COMMENT

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Beech trees, which are vulnerable in warm, dry conditions, are more protected in mixed forest stands.

Five steps for managing Europe's forests

Support resilience and promote carbon storage, say **Silvano Fares** and colleagues.

Europe's varied climates support some of the most biodiverse woodlands on Earth. More than 40% of the continent's land area is wooded. In the north, evergreen forests host Norway spruces and Scandinavian pines; around the Mediterranean, tough-leaved trees such as the holm oak and Aleppo pine withstand heat and drought. Dense beech and oak forests blanket Eastern Europe, and thin strands of dwarf pine mark the Alpine timberline.

Woodlands in Europe have been harvested for timber for thousands of years, but today their roles are multiplying. Wood can substitute for fossil fuels and carbon-intensive materials such as steel. And growing trees sequester carbon — photosynthesis absorbs carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and puts it in wood and soil. Forests remove around 9% of Europe's anthropogenic CO_2 emissions from the air[1].

But European forests face an uncertain future. More frequent heat waves, droughts and fires are reducing their health and productivity, with the region warming faster than the global average[2]. Urban sprawl, pollution and the expansion of transport, commercial and industrial infrastructure compound the climatic threats[3].

Such damage is offsetting gains from planting programmes and the natural reforestation of abandoned agricultural land, which have boosted Europe's woodland ▶