

Mediterranean
Model Forest Network



What is a Model Forest?

A Model Forest is best understood as a process for bringing a diverse partnership of individuals and groups together to realize a common vision of sustainable development in a large landscape.

Three aspects central to a Model Forest are:

- **Landscape:** a large-scale biophysical area representing a broad range of forest values, including environmental, social, cultural and economic concerns
- **Partnership:** a neutral forum that welcomes voluntary participation of representatives of stakeholder's interests and values on the landscape
- **Sustainability:** stakeholders are committed to the conservation and sustainable management of natural resources and the forest-based landscape



The Model Forest concept: transforming conflict into opportunity

The Model Forest concept was first developed by the Government of Canada in the early 1990s during a period of intense conflict between environmentalists, indigenous peoples, forest industry and government. It was a time when the civil society was demanding recognition of multiple forest values beyond timber alone and a greater voice in forest governance. In response, 10 experimental Model Forests were launched across the country to use science, innovation, and inclusive governance for sustainable forest management at a landscape scale.

The Model Forest idea was born to:

- **bring together all of the relevant stakeholders** in a given territory **to form a long-term collaborative partnership;**
- **serve as a neutral forum to encourage constructive discussion and inclusive participation** in the sustainable management of that territory;
- **develop, test and implement initiatives based on science, innovation and traditional knowledge** that were representative of the shared values and interests of the partnership group;
- **act as the middle ground between policy and practice:** national or international priorities could be piloted in the Model Forest before being scaled up, or innovative practices developed by a Model Forest could be shared for broad application;
- **change the way we think about, and act towards, our natural resources and each other.**

Model Forests are intended to be a dynamic “model” from which others can learn and, together, advance their own sustainability objectives.

Based on early success, **at the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED)** in Rio de Janeiro **the Government of Canada invited other countries to join in forming an International Model Forest Network** to share lessons learned and accelerate sustainability goals globally. What began with 10 sites in Canada has now spread to 35 countries with more than 60 MF in operation covering over 70 million hectares.

In 1995, the International Model Forest Network’s Secretariat (IMFN) was officially established in Ottawa (www.imfn.net) where it continues to be hosted by the Natural Resources Canada - Canadian Forest Service.

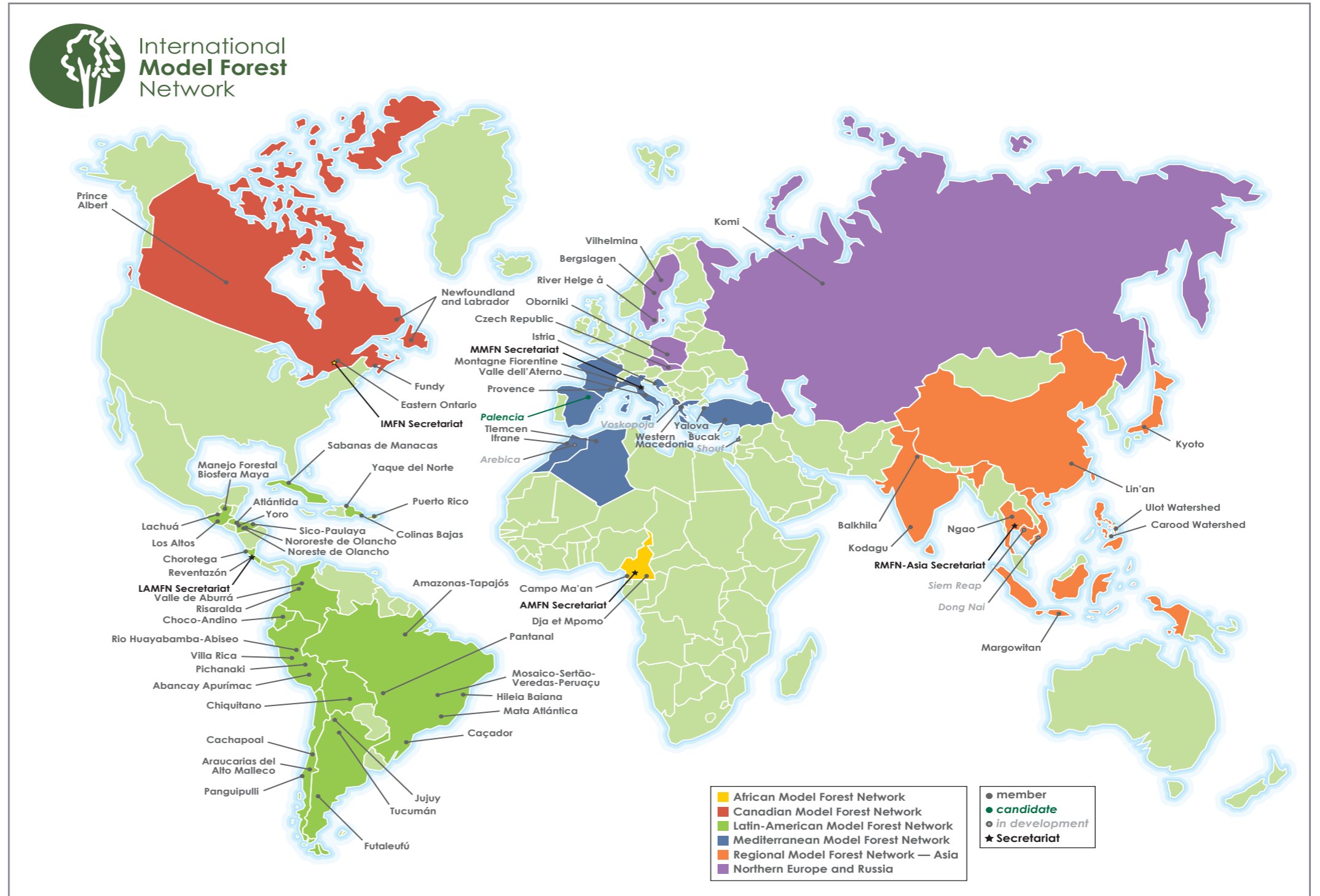
Regional Model Forest Networks

Regional Model Forest Networks define, articulate and manage a regional program of work by those who know the area best. These regional programs may be formal or informal and reflect the priorities, strengths and opportunities that are unique to a particular region.

Regional Network functions include:

- Networking between Model Forest sites within a region to help transfer technology and knowledge
- Assistance in regional resource expansion
- Regional communications and advocacy
- Regional program support
- Regional partnership and capacity of development
- Documentation, monitoring and evaluation
- Review and approval of new Model Forest proposals and membership in the Regional Network

There are currently six Regional Networks under the International Model Forest Network.

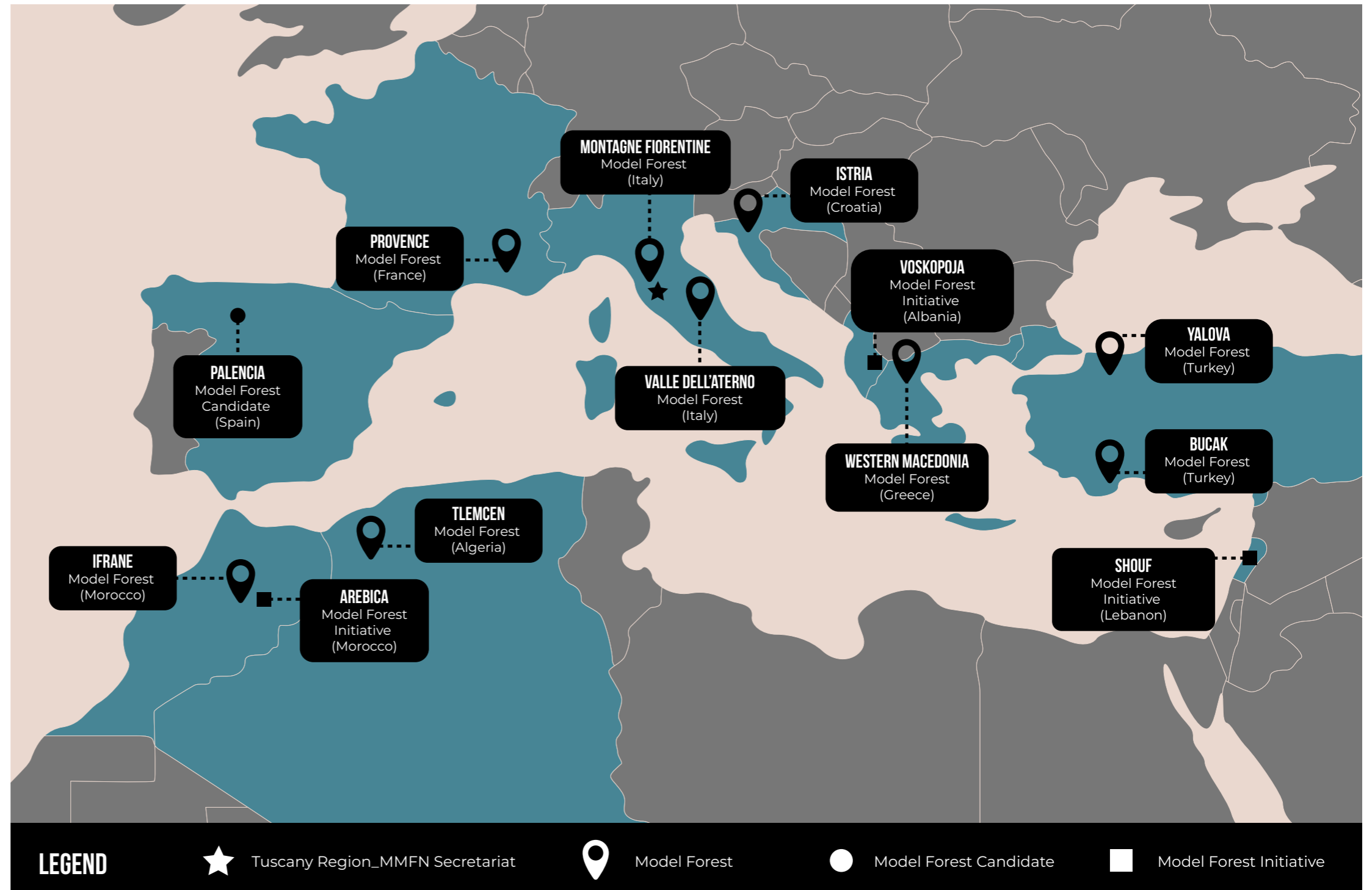


A Network of Model Forests in the Mediterranean

The Mediterranean Model Forest Network (MMFN) is one of the regional networks of the International Model Forest Network, the world's largest one dedicated to sustainable landscape governance. The MMFN was born in Spain in 2008 thanks to Castilla y Leon region which created also a dedicated Secretariat managed for 10 year before passing the baton to Italy that managed it since 2019 for the initiative of the Tuscany Region with the support of the Montagne Fiorentine Model Forest. The Tuscany Region commitment to run the Secretariat was recently renewed for the period 2024-2028.

In the Mediterranean Model Forest Network we **define common objectives and promote collaboration** between areas that have similar ecological, economic, social and cultural characteristics while enhancing individual specificities.

We cooperate on the development of common priorities, in conflict resolution, and the promotion of cooperation and collaboration on sustainable development in the Mediterranean and beyond following the 3 pillars which define Model Forest approach: sustainability, landscape, partnership.



We are many... we want to become even more!



8

Mediterranean countries where Model Forests are present



9

Model Forest of Mediterranean Network



1,382+

Thousand hectares

Networking makes us stronger

Working “in the network” means working connected, enriching partners with specific skills, sharing experiences and know-how. Through networking and sharing lessons learned we save time by avoiding mistakes already made and accelerate opportunities for success. Networking gives us flexibility and allows the participation of the most competent, suitable and interested subjects in achieving a certain result. The Mediterranean Network of Model Forests is inspired by this system and also seeks **to contribute to global environmental sustainability objectives**.



Why a Mediterranean Network?

The Mediterranean basin is full of biodiversity, culture and history but it is also a climate change hotspot, an environment delicate and fragile.

As MMFN we work in this area to:

- promote the Model Forest approach to **shared land management**;
- **share knowledge, promote innovation and join forces**, for the long-term sustainability projects;
- **improve the well being of local communities and their territories** by working in network.



Membership in the Network offers many possible benefits...

- **Accessing and belonging to a global network** with many examples from which to draw inspiration;
- **Participating in projects on a European and International scale;**
- **Participating in broad National and International dialogues** on sustainable development policy and practices;
- **Promoting rural areas and communities** as essential to the social and economic well-being of the Mediterranean area and beyond;
- **Accessing case studies, lessons learned, challenges, the exchange of experiences and good practices** with respect to economic diversification, social support, conflict resolution, good governance, sustainable forest management, and environmental protection;
- **Contributing to public participation processes involving multiple stakeholders with varying needs and values;**
- **Developing and sharing of tools and techniques** that allow local communities to integrate social, environmental and economic factors into decision making for long-term sustainability at a landscape scale;
- **Undertaking cultural exchanges between different areas of the Mediterranean and with Model Forests around the world;**
- **Developing synergies and partnerships with the other international networks** concerned with forests and the environment.



Sustainable development and environmental policies? They concern us all!

Establishing a Model Forest and becoming part of the Network means a commitment to follow **six broad principles that combine the social, environmental and economic needs of local communities with the long-term sustainability** of large forest-based landscapes. As members of a Regional and International Network, Model Forests **bring joint solutions and innovative strategies to shared challenges** such as climate change, wildfires and pests, market access and livelihoods, health and well-being, and land-use conflicts. In other words, being a Model Forest means implementing forest management-based priorities, policies and agreed actions aimed at finding a balance between combating climate and environmental challenges as well as social and economic issues. Model Forests are designed to occupy the middle ground between policy and practice. They are living laboratories where governments and decision makers can test new policies or programs before scaling up to other areas, or where **innovative practices developed within the partnership can be shared with decision makers for implementation** beyond the Model Forest boundary. They are not a project, but a process who in turn also help countries to contribute their national and international commitments such as the UNFCCC and Sustainable Development Goals.





Building a Model Forest is not children's game

Establishing a Model Forest is not simply a bureaucratic or administrative step. **The creation of a Model Forest requires time, dedication, active and sustained involvement, a willingness to listen, mediation and flexibility.** A Model Forest must have a broad representation of all stakeholders in the area - even those who are in conflicting positions - and membership may change over time. In fact, only by including a broad stakeholder base will the strategic plan and resulting initiatives result in long-term buy-in and positive change reflecting differing views and priorities.

*“ A Model Forest takes on projects, but
is not a project itself.
It is a long-term process ”*

The Model Forest approach as best practice in governance sustainability and restoration

In the Staff Working Document accompanying the EU Forest Strategy for 2030 it is highlighted how “Model Forests can contribute to support sustainable forest management by implementing resource management policies at the local level, establishing networks and ensuring the participation of local communities”.

Likewise, at the end of the 7th Mediterranean Forest Week in 2022, **the Model Forest approach was included in the Antalya Declaration as a good practice to be enhanced and extended to promote the management of Mediterranean forests and landscapes toward a vision in which social, environmental, economic and cultural benefits are equally integrated.**

In fact, as highlight several times within the FAO Forest and Landscape Restoration Mechanism, **the inclusion of local communities in the management pathways of the territories ensures a more effective implementation of planning and programmatic tools**, even and especially in recent years that have seen an increase in public attention and sensitivity to environmental and climate change issues.

The ambitious goals of restoring forest ecosystems and landscapes launched by the United Nations Decade on Ecosystem Restoration 2021-2030 and taken up by the Antalya Declaration need **networks such as the MF network capable of being catchy on the territories and speed up the transformation of projects into concrete actions**, within a tight timeframe and without compromising their quality. This can only happen through already structured territorial realities equipped with strategic plans shared between administrations and stakeholders, including, in many cases, research institutes and universities, in short... Model Forests.

Working to harmonize the needs of those around the forestry sector, from policymakers to local communities and producers, is essential to re-establishing the connection between people and the ecosystems in which they live. Model Forests can help make sustainable forest management more “familiar” to people and groups who normally have access to information given, often hastily and superficially, by big media and social media. The forum that characterizes the Model Forest approach is the right place to **discuss between stakeholders with different sensibilities “forcing” them to find a common exit strategy where each one’s needs are understood and respected.**

Likewise, **restoration actions aimed at restoring ecosystems, forests, or landscapes must be perceived and experienced by local communities in rural territories as “their own” and not only as needs imposed, and often, caused by urban environments.**

The implementation of actions then will become more effective by achieving the best possible results that in turn can trigger both new restoration interventions in neighboring areas (cascade effect), make the environmental and economic context more attractive with possible beneficial social effects due to a regeneration of the productive and housing fabric due to a counter migration from urban to rural areas.

In the next pages **four case studies** from restoration projects realized with a Model Forest approach, in or with the Model Forest of the Mediterranean Network. To discover more about the single projects explore our website: www.medmodelforest.net





Enhance forest stands resilience after fire

In the Provence Model Forest, France, a large-scale fire affected almost 7,000 ha across the Massif des Maures. The restoration starts with priority work, i.e. harvesting burnt wood from softwood stands and fascinage on slopes susceptible to erosion, followed by medium- and long-term activities to steer natural regeneration towards forest formations that are more resilient to climatic hazards and less combustible, while at the same time promoting forest production and biodiversity. The work carried out includes the pruning of broadleaved trees, the selection of stump sprouts, selective clearing to aid natural regeneration, enrichment planting and the creation of wildlife shelters.



Stakeholder engagement to merge primary needs with global level objectives

In the Shouf Biosphere Reserve (SBR), Lebanon, a Model Forest Initiative is taking its first steps since 2022. By working with local communities, implementing agencies, governmental bodies and stakeholders the SBR Forest Landscape Restoration Plan aims to the sustainable management of forests and water, handling of the agricultural and organic waste, restoration of degraded areas, fire prevention, biomass management and implementation of water harvesting technologies. In this way SBR aims to raise awareness, protect natural ecosystems, build resilience against climate change and ensure long-term sustainability for the region, merging primary needs with global level objectives.

Adaptive management in restoring damaged forests

In the Montagne Fiorentina Model Forest climate change causes an intensification of extreme weather events, in particular windstorms and heavy snow, with damages to forests and especially to artificial conifer plantations. In the restoration of these areas, adaptive techniques were adopted to improve forest resistance to these events: planting of mixed broadleaf trees combined with the natural regeneration to increase species, horizontal and vertical structural variety; mixed techniques to defend the plants from grazing (shelters, fences, organic repellents); soil, herbaceous and shrub species management to balance between their competition and protection effects.



Innovation meets tradition to keeping back the forest

In the Ifrane Model Forest, Morocco, climate change and human exploitation cause landscape degradation and lack of forest cover. With the help of local communities, both as workers and keepers, holm oak and atlas cedar were planted within a restoration project in collaboration with FAO and funded by the German International Climate Initiative (IKI) and the Government of Canada. Local women were involved in the management of the plantation, including emergency watering and the replacement of the dead ones. In the same area they worked also for the restoration of the traditional "Agdal" pasture system, particularly effective in meeting at the same time the objectives of increasing biodiversity and the needs of improving sheep and goat grazing.



4 ways to support the Model Forests

- **Disseminate and promote** the Model Forest idea and its values.
- **Become a member** of an existing Model Forest in your country or support the ones abroad that are working on topics of your interest.
- If you are interested in participating in the activities of a Model Forest, **become a volunteer or seek internship opportunities** in a Model Forest.
- **Make a donation** on www.medmodelforest.net in support of existing projects or provide the opportunity to create new programming.



Do you want to build one Model Forest? Get in touch

To establish a Model Forest and become part of the Mediterranean and International Network, you can contact us and consult the “Model Forest Toolkit”.

Contact us at info@medmodelfores.net

Toolkit: <https://imfn.net/model-forest/model-forest-toolkit/>

International Model Forest Network



Mediterranean Model Forest Network Secretariat



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Model Forest of Mediterranean Network



Associazione
FORESTA MODELLO
delle MONTAGNE
FIORENTINE



FORESTA MODELLO
Valle dell'Aterno



Candidate Model Forest



Initiative Model Forest

AREBICA - Morocco
VOSKOPOJA - Albania
SHOUF - Lebanon



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