

Neuchâtel, 28.10.2021, Meeting of the European Integrate Network.  
Welcome by Dr. Katrin Schneeberger, Director Federal Office for the  
Environment FOEN, Switzerland.

---

Distinguished representatives of the EU Commission and  
of the European Forest Institute,  
dear members of the European Integrate Network and all  
friends of forests

### **1. Welcome (-> Slide 1)**

As the Director of the Federal Office for the Environment, I  
wish you a very warm welcome to Switzerland. I am also  
happy to meet the recently appointed Director of the  
Federal Institute for Forest, Snow and Landscape  
Research (WSL), Prof. Dr. Beate Jessel. I am looking  
forward to her inputs and considerations from the scientific  
point of view.

You have chosen an excellent location for the meeting of  
the Integrate Network, here in Neuchâtel. It is an excellent  
place to discuss topics around the balance between  
forestry and biodiversity conservation. The reason is not  
only what you see: the beautiful diverse landscape with  
forests, pastures, mountains and the lake. The reason is  
also what is being done - the long-years' local tradition of  
combining protection with utilization of the forest resources  
– here in Neuchâtel but also all over Switzerland. I hope

you all had an inspiring insight yesterday during the excursion in the forest.

In my brief welcome words I would like to address the following 3 issues:

1. The increasing demands of society for securing all the forest functions and the response by the Swiss Government with a future integrated forest and timber strategy 2050
2. The Integrated Approach in politics, science and practical forest management and biodiversity conservation – in Switzerland and in Europe
3. Challenges and impacts of climate change – how to secure a resilient forest in future

## **2. Caring for forests to secure all functions and ecosystem services for society (-> Slide 2)**

Climate change and biodiversity loss are the most pressing environmental issues of our time. Forests provide solutions: they absorb CO<sub>2</sub> and are habitat for numerous animal and plant species. For a mountainous country like Switzerland, forests protect against avalanches, rock falls and erosion. And increasingly, the population expects many more services to be delivered by forests, like space for recreation and health or ensuring clean air and water. These demands make it all the more important to care for the forests.

In the Swiss legislation, we have a clear mandate to secure all the forest functions. And one essential and basic aspect is the conservation and enhancement of **biodiversity** – in many cases this can also mean to do less - or nothing.

10% of the Swiss forests are assigned as forest reserves. And the entire forest area is managed on the principles of close-to-nature silviculture. Biodiversity conservation is an integral part of it.

### **3. Forest Policy and measures to achieve resilient forests (-> Slide 3)**

To balance all these demands, the Swiss Federal Council developed a **national Forest Policy** with measures until 2024 and is working on its revision in consultation with the cantons, stakeholder associations as well as economic and nature conservation organisations.

The Forest Policy defines a total of **eleven policy objectives** such as wood harvesting potential (-> slide 4), climate change and conservation of biodiversity. The forthcoming integrated forest and timber strategy 2050 is now under preparation.

### **4. Integrated approach at policy, practice and research level**

An integrated approach is needed at all levels, at international, national and specifically also at local level.

The **European Integrate Network** provides an excellent platform for exchanging practical experience at local level using its 130 demonstration plots and the in-depth scientific

results. The Network further provides an excellent basis to formulate policy recommendations which were delivered for example during the development of the new EU Forest Strategy few month ago.

### **5. Integrated approach in Switzerland (-> Slide 5)**

In Switzerland the integrated approach is the standard procedure for forest planning. However, these concepts need adjustments, not only for the increased demands by the society, but also due to climate change. During the excursion yesterday you have seen the Tree-App, a tool which is used by the local foresters to promote resilient forest species. This is based on a joint research program from 2009 to 2018 by the Federal Office for the Environment (FOEN) and the Federal Institute for Forest, Snow and Landscape Research (WSL). The scientific results have shown that with a risk of an increase in temperature warming of up to 4 degrees by end of the 21th century, the vegetation units are expected to shift 500-700 meters higher. Everyone can imagine the implications on biodiversity as well as on the economic situation of the forest owners.

### **6. Challenges to adapt the close-to-nature forest management (-> Slide 6)**

I would like to mention just 3 of the many challenges that require adaptation of present forest management concepts:

- The main tree species of our forests - beech, spruce and silver fir - are representing 75% of the wood

stock and are most threatened by the effects of climate change.

- Regeneration with the most promising climate-fit tree species like oak and silver fir - but also with rare tree-species is threatened by the increasing damages by deer.
- Dispersed and small-holding forest ownership with 250'000 owners require intensive and continuous training and advisory service on the recent scientific results of research on climate change.

## **7. Wrap-up and thanks**

Ladies and Gentlemen

I would like to thank the Secretariat of the Integrate Network for its excellent preparation of the conference and for the outstanding cooperation with the Swiss Chairmanship in the last two years. I wish all participants an exciting and fruitful continuation of the meeting.

Thank you for your attention (-> Slide 7)