNEY



Over the past two decades, WWF has been actively involved to ensure that Romania's forests continue to thrive — as ecosystems, as sources of resilience to climate change, and as foundations for communities' well-being.

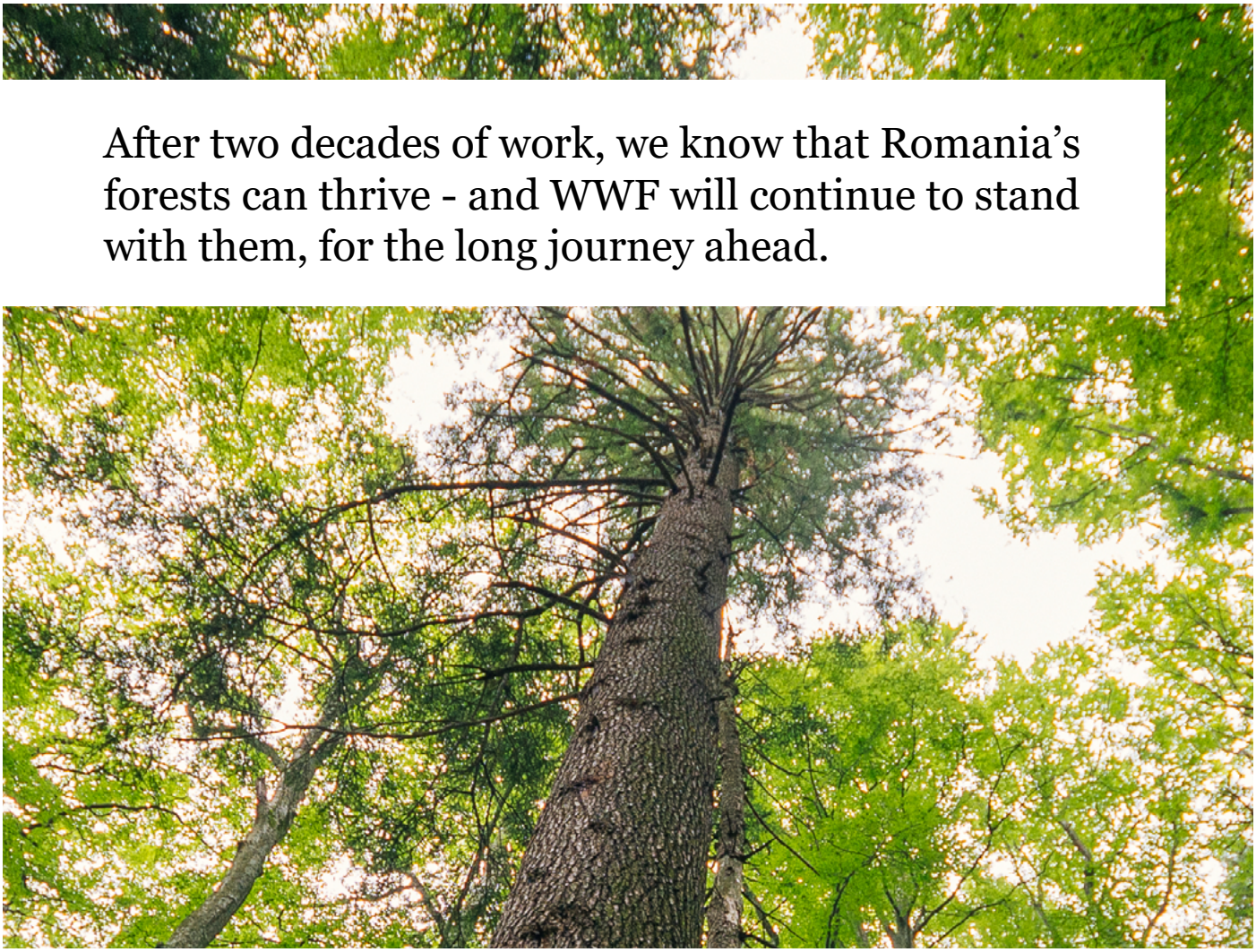
Our role has been to connect knowledge with action, conservation with community needs, and long-term vision with practical solutions. We championed evidence-based approaches that protect biodiversity, strengthen climate resilience, and support sustainable development.

We worked through dialogue, evidence, and partnership — bringing together authorities, businesses, researchers, local communities, and civil society to shape solutions that endure.

HOW WE ACT

Our work brings together four complementary directions:

- Stronger policy and better forest governance
- Responsible markets and credible voluntary standards
- Concrete conservation and restoration on the ground
- Capacity building through education, knowledge sharing, and stakeholder engagement.



After two decades of work, we know that Romania's forests can thrive - and WWF will continue to stand with them, for the long journey ahead.

FROM VISION TO MILESTONES

For more than two decades, long-term efforts have translated into tangible changes in how forests are governed, protected, and integrated into public policy and societal priorities.

The "Big Wins" presented in the following section mark important milestones along this path. They show how sustained work can lead to systemic change - tangible improvements in forest governance, conservation, and the role of forests in society.

These are not final destinations, but significant steps in an ongoing journey of transformation - and a reminder of why continued action and forward-looking solutions remain essential.



BIG WINS IN AN ONGOING TRANSFORMATION

ADVANCING RESPONSIBLE FOREST MANAGEMENT

1 **EMPOWERING A CULTURE OF TRANSPARENCY AND PARTICIPATION**
Enabling stakeholders to co-design forest management decisions that protect nature, strengthen communities, and safeguard their legitimate interests.

2 **ADVANCING TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY IN THE TIMBER TRADE SYSTEM**
Transparency is one of the strongest safeguards for forests.

3 **REFORMING THE NATIONAL FRAMEWORK FOR COMBATING ILLEGAL LOGGING**
Stronger institutions. Clearer rules. Real consequences.

4 **SAFEGUARDING ROMANIA'S LEGACY OF CLOSE-TO-NATURE FORESTRY**
Europe's Green Heart is no coincidence.

5 **DEADWOOD FOR LIVING FORESTS**
From perceived threat to a cornerstone of forest resilience.



SECURING BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION TARGETS

6 STRENGTHENING THE PROTECTION OF HIGH CONSERVATION VALUE FORESTS (HCV)

Preserving what matters most, for nature and people

7 SAFEGUARDING PRIMARY AND OLD-GROWTH FORESTS AS INTERNATIONAL HERITAGE

From overlooked value to multi-stakeholder commitment and permanent protection.

8 RECOGNIZING FORESTS OF OUTSTANDING UNIVERSAL VALUE (UNESCO)

From national treasure to global recognition and lasting value for local communities.



EMPOWERING COMMUNITIES AND INCLUSIVE CONSERVATION

9 UNLOCKING ENVIRONMENTAL PAYMENTS FOR FOREST CONSERVATION

From unpaid stewardship to the first biodiversity payments in Romania.

10 BRINGING FOREST-DEPENDENT COMMUNITIES INTO THE HEART OF FOREST GOVERNANCE

Conservation is most effective when communities are part of it.

1 EMPOWERING A CULTURE OF TRANSPARENCY AND PARTICIPATION

"Enabling stakeholders to co-shape forest management decisions that protect nature, strengthen communities, and safeguard their legitimate interests."

1.A SITUATION 20 YEARS AGO – CLOSED DECISION-MAKING, LIMITED VOICE

Twenty years ago, Romania's forestry sector was still shaped by the **structural legacy of the centralized system**, where forests had been entirely state-owned and management decisions were made almost exclusively by central authorities.

- Forest management and nature conservation were guided by national policies that were sometimes incoherent and had not kept pace with **evolving socio-economic and environmental realities**
- Decision-making was largely characterized by limited dialogue, **and public access to information was minimal or often absent**.
- Institutions **lacked a culture of transparency, trust**, and meaningful stakeholder engagement, while stakeholders themselves - local communities, NGOs, small forest owners - had limited experience, capacity, or channels to contribute proactively.



FOR THOSE WHO REMEMBER:

In the early 2000s, forest management plans were effectively locked away in forest district offices, accessible only with high-level approval, while law-making lacked real transparency and digital systems for open public access were virtually absent.

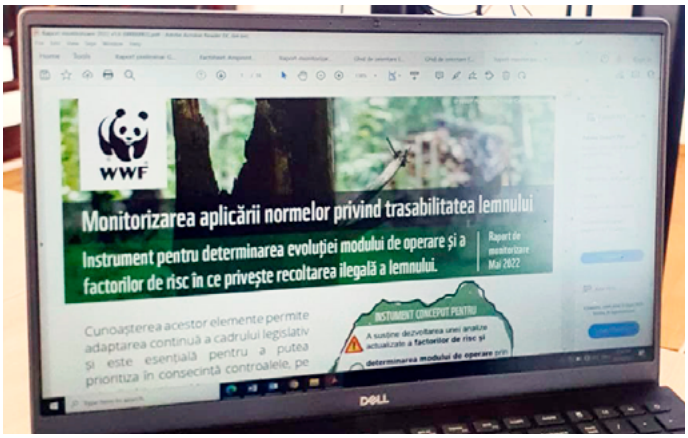
Forest governance functioned largely behind institutional doors, with society reacting only after decisions had already been made.

1.B WWF'S STRATEGIC APPROACH – OPENING GOVERNANCE AND ENABLING PARTICIPATION

Over the past two decades, WWF Romania has worked consistently to shift forest governance from a closed administrative system toward a more transparent, accountable, and participatory model.

Policy and advocacy: strengthening governance and public oversight by promoting transparency as a core principle of forest management.

- Advocated for the development and use of **public transparency tools**, such as forest management planning information, public access to harvesting data, and protected area documentation.
- Promoted transparency and stakeholder participation in the development of Romania's **National Forest Strategy for 2030 (SNP30)**, offering technical expertise on biodiversity conservation, social inclusion, and climate adaptation.
- Consistently supported improved access to data and accountability in forest management decisions.

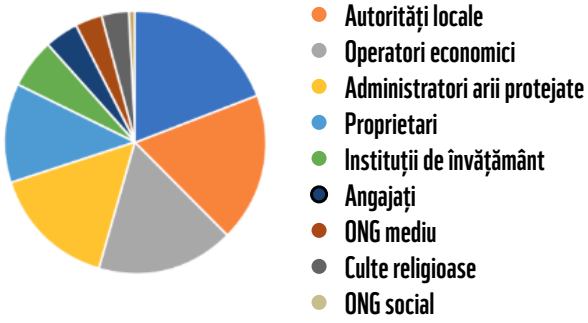




Voluntary and market-based mechanisms: complementing policy work; voluntary standards institutionalized participation and accountability in practice.

- Supported the integration of **internationally recognized and credible forest certification** (Forest Stewardship Council® (FSC®)) as a performance benchmark within the State Forest Administration, including criteria related not only to forest management quality but also the quality of stakeholder engagement.

Stakeholder Engagement Level in FSC in 2020
Source: WWF-Romania



5000+ STAKEHOLDERS

- Invested in building the capacity of **over 5,000 stakeholders** — including local communities, NGOs, and other actors — to engage proactively and constructively in public consultations and participatory processes linked to forest management certification.

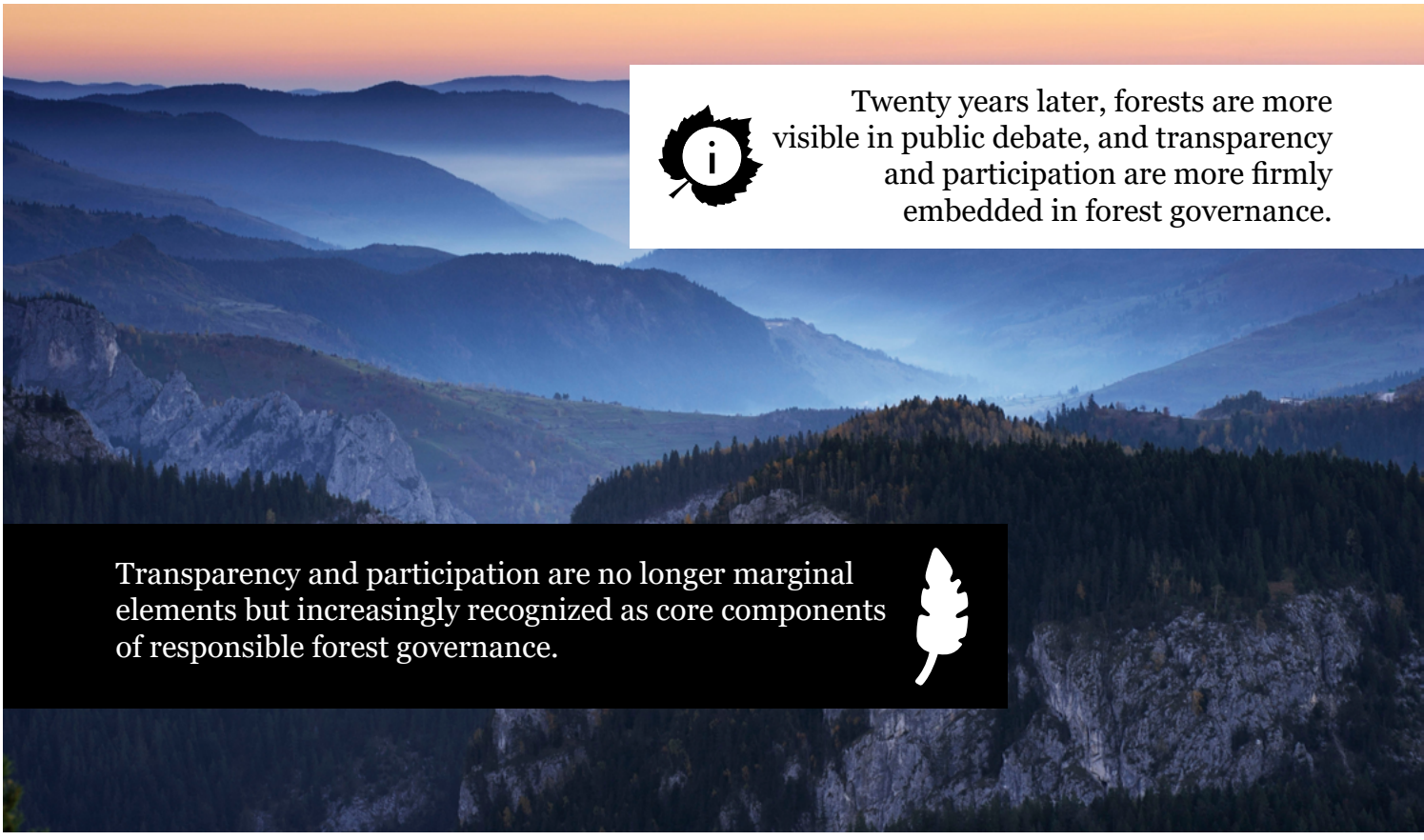
By promoting transparency tools - both legal and voluntary - WWF supported investigations and informed proposals, helping turn transparency into a driver of accountability and systemic improvements.

1.C CURRENT SITUATION AND PROGRESS ACHIEVED

By working both through public policy and voluntary mechanisms, WWF helped create pressure and incentives from multiple directions - institutions, markets, and society - gradually embedding transparency and participation into the fabric of forest governance.

Today, this shift is visible in several structural changes:

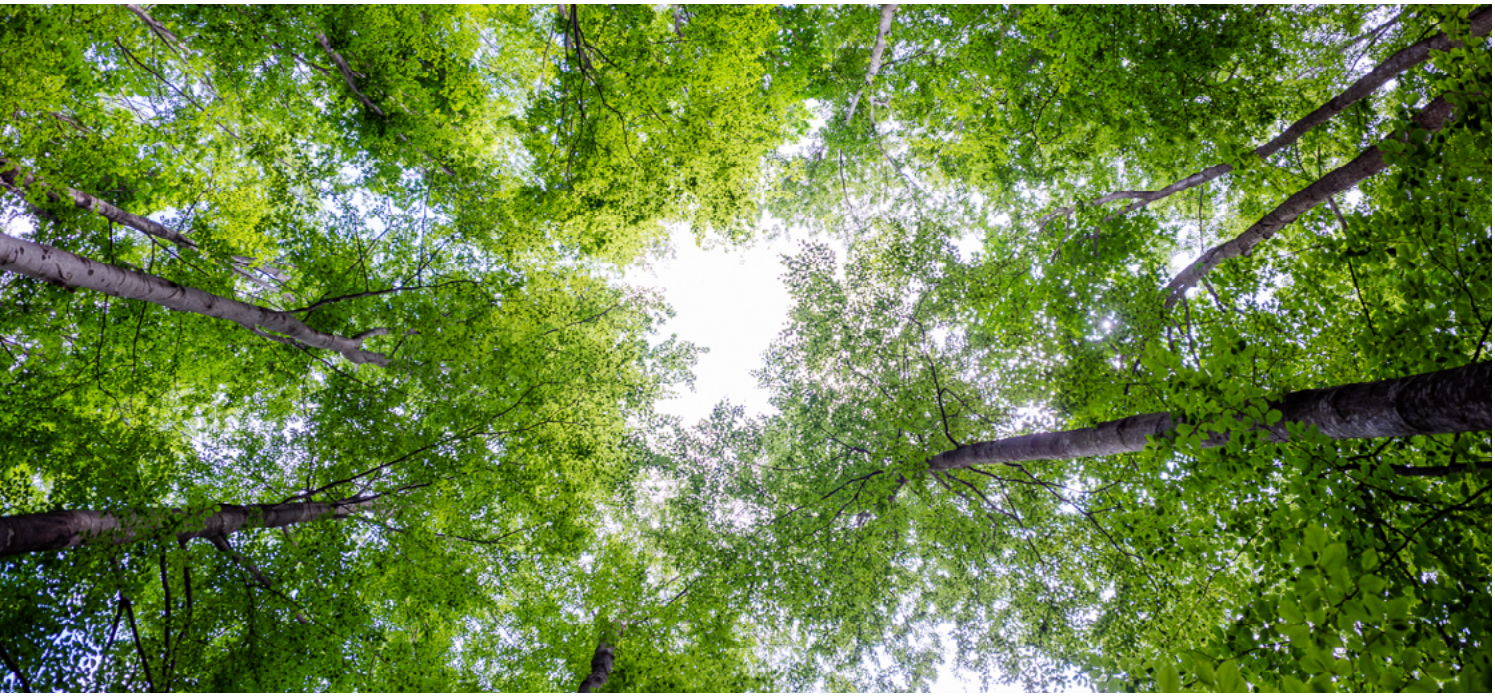
- **Romania has adopted its first participatory National Forest Strategy** (SNP30), providing a clear framework for sustainable forest management aligned with Responsible Forest Management Principles and EU environmental and climate objectives.
- **Public access to forest-related information has significantly improved**, with digital systems and GIS platforms now increasingly available for all forest management plans and protected area management documentation.
- **Public consultations** on forest management and nature conservation **have become regular practice**, extending beyond credible voluntary certification schemes and increasingly embedded in formal decision-making processes – evolving from exception to expectation.
- Local stakeholders are **more active and confident in using consultation and complaint mechanisms**, reflecting a stronger culture of civic engagement in forest governance.



Twenty years later, forests are more visible in public debate, and transparency and participation are more firmly embedded in forest governance.

Transparency and participation are no longer marginal elements but increasingly recognized as core components of responsible forest governance.

1.D NEXT STEPS - CONSOLIDATING TRANSPARENCY, PARTICIPATION AND PREDICTABILITY



Policy Framework:

- Ensure the **effective implementation of the National Forest Strategy 2030** (SNP30), reaffirming WWF's commitment to follow this long-term guiding thread for Romania's forests — one built on transparency, participation, sustainability, and predictable governance.
- **Operationalize the National Forest Registry** as an integrated digital system that contributes to greater transparency, efficiency, reduced bureaucracy, improved inter-institutional coordination, and more predictable decision-making processes.

Voluntary market mechanisms:

- **Strengthen the implementation of FSC® certification** across Romania's forests, reinforcing not only environmental and social standards but also predictable and accountable forest management practices.
- Update the National Forest Stewardship Standard to align with the revised International Generic Indicators (IGIs) and evolving national ecological and socio-economic realities.
- Develop a new set of tailored indicators for SLIMF (Small and Low Intensity Managed Forests) to better reflect the specific conditions of small forest holdings.
- Continue building the capacity of stakeholders to engage proactively and constructively in certification processes and related participatory mechanisms.

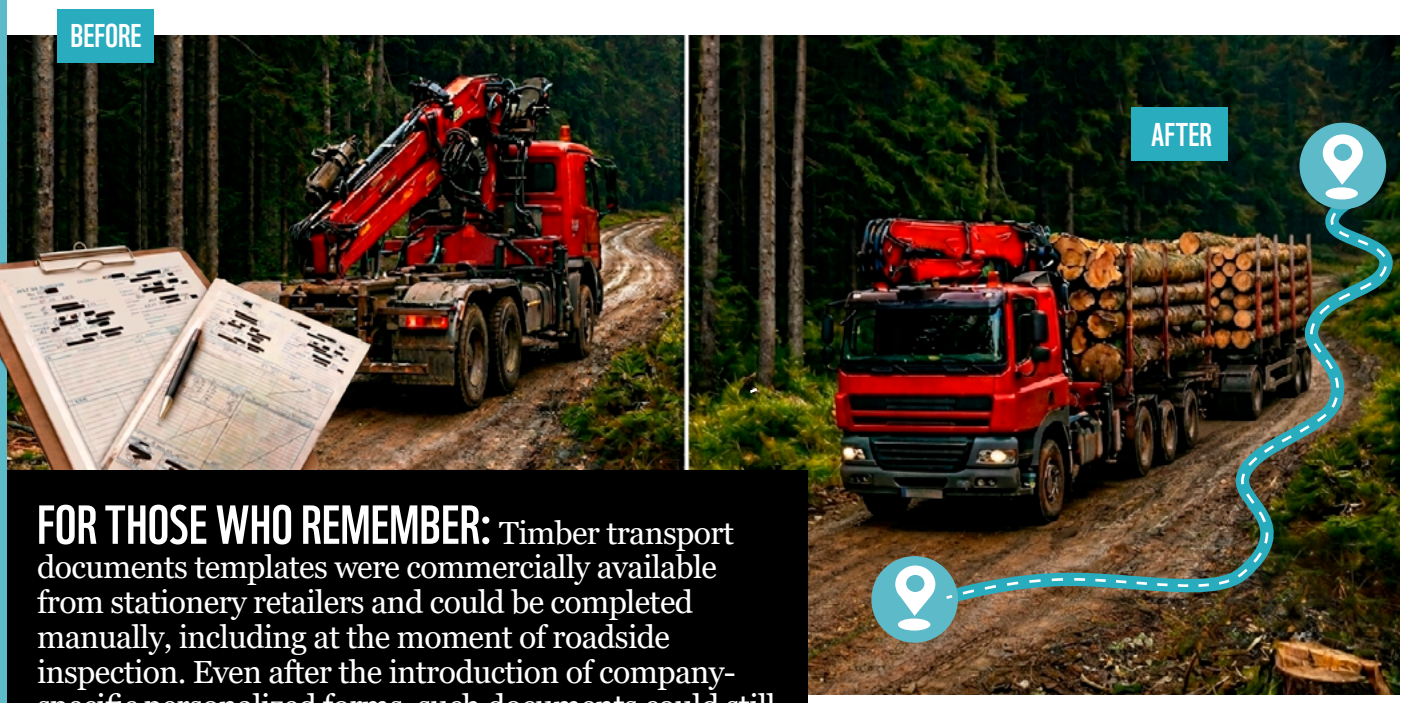
2 ADVANCING TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY IN THE TIMBER TRADE SYSTEM

"Transparency is our strongest safeguard for forests."

2.A SITUATION 20 YEARS AGO: WEAK TRACEABILITY, LIMITED ACCOUNTABILITY

Amid a chaotic land restitution process, illegal logging and opaque trade practices were widespread, undermining trust and weakening accountability across the forestry sector.

- There were virtually **no transparency and no public access** to information regarding the origin of timber materials.
- The paper-based documentation system for wood traceability lacked safeguards to prevent the **misuse of origin documents**. Harvesting permits and delivery documents could be easily manipulated to cover timber originating from unauthorized harvesting places.
- Handwritten timber documentation was **easily forged or repeatedly reused for several transports**. Limited traceability and weak control mechanisms created low detection risks, making such practices difficult to prevent and easy to replicate.



FOR THOSE WHO REMEMBER: Timber transport documents templates were commercially available from stationery retailers and could be completed manually, including at the moment of roadside inspection. Even after the introduction of company-specific personalized forms, such documents could still be obtained through informal channels, issued under fictitious or non-operational entities, undermining traceability and control. In such conditions, setting up a "shell company" could generate falsified origin documents covering hundreds of thousands of cubic meters of timber before being eventually detected.

Timber trade operated largely beyond public scrutiny, with weak safeguards and minimal traceability enabling systemic manipulation.

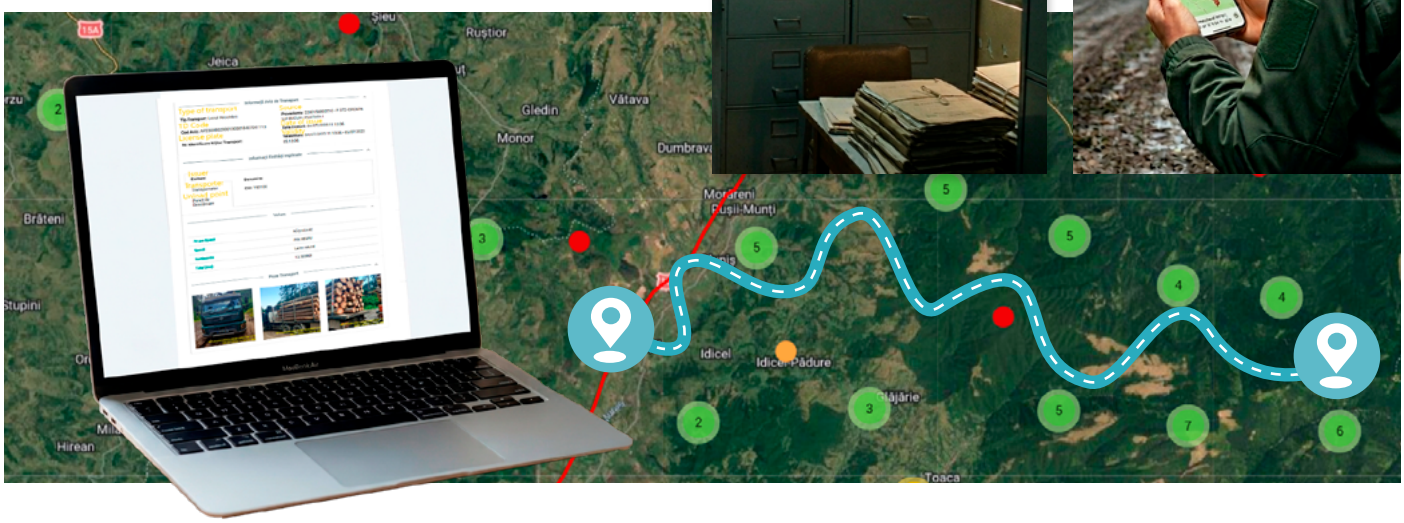
2.B WWF'S STRATEGIC APPROACH: DIGITAL TRANSPARENCY AND PUBLIC ACCOUNTABILITY IN TIMBER TRADE

To address these structural weaknesses, WWF combined sustained policy advocacy, technological innovation, and civic empowerment - transforming timber traceability from a closed, paper-based control system into a transparent and digitally accountable framework.

Policy & Advocacy:

- WWF led sustained advocacy efforts that contributed to the establishment, consolidation and continuous improvement of the national electronic timber traceability system (SUMAL), ensuring full digital traceability of timber - from the legally approved forest management plan and authorized harvesting operation, through transport and processing to wood materials placed and made available on the market.
- As a complementary transparency instrument, WWF also championed the development of the public online platform "Inspectorul Pădurii" (The Forest Inspector), which enables any citizen - via desktop or mobile devices - to verify whether a harvesting site is legally authorized and to check the legality of every timber transport in real time, through the vehicle registration numbers.

Forest Inspector platform: public access to harvesting permits, forest management plans, and real-time information on logging operations

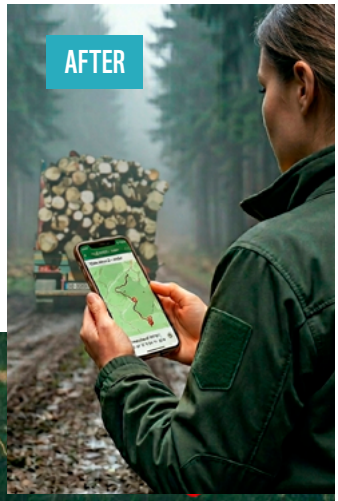


Raising Awareness & Building Capacity:

- Integrated continuous monitoring of wood traceability enforcement with the identification and public highlighting of evolving risks and systemic vulnerabilities, while advancing practical and innovative technical solutions to reinforce system integrity.
- Enabled citizens and stakeholders to play an active role in independent oversight through informed monitoring of timber traceability, strengthening trust and accountability in the timber trade.

Forest Inspector platform: Complete Information for Every Timber Shipment



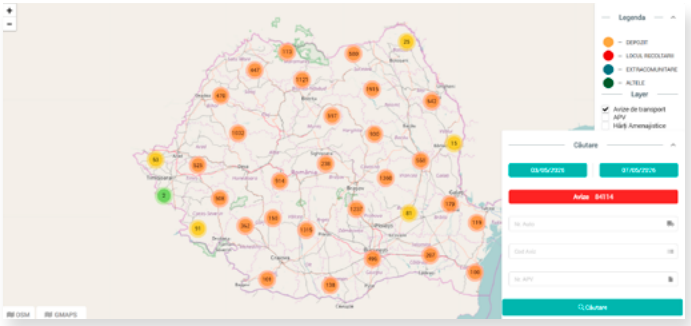


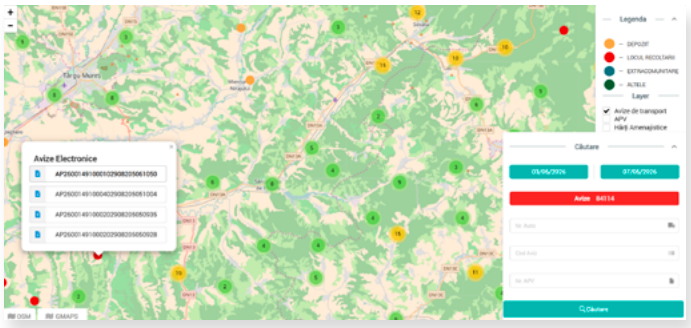
2.C CURRENT SITUATION AND PROGRESS ACHIEVED

Two decades later, timber traceability in Romania has moved from opacity to digital transparency, embedding technology and public oversight at the core of timber trade governance.

- A fully digital timber traceability system - one of the most advanced wood traceability framework currently in operation globally. The system fully replaces paper-based documentation and integrates comprehensive trade data, including transport photographs, vehicle odometer readings at departure, and GPS tracking throughout the supply chain.

Forest Inspector provides interactive mapping and verification tools that allow users to track timber transports, locate harvesting sites, and monitor forestry activities in real time.





100,000+ USERS

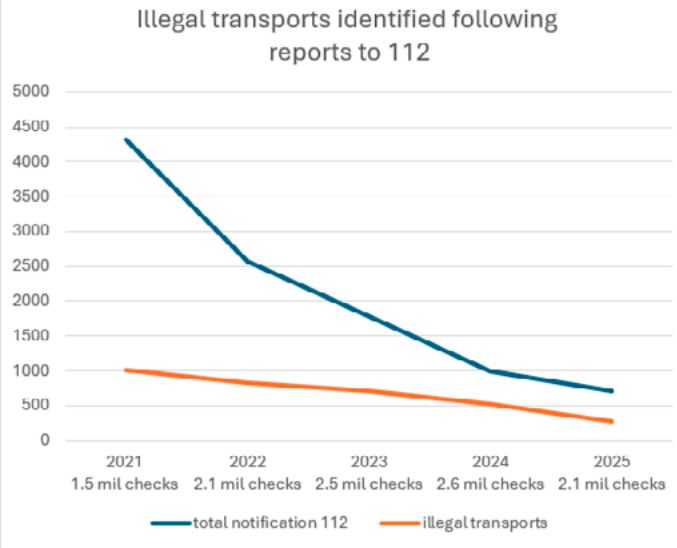
1+ MILLION PUBLIC VERIFICATIONS

- Real-time online tracking of timber flows, combined with public access to verification tools.
- Open data enabling informed public scrutiny, active oversight, and systemic deterrent effect.
- Over **100,000 users** and more than **1 million** public verifications annually through Forest Inspector and SUMAL system.

Evolution of Controls During 2021–2025

Source: Ministry of Environment, Waters and Forests

Year	Controls Triggered by Public Reports	Illegal shipments
2021	4315	1002
2022	2576	823
2023	1781	706
2025	987	527
2025	699	274



- Strengthened accountability across forestry operators, public institutions, and competent authorities.

Digital traceability and public oversight have become structural safeguards of the timber trade, significantly reducing systemic vulnerabilities while strengthening prevention and improving efficiency.

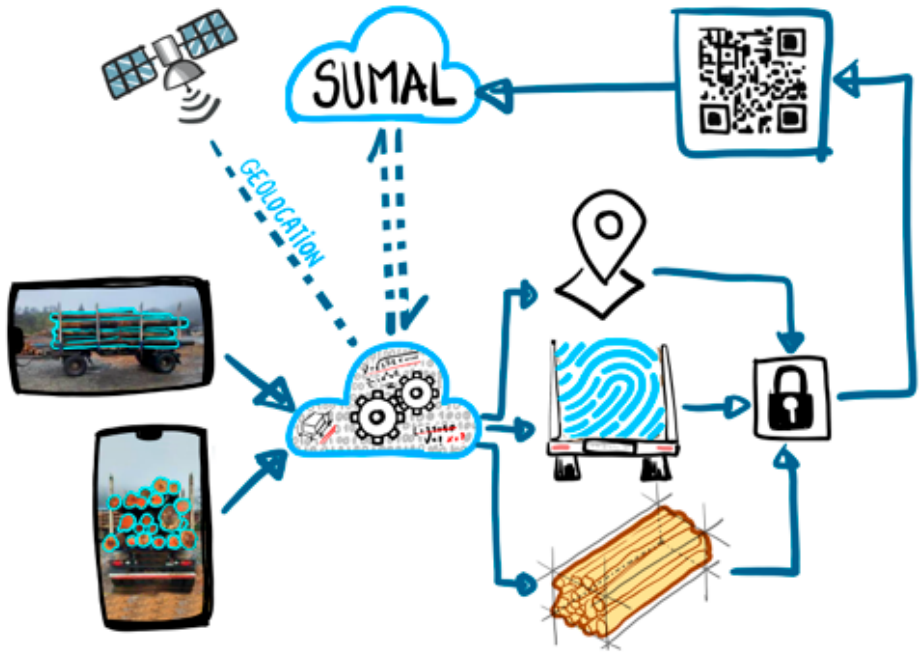
2.D NEXT STEPS: ADVANCING SIMPLICITY, TRANSPARENCY AND EFFICIENCY

While significant progress has been achieved, strengthening system integrity requires continuous adaptation to evolving risks, forward-looking technological innovation - including AI-based tools, and alignment with European regulatory developments.

Policy Framework:

- Advocate for a new generation of SUMAL 3.0 to close remaining gaps and operationalize the “digital fingerprint of timber shipments” as a new benchmark in timber traceability. Such AI-based solution would use image-based analysis to identify the uniqueness of each transport, while simultaneously enabling rapid and objective volume estimation to further strengthen traceability, fraud prevention, and accountability in the timber trade.

SUMAL enables real-time digital tracking of timber throughout the supply chain, supporting transparency and accountability



- Promote full interoperability between the national SUMAL 3.0 system and the EU Information System developed for EUDR implementation, reducing unnecessary bureaucracy and administrative burdens while streamlining compliance for operators and authorities.

Innovation & Evidence-Based Solutions:

- Drive forward an automated risk-based alert system to support a control plan following a risk-based approach, enabling efficient inspections, targeted enforcement, and more effective allocation of control resources.

- Develop and promote innovative forensic tools and methodologies for timber origin verification.

3 REFORMING THE NATIONAL FRAMEWORK FOR COMBATING ILLEGAL LOGGING

"Stronger institutions. Clearer rules. Real consequences"

3.A SITUATION 20 YEARS AGO – SYSTEMIC PRESSURE, WEAK ENFORCEMENT

- Two decades ago, Romania was a country in transition, with newly formed institutions struggling to keep pace with profound structural and economic change. The land restitution process advanced rapidly, yet without a coherent administrative framework and without forest policies adapted to the evolving socio-economic and environmental realities of the post-communist period. Governance reforms lagged realities on the ground.

- Illegal logging became widespread, with entire hillsides stripped of forests, generating significant climate, environmental, and social impacts. State authorities lacked the operational capacity to respond effectively. Public discourse was at times shaped by the narrative that forests would "save the country" from economic hardship and International Monetary Fund (IMF) loans.



Massive illegal logging sites, during chaotic restitution process

- At the same time, expanding Massive illegal logging sites, during chaotic restitution process alue-added primary processing industry created additional pressure and a strong absorption capacity for illegally harvested timber, in the absence of reliable due diligence mechanisms.

50,000+ HECTARES

- The outdated and non-transparent traceability system was compounded by weak enforcement and critically low institutional capacity. A single forest inspector was responsible for supervising up to **50,000 hectares** — without adequate resources — while overwhelmed by bureaucratic burdens, in addition to extensive operational responsibilities ranging from transport controls and harvesting inspections to management plan approvals and handling countless complaints.

< 1% TIMBER TRANSPORTS

- Statistically, **fewer than one in 100 timber transports** could be fully inspected in the field, including accurate verification of timber volumes, highlighting significant enforcement limitations. Sanctions for large illegal shipments were often limited to modest administrative fines, well below the market value of the timber.

- Excessive politicization further weakened forest governance. As forests remained among the few major national assets not privatized, political attention increasingly shifted toward their administration. Firewood supply — in a rural context where approximately 86% of households relied on wood as their primary source of heating and often cooking — became a recurring political instrument.

FOR THOSE WHO REMEMBER:

Over 750,000 small private individuals forest owners — newly restituted and averaging around 1.1 hectares per property - were left to guard their forests individually, without functional support mechanisms for sustained protection. Under socio-economic pressure, many were basically pushed to either harvest their forests or sell them entirely.



Illegal logging thrived where institutions were still consolidating, policies lagged behind reality, enforcement capacity was weak, and market demand outpaced regulatory safeguards.

3.B WWF'S STRATEGIC APPROACH – ADDRESSING THE SYSTEMIC DRIVERS OF ILLEGAL LOGGING

Beyond improving timber traceability systems, WWF adopted an integrated approach to combat illegal logging - targeting structural weaknesses, governance gaps, and underlying economic drivers.



Policy & Advocacy:

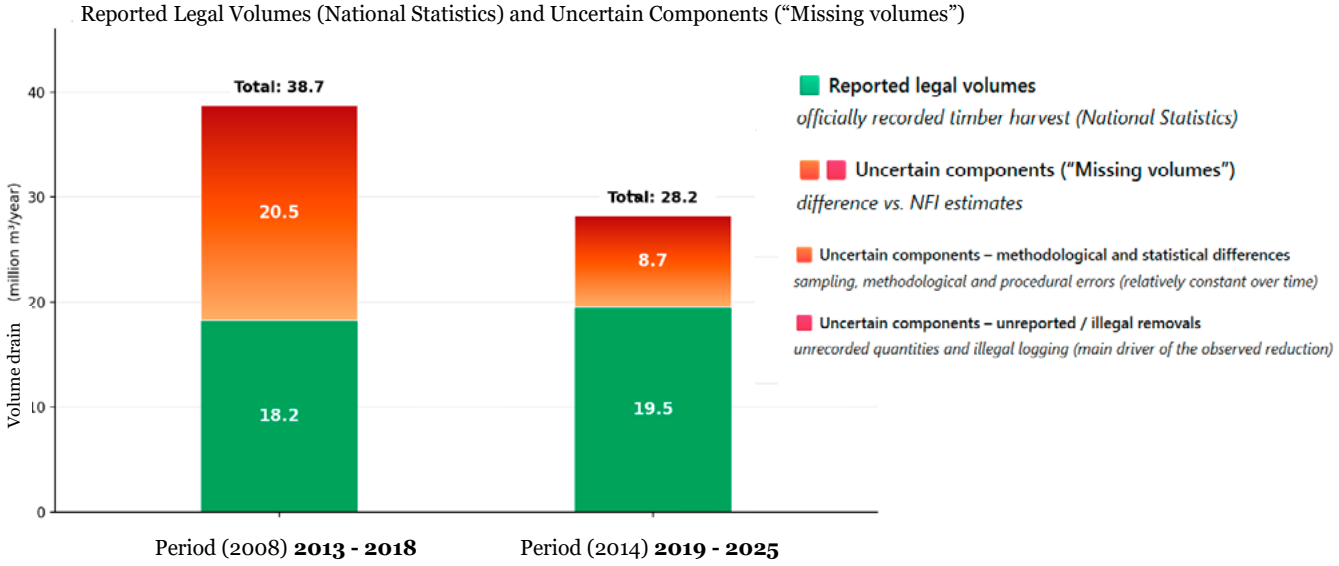
- Promoted reform of the national framework for combating illegal logging, with a focus on digital transparency in timber traceability and prioritizing controls at the first placement of timber on the market.
- Advocated for strengthening enforcement authorities through integrity-based institutional reform, clear performance criteria, and adequate resource allocation.
- Highlighted the need for dissuasive and proportionate sanctions for illegal timber transport.
- Supported the introduction of mandatory guarding of private forests by authorized forest administrations, alongside state-backed protection mechanisms for small forest owners based on the territoriality principle. Advocated for administrative reform of publicly owned forest management to reduce excessive politicization and introduce relevant and ambitious key performance indicators.
- Promoted fair financial compensation mechanisms for private forest owners affected by legally imposed conservation restrictions.
- Promoted reduced fiscal burdens on firewood and timber used for rural construction as a measure to incentivize legal reporting and transparent local trade.

Raising Awareness & Evidence-Based Action:

Conducted field monitoring* of enforcement practices to identify and expose evolving risk factors and modus operandi, while proposing modern, technology-based systemic solutions to address existing loopholes.

*https://lemncontrolat.ro/reports-regarding-the-modus-operandi-and-risk-factors-determination/

Breakdown of Volume Drain (National Forest Inventory) into
Reported Legal Volumes (National Statistics) and Uncertain Components ("Missing volumes")



Interpretation: According to NFI, total volume drain has decreased by more than **10 million m³ annually**, while officially reported timber harvest has increased by around **1.3 million m³ annually**. As a result, the "missing volume" (difference between NFI estimates and legally reported harvest) declined from **20.5 million m³ to 8.7 million m³**.
Note: The "missing volume" does not represent illegal logging alone. It also includes relatively constant statistical and methodological differences between NFI estimates and administrative data (e.g. sampling design, dendrometric models, measurement precision, and data collection and processing). Importantly, the NFI is not designed to directly monitor illegal logging. Assuming these methodological differences remain broadly stable when comparing the same categories of data, the significant reduction in the "missing volume" is primarily explained by a decrease in **illegal logging**. This trend is consistent with strengthened enforcement and governance measures implemented since 2014–2015 (e.g. wood tracking systems, new forest control authorities, increased oversight).
Conclusion: The comparative analysis indicates a clear positive trend driven by measures aimed at reducing illegal logging, which should be continued and further strengthened.

Source: Romanian National Forest Inventory (NFI) - https://roifn.ro/site/ website accessed in February 2026

Promoted transparency and active civil society engagement in monitoring timber traceability and enforcement practices.

Voluntary Market-based Mechanisms:

- Developed updated, transparent national risk assessments on illegal logging and promoted corresponding mitigation measures through certification frameworks (e.g. FSC® Controlled Wood), strengthening operators' capacity to implement robust Due Diligence Systems (DDS).

- Built capacity through online tools, training programs, workshops, and best-practice guidance to support effective risk mitigation and regulatory compliance.



3.C CURRENT SITUATION AND PROGRESS ACHIEVED

Romania's response to illegal logging has evolved - albeit with delay - from reactive and fragmented enforcement to a more structured and coordinated framework, significantly shaped by sustained public scrutiny and civil society engagement.

6 AUTHORITIES REINFORCED

+20% STAFF INCREASE

~90% FOREST FUND GUARDED

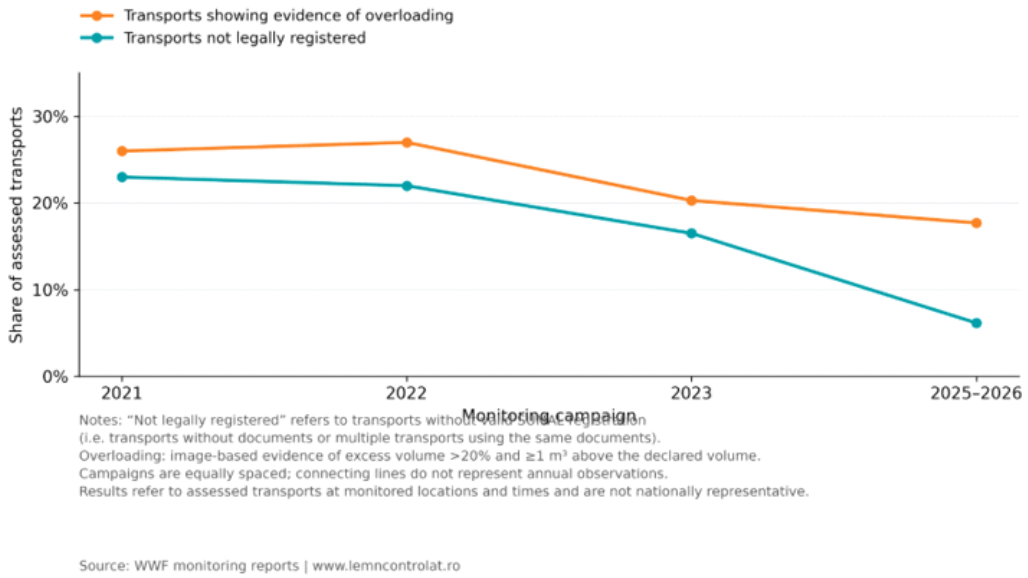
- The Electronic Wood Tracking System (SUMAL) has been upgraded to ensure digital traceability, enhanced transparency, and public oversight, introducing a strong passive control effect.

- Abusive forest management was officially recognized as a threat to national security, elevating the issue to a strategic priority. Enforcement capacity and accountability were reinforced across **six** authorities, including the establishment of the new Forest Guards, whose control staff has effectively increased by over **20%**, although it remains well below the optimal level given the wide range of responsibilities.

  About 90% of forests within the national forest fund are now covered by mandatory guarding services — reaching around **98%** in the Central Region - including privately owned forests, supported by public funding for small forest owners.

- A dissuasive sanctions regime is in place, including criminal liability for transport overloading exceeding ±20% (no less than 5 m³ - repeated transports may also trigger criminal liability when committed at least twice within one year and the cumulative prejudice exceeds the legal threshold) as well as mandatory confiscation of the goods used to commit the offence, including means of transport. N.B. In Romania, the legal deviation for measuring the volume of timber transported is generally between ±2% and ±4%, depending on the measurement method applied and the number of pieces measured – Timber transports exceeding these legally permitted deviations are considered illegal and are subject to sanctions.

Figure 5. Timber transport non-compliance in WWF monitoring campaigns
Independent roadside camera monitoring, 2021–2026



Notes: "Not legally registered" refers to transports without valid online registration (i.e. transports without documents or multiple transports using the same documents).
Overloading: image-based evidence of excess volume >20% and ≥1 m³ above the declared volume.
Campaigns are equally spaced; connecting lines do not represent annual observations.
Results refer to assessed transports at monitored locations and times and are not nationally representative.

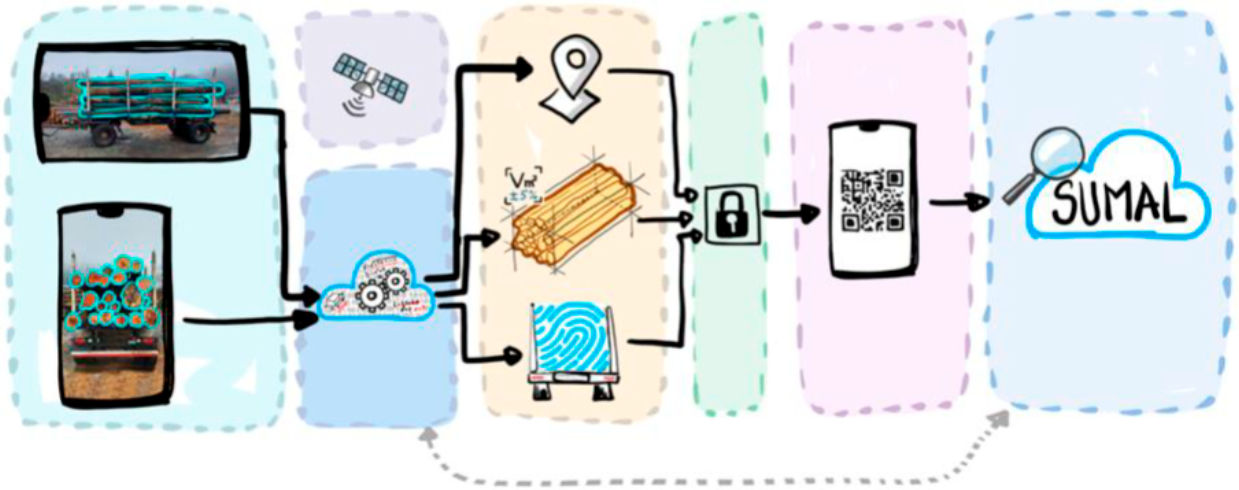
Source: WWF monitoring reports | www.lemncontrolat.ro

Note *Results refer to the locations and periods monitored and are not nationally representative.*
Source: WWF Romania (2026).

- The National Forest Strategy defines a renewed architecture for combatting illegal logging, setting clear and relevant milestones to be operationalized through secondary legislation.

- Innovative monitoring tools are being rolled out, including a national network of surveillance cameras in high-risk areas and automated risk-alert systems, aimed at strengthening proactive enforcement capacity.

Creating a Digital Fingerprint for Every Timber Shipment



Combining images, geolocation, volume estimation and AI-based analysis to verify the identity and traceability of each timber shipment.



Illegal logging has been significantly reduced in scale and intensity, shifting from large-scale mountain clearances to smaller, more covert activities embedded in the shadow economy pattern.

Traditional forestry hammer mark used to identify the legal origin of timber

3.D NEXT STEPS: CONSOLIDATING REFORM AND STRENGTHENING CREDIBILITY

While substantial progress has been made, completing the reform process requires reinforcing structural changes already initiated and ensuring strategic coherence with evolving European regulatory frameworks, including EUDR.



Policy Framework & Structural Reform:

- Shift the control model from tree marking and guarding in the forest toward effective verification of timber volumes when first placed on the market - where accountability can be objectively enforced.
- Link payments for harvested timber strictly to declared market quantities at first placement on the market, rather than to estimated standing volumes under the stumpage sales system — a core reform with implications for timber valuation, forest guarding rules, and the overall architecture of the national anti-illegal logging system, in line with the National Forest Strategy.
- Integrate the online enforcement of the contravention system to enable objective, evidence-based controls and strengthen institutional accountability.
- Strengthen enforcement through enhanced inter-institutional cooperation in combating illegal logging.

Risk-Based Control and European Alignment

- Strengthen risk-based controls, enhance traceability transparency, and improve compliance tools to ensure effective enforcement, regulatory credibility, and fair market competitiveness.
- Build institutional knowledge and regional cooperation capacity to ensure effective implementation of EUDR requirements.
- Promote higher value-added utilization of wood resources in order to reduce the structural pressure and foster the development of a sustainable circular forest-based bioeconomy.



4 SAFEGUARDING ROMANIA'S LEGACY OF CLOSER-TO-NATURE FORESTRY

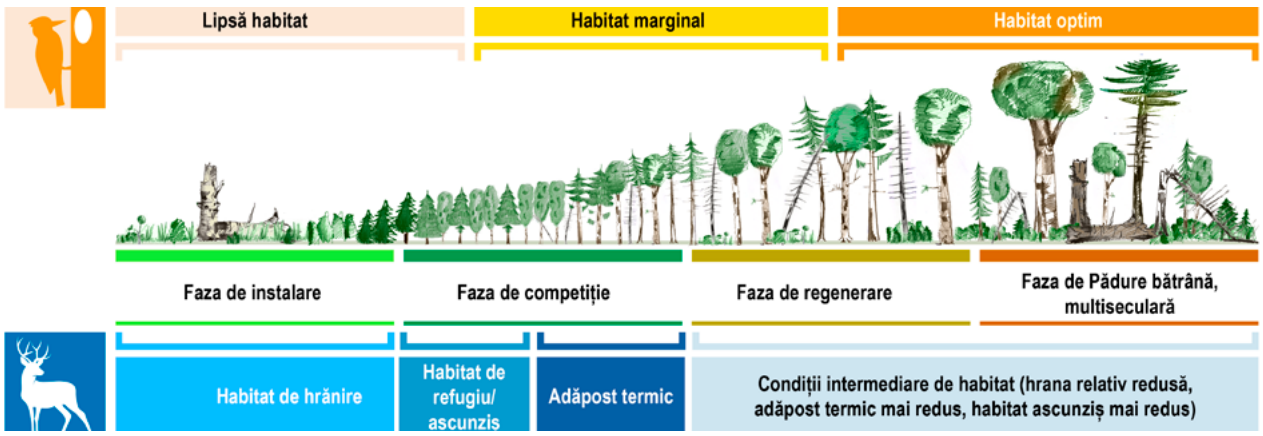
"Europe's Green Heart is no coincidence"

4.A SITUATION 20 YEARS AGO – SITUATION 20 YEARS AGO – A VALUABLE SILVICULTURAL LEGACY UNDER PRESSURE

Romania has long been home to some of the most well-preserved forest landscapes in Europe. This natural heritage is no coincidence, but the result of a silvicultural system based on sound ecological principles, consistently applied for more than a century.

- Romania possesses a valuable Closer-to-Nature Forest Management (CNFM) model built on natural regeneration, diverse compositions of native species, long rotation periods and extended harvest-free periods acting as decades-long tranquility periods, all integrated through a distinctive landscape-level forest planning approach that has stood the test of time.

Different Forest Stages, Different Habitat Needs



- Forest management planning has traditionally been designed to ensure continuity across generations of forest functions and timber production, shaping structurally diverse forest stands in dynamic equilibrium at the landscape scale.

- National forestry norms establish late harvesting ages (e.g. 120–180 years) in production forests to support high-quality timber assortments suitable for long-lived, high value-added products, prioritizing wood quality and forest multifunctionality over maximizing raw biomass output.



- Despite these ecological strengths, increasing economic pressures linked to expanding primary wood-processing industries have increasingly driven calls for more intensive harvesting models, often overlooking the principles that have historically shaped Romania's resilient forest landscapes.

- At a time when Europe is seeking forest management models aligned with the green transition, Romania risks eroding its own proven system if economic competitiveness alone continues to rely on increasing harvesting volumes, rather than fostering a circular forest bioeconomy that properly values high-quality wood assortments through cascading use, transforming them into high value-added, long-lived products.





The mistakes of some individual foresters, landowners, companies or political decisions should not be confused with the silvicultural system itself. If Romania's forests and the biodiversity they sustain are valued today, the ecological logic behind this system must also be understood, safeguarded and further strengthened.



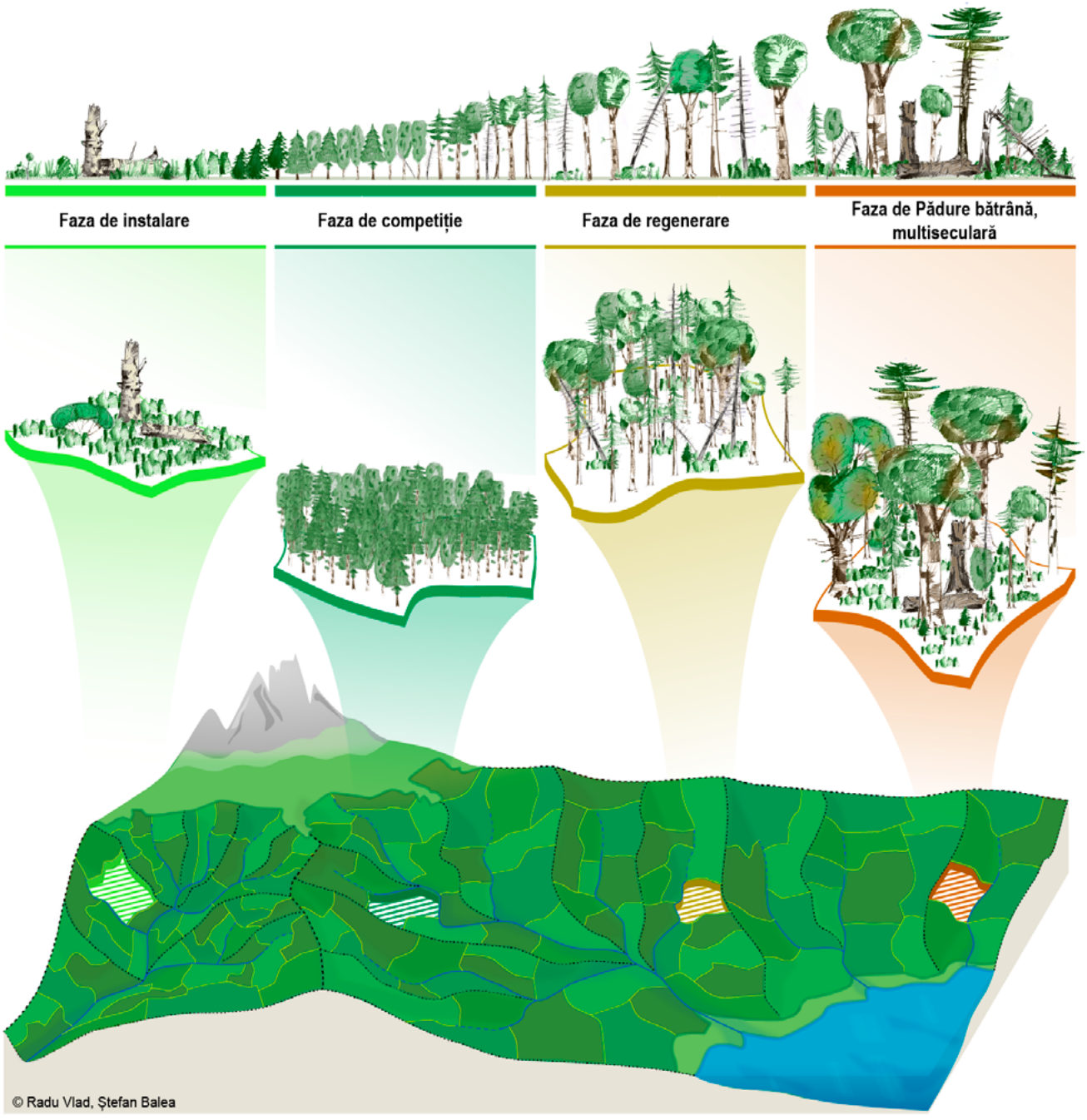
4.B WWF'S STRATEGIC APPROACH – SAFEGUARDING AND ADVANCING THE MODEL

WWF Romania has consistently promoted Closer-to-Nature Forestry as a cornerstone for sustaining the multifunctional role of forests and enabling a resilient forest-based bioeconomy.

Policy & Governance

- Promoted the recognition and consolidation of CNFM principles within national forest policy rather than replacing it with simplified intensive models.

Continuity Through a Diverse Forest Mosaic



A dynamic forest mosaic ensures that all development stages remain present across the landscape, supporting biodiversity and ecosystem resilience over time.

- Strategically supported strengthening law enforcement and preserving the core principles of the national forest management regime, while advocating reforms improving transparency, and administrative efficiency.

- Advocated strengthening the regulatory framework on the higher-value use of timber from publicly owned forests, promoting the cascading use of wood through high-value-added processing chains that transform high-quality assortments into long-lived products

Strategic Vision & Raising Awareness:

- Supported scientific research, facilitated stakeholders' dialogues and expert engagement to consolidate the understanding of ecological forest dynamics, structural diversity, and resilience-based management.

- Advanced the strategic vision "Resilient Forests – Sustainable Bioeconomy", raising awareness of the ecological benefits and economic rationale underpinning the closer-to-nature forestry system.



Only by properly valuing and truly cherishing the full worth of these large-dimension, high-quality wood assortments produced through long rotation cycles can the economic viability of close-to-nature forestry systems be ensured, thereby reducing pressure to increase biomass harvesting.

4.C CURRENT SITUATION AND PROGRESS ACHIEVED

Romania's forestry tradition is increasingly recognized as a strategic asset for resilient forests and sustainable forest-based bioeconomy development.

- Romania's forest governance framework continues to maintain the ecological principles of close-to-nature forestry despite significant political and economic pressures. Attempts to dilute or replace these principles with simplified intensive models were successfully countered through consistent, evidence-based advocacy and dialogue.
- The 2024 Forestry Code further reinforces the role of closer-to-nature silvicultural principles, strengthening their legal recognition within Romania's forest governance framework.
- The National Forest Strategy 2030 formally recognizes closer-to-nature forestry as a guiding principle for sustainable forest management.
- The National Forest Inventory shows that Romania's forests remain among the most structurally diverse and ecologically resilient forest landscapes in Europe, reflecting the long-standing application of these silvicultural principles.

60,000 HECTARES

25+ m^3/ha

347 m^3/ha

230 million m^3

Despite all challenges, Romania's forest area has been maintained and gradually expanded, increasing by more than **60,000 hectares** through afforestation and the natural transition of some pasturelands to forests. In parallel, the average standing volume has grown by over **25 m³** per hectare (reaching the highest wood stocks per hectare in Europe after Luxemburg and Switzerland with **347 m³/ha**), leading to an increase of more than **230 million** cubic meters in national growing stock, reinforcing the forests' role in climate resilience.



The resilience and diversity of Romania's forests today are the visible outcome of a silvicultural system built on long-term ecological principles and applied consistently across generation. Europe's "Green Heart" is therefore not a coincidence, but the result of a silvicultural system designed to work with nature.

4.D NEXT STEPS – CONSOLIDATING ROMANIA'S CLOSER-TO-NATURE FORESTRY MODEL

Building on this legacy requires strengthening both the policy framework and the economic conditions that allow close-to-nature forestry to thrive.

Policy Framework:

- Consolidate the legal framework for CNFM as a national best practice, shifting the narrative from criticism toward recognition of Romania as a CNFM champion system, supported by consistent enforcement.
- Position Romania's forestry tradition as a valuable regional reference model for climate-resilient forests and landscape-level ecosystem stewardship.

Incentives & Investment:

- Strengthening the link between close-to-nature forestry and the circular bioeconomy, promoting responsible wood use through higher-value processing chains and cascading use of timber, transforming superior assortments into long-lived, high value-added products.
- Support basic eco-friendly forest infrastructure investments that reduce environmental impact, enable efficient forest management, and facilitate the higher-value use of wood resources.
- Advocate for forestry to be recognized as a strategic sector within the future EU Multiannual Financial Framework (2028–2034), with dedicated financial support for CNFM implementation, climate resilience, compensatory mechanisms for forest owners facing management restrictions, research and innovation, and the development of a sustainable circular forest bioeconomy.



© Vlad Radu/WWF, Ștefan Balea

High-quality timber can support a wide range of long-lived products, creating added value while strengthening a sustainable circular forest bioeconomy

A sustainable forest-based bioeconomy cannot exist without a responsible silvicultural system, just as such a system cannot endure without an economy that truly values wood.

5 DEADWOOD FOR LIVING FORESTS

"From perceived threat to a cornerstone of forest resilience."

5.A SITUATION 20 YEARS AGO – DEADWOOD SEEN AS A RISK FOR FOREST HEALTH

Twenty years ago, deadwood was widely perceived as a sign of negligence in forest management and a potential risk for forest health, associated with pests, diseases, and natural hazards.

- There was no regulatory framework recognizing the role of deadwood in maintaining forest resilience in managed forests.
- Forestry regulations promoted the systematic removal of fallen, dead, or over-mature trees, considering them incompatible with responsible forest management.
- Forest inventories did not include specific indicators for monitoring deadwood, limiting the understanding of its ecological functions.
- Forest owners and managers were discouraged from retaining deadwood, as no incentives or compensation mechanisms existed for maintaining deadwood as essential microhabitats for key species.
- Public perception reinforced the idea that "a clean forest is a healthy forest," rather than recognizing deadwood as a natural component of resilient forest ecosystems.



Overall, forest management, despite its goal for multifunctionality, overlooked the ecological functions of deadwood. National forestry regulations were not in favor of — and in certain cases even in "conflict" with — the deadwood retention principles promoted by voluntary certification systems such as FSC®.

5.B WWF'S STRATEGIC APPROACH – FROM PROBLEM TO STRUCTURAL SOLUTIONS

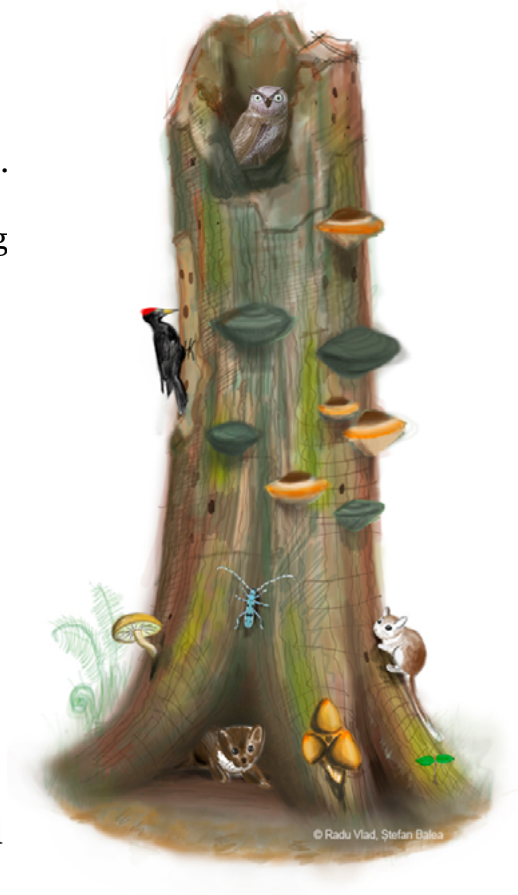
WWF Romania acted as a key catalyst in reframing deadwood management through a science-based approach, highlighting its role in supporting biodiversity and strengthening forest ecosystem resilience.

Voluntary Forest Management Certification:

- Promoted **FSC®** certification, which introduced clear requirements for maintaining ecologically necessary levels of deadwood and habitat trees in forest ecosystems.
- Certification acted as the first practical vector introducing deadwood retention into forest management practices in Romania.

Scientific Research & Capacity Building:

- Led scientific studies assessing the ecological importance of deadwood, demonstrating its role in maintaining biodiversity and strengthening forest resilience.
- Pioneered practical conservation approaches such as "ageing islands" (retention patches), designed to maintain deadwood, habitat trees and enhancing overall forest structural diversity.
- Developed the first national technical guidance dedicated to deadwood management, addressing all forms of deadwood, standing deadwood, lying deadwood, habitat trees, or veteran trees.
- Facilitated consultative processes, awareness campaigns, and training activities to help forest managers adopt practical deadwood management solutions.



Deadwood is the forest's natural vaccine, sustaining biodiversity and strengthening ecosystem resilience

Policy & Advocacy

Advocated for the integration of responsible deadwood management into the Forestry Code, technical forestry norms, and protected area management plans.



5.C CURRENT SITUATION AND PROGRESS ACHIEVED

Today, deadwood management is increasingly recognized as a fundamental component of responsible forest management in Romania.

- The Forestry Code now explicitly integrates deadwood retention as a measure for biodiversity conservation, including provisions supporting the retention of habitat trees, standing or lying deadwood and the "network of ageing islands" in forest ecosystems.

500+ FORESTERS EMPOWERED

- **Over 500 forest practitioners** have been empowered to apply deadwood management, and the topic has been formally integrated into forestry education curricula.

2.8 M+ ha FSC® FORESTS

- Deadwood retention and monitoring are implemented annually across more than **2.8 million hectares of FSC®-certified** forests as proactive biodiversity management measures.
- Voluntary forest-environmental schemes, including measures under the National Strategic Plan within the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), support increased deadwood retention and compensate income losses resulting from harvesting restrictions, in private forests.

+3 m^3/ha DEADWOOD IN 10 YEARS

- The National Forest Inventory indicates an increased volume of standing deadwood: over **3 m^3 /ha added over the last 10 years.**



Forest owners and administrators increasingly perceive deadwood not as waste or risk, but as an essential ecological asset contributing to biodiversity and forest resilience.

5.D NEXT STEPS – SCALING AND CONSOLIDATING DEADWOOD MANAGEMENT

Interest in deadwood conservation has grown significantly among scientists, forest managers, protected-area administrators and policymakers. As the concept continues to mature, further scientific work, practical guidance and incentive mechanisms remain essential to consolidate its implementation.

Policy Framework:

- Support the integration of deadwood-related indicators and management requirements into forthcoming forestry technical norms and guidelines developed as secondary legislation under the Forestry Code
- Embed the "network of ageing islands" concept into Closer-to-Nature Forest Management systems and National Restoration Plans under the EU Nature Restoration Law. The concept involves a strategic spatial designation of forest areas left to age and evolve naturally - featuring bio-groups of deadwood, habitat trees, rare tree species and structural diversity— to create ecological steppingstones across the landscape (ecological matrix).
- Promote adequate incentive mechanisms and voluntary payment schemes for deadwood retention, compatible with EU state-aid rules.

Capacity Building & Implementation:

- Develop practical and cost-effective methodologies for monitoring deadwood distribution and quality at forest landscape level
- Implement the designation of ageing islands within connectivity buffer zones of UNESCO World Heritage forests and protected-area networks, strengthening ecological continuity.
- Expanding stakeholder awareness of the ecological benefits of deadwood through targeted training, knowledge-sharing and outreach initiatives supporting wider adoption of good practices.

Deadwood is no longer seen as a sign of neglect or a threat, but as a living foundation for resilient forests and thriving biodiversity.



6 STRENGTHENING THE PROTECTION OF HIGH CONSERVATION VALUE FORESTS (HCV)

"Preserving what matters most – for nature and people"

6.A SITUATION 20 YEARS AGO – A ROBUST TECHNICAL SYSTEM FACING NEW CONSERVATION CONCEPTS

58 FOREST CATEGORIES

Romania's long-standing functional forest classification system was technically rigorous, defining **58 forest** functional categories focused mainly on critical ecosystem services. Yet it had not yet integrated emerging ecological, social, and cultural conservation perspectives.

- Forests with outstanding ecological, social, or cultural importance were not always clearly recognized within forest planning and management systems.
- Structural gaps existed between Romania's national functional forest classification system and the High Conservation Value (HCV) concept, limiting the establishment of dedicated protection regimes for certain conservation values like rare or threatened forest habitats, critical ecological corridors, or forests essential for the cultural identity of local communities.
- The High Conservation Value (HCV) concept, emerging under FSC® Principle 9, lacked a consistent national identification methodology, and these values were not systematically mapped.



Forest protection functions were largely designated through expert assessments and institutional procedures, with limited stakeholder participation — unlike the multi-stakeholder approach of the HCV framework.

6.B WWF'S STRATEGIC APPROACH – BRINGING HIGH CONSERVATION VALUES INTO FOREST GOVERNANCE

WWF promoted the High Conservation Value (HCV) concept as a reference framework for conservation priorities, complementing Romania's national functional forest classification system and strengthening the protection of key ecological, social, and cultural forest values.

Voluntary & Market Based:

- Coordinated the translation of the HCV concept into national practice through successive practical guides for identification and management, ultimately integrated into the **FSC®** National Forest Stewardship Standard for Romania through a transparent multi-stakeholder process.

100k+ ha
HCV FORESTS

- Conducted field identification, mapping, and participatory management planning for over **100,000** hectares of HCV forests primarily within WWF Priority Conservation Areas
- Built capacity among forest managers and interested stakeholders for HCV identification and management.

Policy & Advocacy:

- Advocated for adequate integration of HCV categories into Romania's national functional forest classification system, bridging voluntary standards and national forest policy.



6.C CURRENT SITUATION AND PROGRESS ACHIEVED

Romania's forest governance framework has evolved to better reflect ecological, social, and cultural forest values, with a strong alignment between the national functional forest classification system and the High Conservation Value (HCV) framework promoted by **FSC®**.

58 to 86
CATEGORIES

- The national functional forest classification system (NT5) has been revised from **58** to **86** functional categories to align better with the HCV framework and address previous conceptual gaps.
- Beyond virgin and quasi-virgin forests (i.e. old-growth forests), new functional subcategories now include forests essential for maintaining the cultural identity of local communities, forests located in ecological corridors, or forests representing rare or threatened ecosystems and species.

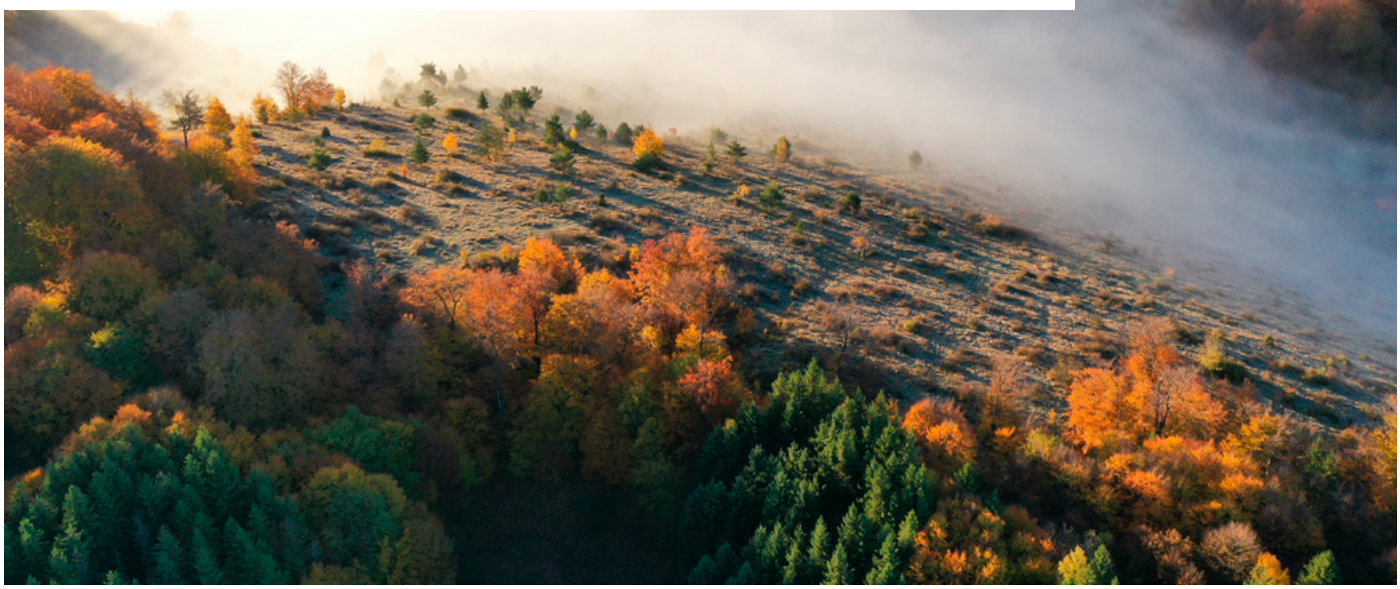
1,000
STAKEHOLDERS

- Empowered over **1,000 stakeholders**, including forest and protected area managers, NGOs or local authorities - through training and guidance to support the identification and management of HCV.



300,000
FSC®
FORESTS

300,000 hectares of High Conservation Value forests within FSC® -certified areas are now managed through transparent and participatory processes, engaging thousands of stakeholders annually - a shift toward inclusive and accountable forest governance.



6.D NEXT STEPS – SCALING PROTECTION AND FINANCING CONSERVATION

Building on the progress achieved so far, the next phase focuses on scaling protection efforts, strengthening multi-stakeholder engagement, and mobilizing fair financing mechanisms to ensure long-term conservation.

Policy Framework & Multi-stakeholder Engagement:

- Support the designation of 10% of forests under strict protection as defined by EU Biodiversity guidelines, including eligible HCVs, riparian ecosystems, and high-value silvo-pastoral mosaic landscapes.
- Advance fair compensation and incentive mechanisms, mobilizing blended finance solutions, including nature and carbon credits, to ensure a just-transition for both forest owners and local communities affected by conservation measures.
- Uphold the "beneficiary pays" principle, ensuring that economic beneficiaries of ecosystem services contribute to conservation, rather than placing the burden solely on affected stakeholders.

Conservation Action & Landscape Restoration:

- Advance the designation of at least 700,000 hectares of forests for the "10% strictly protected areas" under the EU Biodiversity Strategy, prioritizing areas of outstanding biodiversity and ecosystem services are most critical, guided by the High Conservation Value (HCV) framework.
- Pilot restoration of HCVs, focusing on rare and threatened forest ecosystems, aligned with EU Nature Restoration legislation.
- Promote Nature-based Solutions and green value chains in high conservation landscapes, demonstrating that biodiversity protection can support sustainable local economies.



7 SAFEGUARDING PRIMARY AND OLD-GROWTH FORESTS AS INTERNATIONAL HERITAGE

"From overlooked value to multi-stakeholder commitment and permanent protection"

7.A SITUATION 20 YEARS AGO – HIDDEN VALUE, INADEQUATE PROTECTION

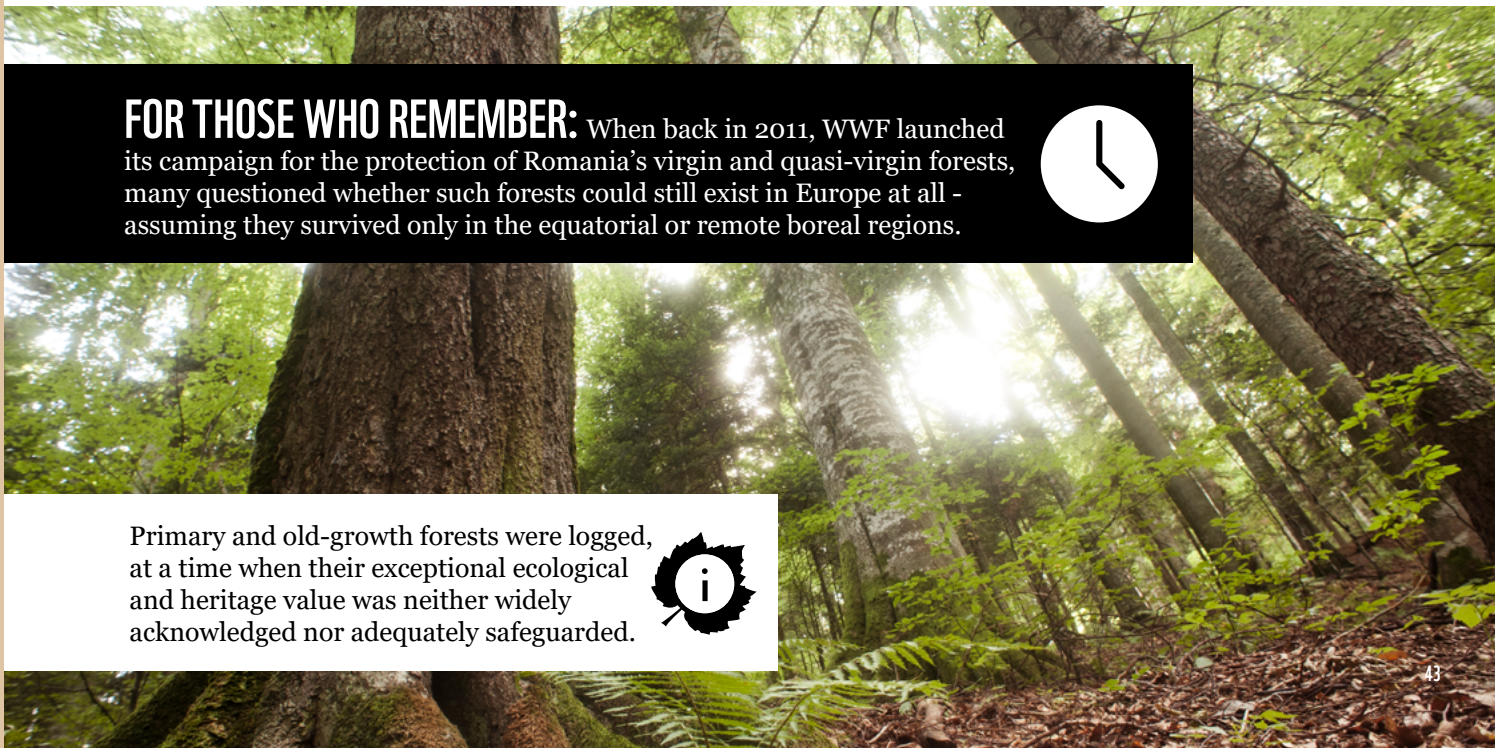
Two decades ago, the true ecological and strategic value of Romania's primary and old-growth forests (OGF) was not broadly recognized - neither in Romania nor at European level. Mechanisms capable of ensuring their strict and lasting protection were largely missing.

- Awareness of their existence, extent, and irreplaceable ecological role remained limited.

8,000 ha
VIRGIN & QUASI-VIRGIN FORESTS

- Although approximately **8,000** hectares of virgin and quasi-virgin forests had been identified in forest management plans according to national technical regulations, there was no shared understanding of definitions and clear identification criteria.
- No dedicated legal framework guaranteed strict protection. Even officially recognized virgin forests could still be subject to silvicultural conservation interventions that risked altering their natural structure and ecological integrity.
- The national distribution and full extent of these forests were not clearly identified and systematically mapped. Existing studies were often preliminary, based largely on desk analysis of forest management data rather than comprehensive field verification.
- The High Conservation Value Forest (HCVF) concept under FSC® Principle 9 was still emerging and did not yet fully capture the exceptional heritage and irreplaceable character of these forests at national level.

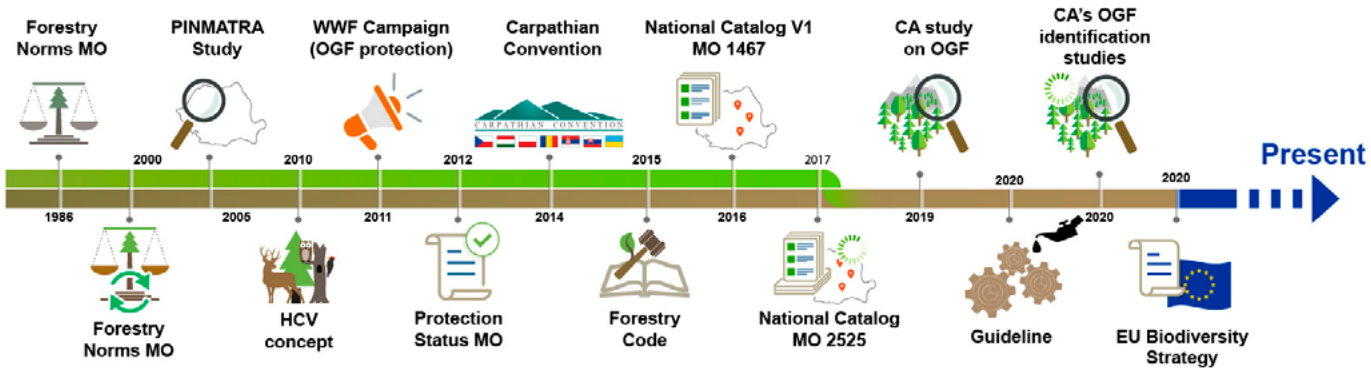
FOR THOSE WHO REMEMBER: When back in 2011, WWF launched its campaign for the protection of Romania's virgin and quasi-virgin forests, many questioned whether such forests could still exist in Europe at all - assuming they survived only in the equatorial or remote boreal regions.



Primary and old-growth forests were logged, at a time when their exceptional ecological and heritage value was neither widely acknowledged nor adequately safeguarded.

7.B WWF'S STRATEGIC APPROACH – FROM RECOGNITION TO PROTECTION

WWF's contribution went beyond raising awareness. It helped transform primary and old-growth forests from a largely overlooked ecological asset into a recognized conservation priority embedded in policy, standards, and legal procedures.



Key milestones in the transition from voluntary conservation initiatives to a national framework for the identification and long-term protection of Romania's primary and old-growth forests, highlighting WWF Romania's contribution to this transformation

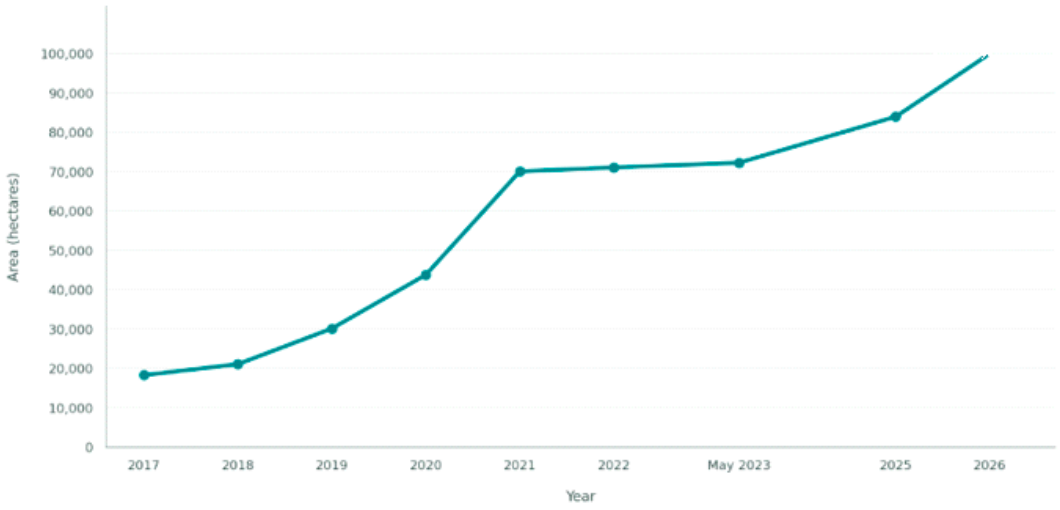
Voluntary and Preventive Market Safeguards:

- Development of the National HCV framework through a participatory process under Principle 9 of the **FSC®** Standards, introducing regionally harmonised criteria that better reflect the specific ecological and heritage value of these forests.
- Promoted the application of robust Due Diligence Systems (DDS) under Controlled Wood requirements to ensure that timber from identified primary and old-growth forests was excluded from certified supply chains until formal legal protection status was established.

Policy and Advocacy:

100,000+ SIGNATURES

- Launched a national awareness campaign in 2011 that mobilized over 100,000 signatures in less than one month, placing the protection of virgin and quasi-virgin forests firmly on the public and political agenda.
- Advocated for expanding strict protection, through Romania's NRRP by contributing to the identification methodology and public consultation process, helping establish the National Catalogue of Priority Biodiversity Areas, which doubled the area of state-owned forests under biodiversity-focused protection to around 340,000 hectares in its first phase.
- Supported the creation and operationalization of the National Catalogue of Virgin and Quasi-virgin Forests as a dynamic ("living") mechanism for continuous identification and long-term strict protection - a complex reform process that required coordinated amendments to five distinct legislative acts to make the protection framework operational in practice.



A decade o progress in protecting Primary and Old-Growth Forests

Source: Ministry of Environment, Waters and Forests

Field-Based Identification & Technical Support:

600k+ ha PRE-ASSESSED

- Facilitated public consultations, systematic remote landscape screening, and field verification within a large-scale identification process, contributing to the pre-assessment of **over 600,000** hectares for potential primary and old-growth forest identification.

66k+ ha STRICTLY PROTECTED

- Conducted formal field identification and completed the legal procedures required to secure long-term strict protection status for more than **66,000** hectares of validated old-growth forests.

Capacity Building & Stakeholder Engagement:

100+ KEY STAKEHOLDERS

- Trained over **100 key stakeholders** -including forest managers, protected area administrators, NGOs, and public authorities - strengthening both technical capacity and public participation to ensure that the identification and inclusion of forests in the National Catalogue are transparent, science-based, and legally robust.

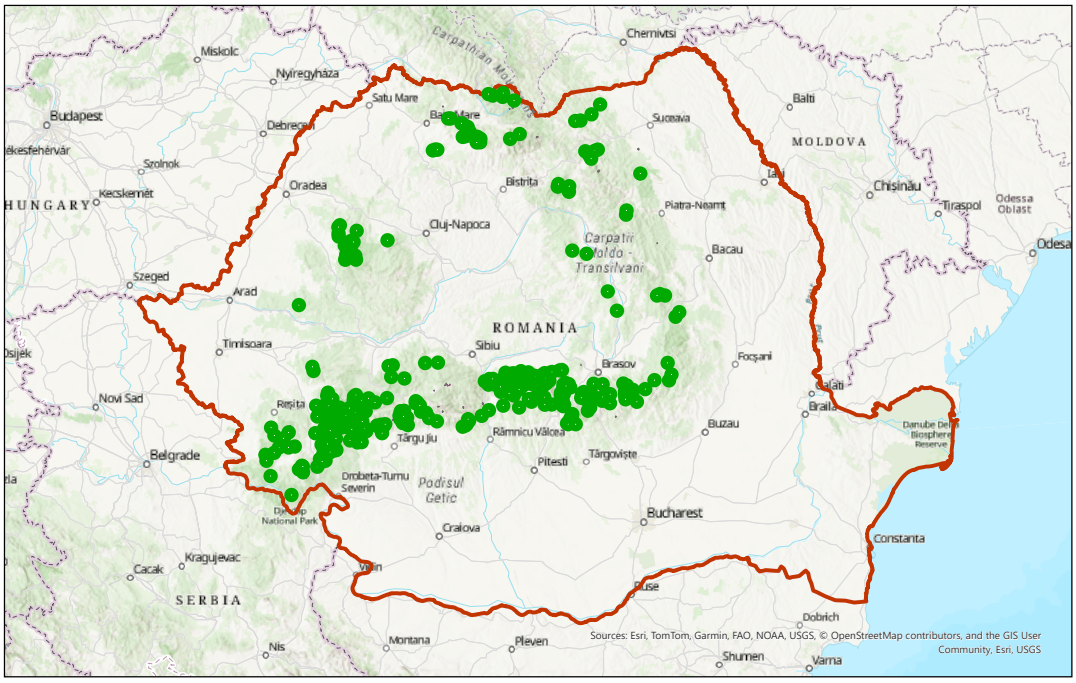


Primary and old-growth forests have moved from marginal recognition to structured protection, becoming a national conservation priority and a preserved European heritage.

7.C CURRENT SITUATION AND PROGRESS ACHIEVED

Over the past decade, Romania has made significant progress in strengthening the protection of primary and old-growth forests, driven by increasing public awareness and reinforced political commitment.

- Romania is now among the few EU countries in CEE with a dedicated legal framework establishing clear procedures for identification, designation, and strict protection of primary and old-growth forests, developed through multi-stakeholder platforms.



Source: Ministry of Environment, Waters and Forests

- The national **FSC®** forest management standard, adopted through a transparent and participatory process, harmonizes identification criteria and indicators in line with the Carpathian Convention. Several emblematic forest areas were safeguarded through certification mechanisms even before consolidated legal protection was in place.

100,000+ ha
STRICTLY PROTECTED

- About **100,000 hectares** of primary and old-growth forests are currently secured under long-term strict-protection regimes, through several protection mechanisms: UNESCO World Heritage designation, inclusion in the National Catalogue of Virgin and Quasi-Virgin Forests, classification as virgin or quasi-virgin forests in forest management plans, and inclusion in the National Catalogue of Priority Biodiversity Areas.

- The process remains open for the identification of additional eligible primary and oldgrowth forests, which can be assessed and granted strict protection through existing legal mechanisms. Equally important is the continued consolidation of forests under strict protection into a comprehensive and regularly updated inventory, ensuring accurate national accounting, transparent reporting, and effective monitoring of conservation progress.

7.D NEXT STEPS: CONSOLIDATE PROTECTION

Policy & Strategic Direction:

- Advance the designation of 10% of forest areas under strict protection aligned with the EU Biodiversity Strategy, encompassing not only virgin and quasi-virgin forests (i.e. primary and old-growth forests as defined under national legislation), but also broadening the scope to include other ancient forests with a high degree of naturalness that provide essential multiple protective functions.

- The revised methodology for identifying areas for 10% strict protection should enable the inclusion of forests that, while not meeting all national leagal criteria for virgin and quasi-virgin forest status, (i) satisfy a minimum set of naturalness indicators grounded in the scientific reference model of oldgrowth forest characteristics across Romania's forest types; and (ii) fulfill formally assigned protective functions under which wood production is excluded and management remains compatible with the strict protection regime defined by the EU Biodiversity Strategy.

This approach is necessary to avoid undermining the continuity of Romania's traditional close-to-nature forestry model, which has deliberately maintained natural forest structures over time.

Governance & Implementation:

- Maintain transparent, science-based designation processes with continued stakeholder involvement to strengthen legitimacy, predictability, and long-term sustainability of the strict protection framework.

- Ensure functional compensation mechanisms for forest owners / administrators. Nevertheless, just compensating for the rightful owners who will be subject to restrictions is NOT enough. A fair transition must also address the forest dependent communities whose livelihoods are affected by limitations in access to forest resource through tailored measures that respect traditional practices and promote sustainable alternatives.



8 RECOGNIZING FORESTS OF OUTSTANDING UNIVERSAL VALUE (UNESCO)

"From national treasure to global recognition and lasting value for local communities"

8.A SITUATION 20 YEARS AGO – UNRECOGNIZED GLOBAL VALUE

Twenty years ago, no Romanian forests were recognized as having Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) under UNESCO World Heritage criteria.

- Forest conservation operated in isolation, without integration into international heritage recognition mechanisms, ecosystem services valuation frameworks, or local sustainable development strategies.
- Market-based instruments such as **FSC®** Ecosystem Services certification were not yet implemented in Romania.



Although Romania hosted some of Europe's most valuable primary and old-growth beech forests, their global significance had not yet been formally acknowledged at international level.

8.A WWF'S STRATEGIC APPROACH – FROM GLOBAL HERITAGE RECOGNITION TO COMMUNITY -DRIVEN SUSTAINABLE VALUE

WWF adopted a proactive and integrated approach to secure international recognition for some of the Romania's most emblematic primary and old-growth forests, linking global heritage status with market-based instruments and tangible community benefits.

Policy & International Advocacy:

- Promoted the integration of primary and old-growth forests into EU biodiversity policy and supported the inscription of some of Romania's most significant forest sites on the UNESCO World Heritage List under Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) criteria.
- Supported the national UNESCO nomination process through financial assistance, technical expertise, and sustained advocacy - proposing three of the eight sites included at national level and contributing to the development of the required documentation.
- Participated in transnational working groups aligned with IUCN guidance for the Ancient and Primeval Beech Forests of the Carpathians and Other Regions of Europe, ensuring effective management of UNESCO buffer zones and integration with Natura 2000 site management plans.

Market & Ecosystem Services Innovation:

- Supported a Forest Management Unit (FMU) responsible for one UNESCO World Heritage Forest site in obtaining FSC® Ecosystem Services certification, with a focus on biodiversity conservation and sustainable tourism.
- Facilitated the development of a voluntary Payment for Ecosystem Services (PES) mechanism to support conservation actions and visitor infrastructure, strengthening the link between forest protection and local community well-being.



8.C CURRENT SITUATION AND PROGRESS ACHIEVED

Some of Romania's most emblematic primary and old-growth forests have been internationally recognized as part of the UNESCO World Heritage List under the Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) criteria.



- More than **24,000 hectares** have received UNESCO recognition, with about **65,000 hectares** designated as buffer zones ensuring ecological connectivity and long-term protection.
- Romania's first FSC® Ecosystem Services Certificate - focused on biodiversity conservation and sustainable tourism - has been awarded to a Forest Management Unit that hosts one of the UNESCO World Heritage forest sites at Strâmbu-Băiuţ (Maramures county).
- A local PES initiative has been developed, designed to support visitor infrastructure, environmental education programs, and community-based initiatives - strengthening the connection between conservation and sustainable rural development.



The recognition of Romania's primary and old-growth forests as Outstanding Universal Value represents a historic milestone for Romanian forestry - affirming their exceptional global significance under the highest scientific and cultural authority, UNESCO

8.D NEXT STEPS – LINKING GLOBAL HERITAGE WITH LOCAL SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

WWF is following a proactive and integrated approach to anchor Romania's primary and old-growth forests within international heritage frameworks, while linking global recognition to market-based instruments and tangible community benefits.

Policy & Ecological Connectivity:

- Improve management plans for UNESCO buffer zones by piloting a "network of ageing islands" to enhance structural continuity, resilience, and landscape-level ecological connectivity.

Ecosystem Services & Local Development:

- Valorize these globally significant forests within an appropriate framework that supports sustainable local development, including education, research, and nature-based tourism opportunities.

- Develop forest therapy trails in Băiuţ, linked to Ecosystem Services certification, positioning the area at the intersection of conservation, health, and sustainable rural development.



9 UNLOCKING ENVIRONMENTAL PAYMENTS TO FOREST CONSERVATION

"From unpaid stewardship to the first biodiversity payments in Romania"

9.A SITUATION 20 YEARS AGO – CONSERVATION WITHOUT COMPENSATION

Following EU accession, Romania had to reconcile forest restitution, property rights and the expansion of the Natura 2000 network. However, conservation obligations were introduced without economic instruments to support forest owners.

- Environmental restrictions were imposed without compensation mechanisms.
- Protected area designations often occurred with limited transparency and consultation of affected stakeholders.
- No silvo-environmental schemes or incentives existed to support biodiversity conservation or close-to-nature forestry practices.
- The highly regulated forestry framework limited the scope for demonstrating additionality under EU funding rules, leaving many conservation efforts ineligible for compensatory support from European public funds.

Forest conservation relied largely on uncompensated stewardship, placing the economic burden of environmental protection on forest owners.



9.B WWF'S STRATEGIC APPROACH – ENABLING INCENTIVES FOR FOREST CONSERVATION



WWF Romania has advocated the introduction of fair economic incentives for forest conservation, highlighting the need to align environmental responsibilities with adequate financial support mechanisms.

Through socio-economic impact analyses, policy dialogue and public awareness campaigns, WWF brought attention to the systemic funding gap affecting forest owners and administrators who contribute to biodiversity conservation, climate adaptation and closer-to-nature forest management.

WWF promoted the need for public financing mechanisms dedicated to forests, supporting compensation for conservation restrictions, investments in climate-resilient forest management, and the development of a sustainable circular forest bioeconomy.

So far, the most tangible progress has been achieved through WWF's policy and advocacy efforts supporting the introduction of silvo-environmental schemes under the CAP framework.

- Advocated the introduction of silvo-environmental schemes within the CAP framework, enabling EU funding for voluntary forest conservation practices.
- Contributed to the development of the national measure "Silvo-environmental services, climate services and forest conservation".

9.C CURRENT SITUATION AND PROGRESS ACHIEVED

Despite covering over 43.5% of the EU's territory, forests and other wooded land receive only a marginal share of public funding (less than 1% of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) budget), a structural mismatch that fails to reflect the essential climate, biodiversity and socio-economic services forests provide, as well as the growing responsibilities placed on forest managers.

In this context, the most tangible progress in Romania so far has been the introduction of silvo-environmental schemes under the Common Agricultural Policy, currently the only operational financial mechanism supporting voluntary forest conservation practices in Romania.

- EU compensatory payments for voluntary biodiversity- and climate-friendly forest practices are now available to private forest owners through the former M15 framework and, currently, through the DR-07 "Silvo-environment and climate" scheme, supporting additional conservation measures across approximately 200,000 hectares of forest.

- The scheme creates a predictable cooperation framework between public authorities and forest owners.

Although still a drop in the ocean, the silvo-environmental scheme proves that public financing for forest stewardship is possible, opening the path toward a fairer allocation of public funds that better reflects the strategic value forests deliver to society.



9.D NEXT STEPS – SCALING INCENTIVES FOR FOREST ECOSYSTEM SERVICES

Forests provide essential benefits for society, from climate stability and biodiversity conservation to rural resilience, yet the economic systems meant to support their stewardship still fall short of reflecting their true value. Unlocking fair and predictable financing for forests is therefore essential to secure their long-term protection and sustainable management.

Policy Framework

- Promote a dedicated EU financing mechanism for forests reflecting the key values for climate, biodiversity, and economic resilience.
- Formally recognizing forests as a strategic sector on competitiveness agenda and sustainable circular bioeconomy.
- Implement transparent and performance-based compensation mechanisms, contributing to ecosystem protection and climate resilience.

Strategic Perspective

- Sustainable forest conservation requires recognizing that ecosystem services generate public value and must therefore be fairly supported through dedicated economic instruments.



10 BRINGING FOREST-DEPENDENT COMMUNITIES INTO THE HEART OF FOREST GOVERNANCE

"Conservation is most effective when communities are part of it"

10.A SITUATION 20 YEARS AGO - INVISIBLE DEPENDENCE, UNRECOGNIZED RIGHTS

Twenty years ago, Romania's forest policies failed to formally acknowledge Forest Dependent Communities (FDC), despite their long-standing and deep-rooted cultural and economic reliance on forest resources, leaving them without meaningful participation in forest governance and decision-making processes.

- In large parts of rural Romania, forests were, and in many areas still are, a fundamental pillar of local livelihoods, providing: (i) energy for heating and cooking; (ii) timber for housing and farm infrastructure; (iii) raw materials for traditional wood craftsmanship central to cultural identity; (iv) forest-based socio-economic foundations sustaining rural livelihoods, subsistence, and household income.

  Despite this structural dependence, forest policies largely overlooked the socio-economic realities and rarely assessed the impacts of management restrictions. As a result: (*) local needs were insufficiently integrated into forest management planning; (*) conservation measures were often adopted without structured socio-economic impact assessments.



Successful forest conservation requires balancing biodiversity protection with the livelihoods and well-being of forest-dependent communities



Forest-dependent communities existed in reality, but not in policy.

10.B WWF'S STRATEGIC APPROACH – FROM SOCIAL REALITY TO POLICY INTEGRATION

For more than two decades, WWF-Romania worked to integrate the social dimension of forest governance into national policy frameworks, promoting the recognition of forest-dependent communities as legitimate stakeholders.

Evidence-based Policy & Advocacy

- Advocating for the integration of FDCs needs into national forestry policy framework, starting with their formal recognition in the National Forest Strategy 2030 (SNP30) and subsequent legislation.
- Facilitated dialogue between communities, authorities, and forest managers to clarify legitimate access needs and sustainability safeguards.
- Co-develop through multi-stakeholder platforms, clear designation criteria for Forest-Dependent Communities (FDCs), based on cumulative criteria such as livelihood reliance, traditional continuity, feasibility of alternatives and sustainable resource use.

Voluntary and Market-Based Mechanisms

- Promoted management approaches that safeguard forest sites and resources fundamental for meeting the basic needs of local communities within the **FSC®** certification framework, particularly through the High Conservation Value concept (HCV5).
- Strengthened participatory processes within certified forest management units, ensuring meaningful engagement and conflict-resolution mechanisms for local communities through culturally appropriate approaches.

Community dependence on forests is **no longer treated as an informal reality, but as a legitimate socio-economic dimension** that must be assessed and integrated into decision-making.







10.C CURRENT SITUATION AND PROGRESS ACHIEVED

Today, Forest-Dependent Communities are formally acknowledged within Romania's national forest policy framework.

- The National Forest Strategy 2030 (SNP30) explicitly recognizes rural communities dependent on forest resources and calls for the regulation of sustainable access to these resources.
- The revised Forestry Code introduces the FDCs concept and establishes the legal basis for their formal designation, alongside mechanisms to safeguard legitimate interests and ensure equitable access to forest resources, particularly in areas affected by conservation restrictions.
- These developments lay the foundation for integrating social, cultural, and traditional forest-based activities into forest management planning, both through legal provisions and voluntary management practices.
- They also strengthen the link between forest governance and the socio-economic role of local forest economies, including horizontal and vertical value chains related to timber and non-timber forest products as an important pillar of rural resilience.

While implementation remains ongoing, the **transition from policy invisibility to formal recognition marks a fundamental structural shift**: FDCs are now emerging as legitimate partners in shaping a more balanced and socially rooted model of sustainable forest governance.



10.D NEXT STEPS – ENSURING A JUST AND PREDICTABLE TRANSITION

Formal recognition is only the first step. Ensuring long-term stability requires clear implementation mechanisms, reliable data, and fair economic opportunities for forest-dependent communities.

Policy Framework

- Integrate the recognition of FDCs consistently into secondary legislation and cross-sectoral policies.
- Develop a transparent, data-driven national framework to identify, map, and formally designate FDCs based on clear criteria and defined institutional responsibilities
- Ensure that conservation measures or management strategies restricting access to forest resources are preceded by socio-economic impact assessments and followed by fair, transparent, and performance-based compensation mechanisms.

Just Transition & Rural Resilience

- Support a just transition for FDCs through targeted investments in a sustainable forest bioeconomy and diversified green value chains
- Design and promote income-generating models, including Nature-Based Solutions and high value-added bio-based products, strengthening local economic resilience while maintaining sustainable forest management.



The long-term objective is not only to prevent marginalization, but to empower FDCs as genuine partners in forest governance - recognizing their historic role in shaping the forest landscapes that society cherishes and depends on today.



LESSONS LEARNED FOR THE JOURNEY

As we already mentioned, forests teach us that growth is never linear. Storms, droughts, and disturbances are part of how ecosystems adapt and become more resilient. The same is true for change in the real world. Over the past twenty years, progress has not followed a straight line. There were setbacks, resistance, trial and error, and the need to constantly adjust our course. Yet each challenge has offered a lesson - helping us better understand what lasting transformation truly requires.

THESE ARE SOME OF THE LESSONS WE CARRY FORWARD INTO THE WORK THAT STILL LIES AHEAD:

Lasting change needs fair foundations

Effective conservation cannot stand without fair and functional compensation mechanisms for forest landowners and communities affected by restrictions. Sustainability must be ecological but also social and economic at the same time.

A just transition must stay truly just

Protection measures only last when local communities see a future for themselves. A just transition means supporting livelihoods, dignity, and opportunity alongside conservation goals.

We only understand what we have lost once it is gone

We know that it is no coincidence that Romania's forests are part of Europe's "Green Heart." This is the result of close-to-nature forestry practices that were developed and applied with consistency for nearly a century. These traditions have helped shape resilient forests and landscapes of exceptional value. That is why we must protect and strengthen these good practices, even when they are misunderstood, overlooked, underfunded or challenged by short-term interests. Because what is easy to neglect today may be impossible to restore tomorrow.

Systems must evolve with reality

Combating illegal logging requires moving beyond outdated control methods toward modern systems that focus on transparent traceability, evidence-based approaches, and market accountability. These systems must continuously adapt to evolving risks and practices in the timber supply chain. Simpler, smarter, and more efficient approaches not only strengthen protection, but also reduce administrative burdens and improve the competitiveness of the sector.



Just like forests, meaningful change grows through adaptation, learning, and shared responsibility. These lessons guide the path ahead.

Awareness and education are as important as policy

Forests cannot be protected by regulations alone. A deep connection to forests, along with public understanding of the challenges they face and the real solutions available, is essential for lasting change.

Participation requires capacity

Transparent processes only work when people have the knowledge, confidence, and support to engage constructively. Capacity building is therefore not an add-on, it is essential.

What is not shared can be lost

Silence allows even truth to fade. Making our work visible, communicating results clearly, and engaging both supporters and critics are vital parts of creating lasting impact.

Reform requires persistence - and proof.

Lasting change depends on sustained effort and mindset shifts, while viable models and proven solutions speak louder than pledges.



FROM PROGRESS TO RESPONSIBILITY



The journey continues - and the next chapter will be shaped by the choices we make today.

PARTNERS IN CHANGE: TOGETHER WE HAVE MOVED FORESTS

Over the past two decades, the work to protect and restore Romania's forests has never been a solo effort. It has been, and it is a collective undertaking shaped by diverse actors - each bringing their own expertise, commitment, and sense of responsibility.

This chapter is not a catalogue of logos or a roll call of supporters. Rather, it is an acknowledgment of the kinds of collaboration that matter - partnerships rooted in shared purpose, mutual respect, and long-term commitment. Real progress is built not by transactions but by trust, shared learning, and joint action.

We recognize and value contributions from across the spectrum:

INSTITUTIONAL AND PUBLIC PARTNERS

European and national public funding and policy frameworks have provided the backbone for systemic change. Support from EU programmes and cooperation instruments - including the European Union, EUKI, Norway Grants, Swiss development cooperation, and national schemes - has enabled investments in governance reform, innovation in traceability, and forest landscape conservation at scale.

Local and regional public authorities, including municipalities, have also played an important role in supporting conservation measures and community-level engagement.

ACADEMIC AND KNOWLEDGE PARTNERS

Universities and national research institutions with forestry and environmental expertise -including academic and research centres in Braşov, Suceava, Cluj, and Bucharest - have contributed scientific knowledge, field research, and technical input that strengthened the evidence base for responsible forest management and conservation approaches.

FIELD AND FOREST MANAGEMENT PARTNERS

Our work would not be possible without the collaboration with forest administrations and practitioners - from State-owned enterprises such as Romsilva to private forest districts - whose practical knowledge and on-the-ground experience have grounded policy discussions in everyday realities.

Professional associations from the forestry and forest-based sectors have also provided valuable perspectives, linking policy discussions with field realities and professional practice.

CIVIL SOCIETY AND COMMUNITY VOICES

Coalitions of environmental and social NGOs, grassroots organizations, and forest-dependent communities have been essential in ensuring that forest governance is transparent, participatory, and responsive to social and environmental needs. Their active engagement has deepened the legitimacy and relevance of reforms.



RESPONSIBLE PRIVATE SECTOR ENGAGEMENT

Shaping markets for responsible forest management requires partners from the private sector who are willing to go beyond compliance and work to improve transparency and sustainability in supply chains. These collaborations have opened space for innovation and helped demonstrate that economic activity and environmental stewardship can advance together.

Voluntary standards such as **FSC®** (Forest Stewardship Council) have also served as complementary mechanisms in promoting responsible forest principles while providing structured spaces for dialogue, dispute resolution, and continuous engagement among diverse stakeholders.

Within this broader landscape of responsible business engagement, the **long-term partnership between WWF and IKEA** has played a particularly significant role in supporting strategic initiatives related to responsible sourcing, improved traceability, and the conservation of forests with high conservation value in Romania with a focus on primary and Old-Growth Forest protection.

SHARED RESPONSIBILITY, SHARED IMPACT

The partnerships we celebrate here do not end in themselves; they are means to lasting impact. What makes them meaningful is not the number of logos, but the shared commitment to solutions that endure - from opening forest governance, strengthening traceability systems, to supporting inclusive participation and community resilience.

This chapter recognizes not just support received, but the shared journey we continue. ilient. The same is true for change in the real world. Over the past twenty years, progress has not followed a straight line. There were setbacks, resistance, trial and error, and the need to constantly adjust our course. Yet each challenge has offered a lesson - helping us better understand what lasting transformation truly requires.



CONTRIBUTING TO CHANGE: 20 YEARS OF IMPACT

TRANSPARENCY AND GOVERNANCE



100%

digital timber traceability system (SUMAL), providing real-time public access to timber transport data from forest to downstream supply chain stages

100,000+ USERS

1+ MILLION

public verifications annually through the online timber tracking platform, enabling citizen oversight and strengthening transparency across the timber supply chain.



FOREST INTEGRITY AND ECOLOGICAL RESILIENCE



60,000+ ha

of forest expansion through afforestation and the natural regeneration of former pasturelands.





74%+

ecological connectivity in forest area.



70+%

of forests have a natural composition adapted to local site conditions, supporting ecosystem stability and biodiversity conservation.



80+%

of Romania's forests regenerate naturally, demonstrating the resilience of forest ecosystems





25+ m^3/ha

increase in average standing volumes, reaching approximately

347 m^3/ha

among the highest levels in the European Union due to the continued application of close-to-nature silvicultural practices.



230+ M m^3

increase in national growing stock, strengthening forests' contribution to carbon storage and climate mitigation.

3+ m^3/ha

increase in standing deadwood volume over the last ten years, reflecting improved biodiversity-oriented forest management.



SAFEGUARDING EUROPE'S NATURAL HERITAGE



100,000 ha

of primary and old-growth forests under strict protection.







24,000 ha

of forests inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List under the Outstanding Universal Value designation, supported by 65,000 hectares of buffer zones ensuring ecological connectivity and long-term protection.



300,000 ha

of High Conservation Value (HCV) forests identified and managed through participatory processes involving multiple stakeholders.



430,000 ha

already listed in Romania's National Catalogue of Priority Biodiversity Areas.







RESPONSIBLE FOREST MANAGEMENT AND STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

2.8M ha

of FSC® -certified forests, where additional stakeholder engagement and transparency mechanisms support responsible forest management.





200,000 ha

enrolled in voluntary biodiversity and climate-related conservation measures, supporting private forest owners who adopt enhanced environmental practices.



5,000+ stakeholders

empowered — forest managers, public authorities, experts, NGOs and community representatives — strengthening national capacity for responsible forest



1+ million

citizens reached and involved in supporting responsible forest policies through civic participation, public monitoring and awareness initiatives.

BUSINESS AND CIVIL SOCIETY PUSHING FOR A RESPONSIBLE FOREST SECTOR

TOGETHER POSSIBLE: WHY DOES WWF ENGAGE WITH THE PRIVATE SECTOR?

Forests are shaped not only by public policy and local management decisions, but also by global markets and value chains. This is why WWF works not only with governments, communities and civil society, but also with private-sector actors that share common goals and are willing to contribute to meaningful change. By bringing together conservation expertise and business influence, such partnerships can help improve how forests are valued, managed, protected and restored, while fostering greater transparency, accountability and stewardship across the sector.



WWF & IKEA: ADVANCING RESPONSIBLE FOREST MANAGEMENT IN ROMANIA

The long-standing partnership between WWF and IKEA, established globally in 2002, is one example of how WWF engages with private-sector actors to achieve lasting conservation impact. Built around a shared ambition to advance responsible forest management and contribute to resilient forest landscapes, the partnership has supported forest conservation efforts in 21 countries over more than two decades, helping to strengthen forest stewardship, biodiversity conservation and the livelihoods of forest dependent communities.

Romania has been part of this journey from the beginning. Over the years, the WWF-IKEA partnership has supported WWF-Romania's broader efforts to promote responsible forest management with funding for conservation work, technical expertise and collaborative initiatives. This included work related to High Conservation Value Forests, particularly the protection of primary and old-growth forests, the advancement of third-party verified certification systems such as FSC®, improvements in transparency and traceability in forest product supply chains, and support for stakeholder engagement and dialogue (see Chapters 1-10).

Over the past two decades, WWF Romania has worked with a wide range of actors, from local communities and forest owners to public institutions, researchers and businesses. The WWF-IKEA partnership represents a strong example of this 'together possible' approach, reflecting the role that long-term collaboration can play in supporting WWF Romania's forest programme and its conservation objectives.

STRUCTURAL CHALLENGES AHEAD



Despite significant progress, several structural challenges remain.

- √ Less than 1% of EU funding currently supports sustainable forest management, biodiversity protection and climate resilience, despite forests covering more than 43% of the EU's territory and providing essential ecosystem services for European society. Forests should therefore be recognized as a strategic pillar of sustainable development in Europe, requiring dedicated financial instruments to support investments, conservation efforts and fair compensation for forest owners and managers facing environmental restrictions.

- √ Limited predictability of the forest policy framework remains a key structural challenge. Ensuring coherence and stability requires consistent alignment with the strategic directions set out in the National Forest Strategy 2030. All subsequent reforms in forestry - including secondary legislation derived from the Forest Code -should follow these agreed priorities and result indicators, providing a clear and predictable pathway for the sector's development.

- √ Illegal logging has shifted toward covert activities embedded within the shadow economy. However, it remains a persistent challenge affecting environmental values, distorting fair economic competition in the forest sector, and eroding the rule of law. Continued reforms are needed to further strengthen the governance architecture, improve enforcement capacity, and deploy new modern monitoring and verification tools for timber traceability.

- √ The way we value wood determines the way we manage forests. Around 50% of harvested timber is still used as firewood or biomass, while less than 10% reaches high value-added wood processing industries. This highlights the need to strengthen a sustainable circular forest bioeconomy based on cascading wood use, capable of incentivizing the continuation and improvement of Closer-to-Nature Forest Management (CNFM) in Romania.

- √ Growing political instability at national and global levels, risks pushing environmental sustainability down the policy agenda in favor of short-term economic competitiveness. In this shifting context, voluntary market-based instruments — particularly credible forest certification systems — are re-emerging as essential enablers, aligning market incentives with sustainability goals and supporting the transition toward a resilient and circular forest bioeconomy.

- √ Strengthening stakeholder engagement and transparency remains a cornerstone of effective forest governance. Empowering stakeholders with the capacity to engage meaningfully in decision-making processes is essential for building trust and co-creating solutions. Persistent myths and polarized narratives often obscure viable pathways forward; transparency and access to reliable information are therefore critical to enabling informed dialogue and advancing inclusive, multi-stakeholder solutions in the public interest.



WWF ROMANIA'S DONORS & PARTNERS

We thank the organizations, institutions, experts and donors who have contributed over the years to WWF Romania's activities and projects dedicated to forest conservation and responsible forest management in Romania. The results presented in this report have been made possible through collaboration, expertise, engagement and support provided at different stages of this journey.

NOTES:

1. The list below (in alphabetical order) is not exhaustive and includes organizations, institutions and donors identified during the preparation of this report.
2. This report reflects solely the analysis, conclusions and views of WWF Romania. The inclusion of organizations, institutions and donors in this section does not imply their endorsement or approval of the report's content.

- Academia de Ştiinţe Agricole şi Silvice „Gheorghe Ionescu-Şişeşti" (ASAS)
- Academia Română, Centrul de Studii şi Cercetări de Biodiversitate Agrosilvică „Acad. David Davidescu"
- Administraţia Parcul Naţional Domogled-Valea Cernei
- Administraţia Parcului Natural Apuseni
- Agenţia Metropolitană pentru Dezvoltare Durabilă Braşov
- Apple Inc.
- Asociaţia Administratorilor de Arii Naturale Protejate din România (AAANP)
- Asociaţia EcoLogic
- Asociaţia Ecologistă din Maramureş
- Asociaţia Forestierilor din România (ASFOR)
- Asociaţia Judeţeană a Vânătorilor şi Pescarilor Sportivi Maramureş (AJVPS Maramureş), România
- Asociaţia Multiculturală „Johannes Bánffy Hunyades"
- Asociaţia pentru Certificare Forestieră
- Asociaţia pentru Dezvoltarea Durabilă a Comunităţilor Locale "România Rurală" (ARR)
- Asociaţia Producătorilor de Mobilă din România (APMR)
- Asociaţia Proprietarilor şi Administratorilor de Păduri din Estul Transilvaniei
- BRD, Groupe Société Générale S.A.
- Brico Dépôt România
- Carrefour România
- Centrul de Dezvoltare SMART
- Coaliţia Natura 2000 România
- ENI Cross-border Cooperation Programme 2014-2020
- ENPI FLEG II (Forest Law Enforcement and Governance)
- Forest Stewardship Council (FSC)
- Fundaţia ADEPT Transilvania
- Fundaţia Mihai Eminescu Trust
- Fundaţia ProPark pentru Arii Protejate
- Garda Forestieră Cluj
- Garda Forestieră Naţională
- Garda Forestieră Suceava
- Greenpeace România
- Institutul Naţional de Cercetare-Dezvoltare în Silvicultură „Marin Drăcea" (INCDS)
- Inter IKEA Group
- Internal Security Fund (ISF) - Police 2014-2020
- Interreg Danube Region Programme 2021-2027
- Interreg NEXT HU-SK-RO-UA 2021-2027
- Joint Operational Programme Romania – Ukraine 2014 – 2020 - financed by ENI CBC-
- Lidl România
- LIFE Programme Climate Change Adaptation (CCA) 2014-2020
- Mecanismul Financiar al Spaţiului Economic European (SEE) 2009-2014
- Ministerul Mediului, Apelor şi Pădurilor (MMAP)
- Mondi Group
- Muzeul Maramureşean din Sighetu Marmaţiei
- Nhood România
- Ocolul Silvic Comunal Telciu R.A.
- Ocolul Silvic Municipal Baia Mare
- Ocolul Silvic Privat Baraolt
- Ocolul Silvic Sighişoara
- Primăria Comunei Băiuţ
- Primăria comunei Lăpuş
- Primăria Comunei Şinca Veche
- Primăria Municipiului Braşov
- Programul de cooperare elveţiano-român (Swiss-Romanian Cooperation Programme)
- Programul Operaţional Infrastructură Mare (POIM) 2014-2020
- RakhivEcoTur NGO
- Regia Naţională a Pădurilor Romsilva (RNP Romsilva)
- Regia Naţională a Pădurilor Romsilva, Direcţia Silvică Caraş-Severin
- Regia Naţională a Pădurilor Romsilva, Direcţia Silvică Maramureş
- Regia Naţională a Pădurilor Romsilva, Direcţia Silvică Suceava
- Regia Publică Locală a Pădurilor Stejarul R.A.
- Regia Publică Locală Ocolul Silvic Pădurile Făgăraşului R.A.
- Regia Publică Locală Ocolul Silvic Pădurile Şincii R.A.
- Reţeaua WWF
- Societatea Ornitologică din România (SOR)
- TerraSteel
- Universitatea de Ştiinţe Agricole şi Medicină Veterinară din Cluj-Napoca, Facultatea de Silvicultură şi Cadastru
- Universitatea din Bucureşti
- Universitatea din Bucureşti, Centrul de Cercetare în Ecologie Sistemică şi Sustenabilitate
- Universitatea Transilvania din Braşov, Facultatea de Silvicultură şi Exploatări Forestiere
- Universitatea „Ştefan cel Mare" din Suceava, Facultatea de Silvicultură
- Weleda AG

CREDITS

BEHIND THE REPORT

The people, partnerships and contributions behind this publication

WWF-Romania

2026

Coordination

Radu Vlad

Contributors

Radu Melu
Cătălin Vasile
Magda Constantin

Graphic Design & Layout

Daydream Creative Studio

Illustrations

Ștefan Balea

Photo Credits

Front and Back Covers: Sorin Onișor/WWF-Romania
Rest of the photos: WWF-Romania

Disclaimer

This report reflects WWF-Romania's perspectives and experience regarding the evolution of forest governance and sustainable forest management in Romania over the past 20 years.


ROMANIA'S FORESTS ARE A LEGACY SHAPED BY GENERATIONS OF STEWARDSHIP AND A CLOSER-TO-NATURE APPROACH TO FOREST MANAGEMENT. THEIR FUTURE IS A RESPONSIBILITY WE ALL SHARE.
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