

Sub-measure fiche (annex IV to the measure fiche "forestry")

Investments improving the resilience and environmental value of forest ecosystems

Measure 8

Article 25 of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council on support for rural development by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD)

Article XX of Commission Regulation [...]

This fiche is based on the text of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013 [EAFRD] and, when relevant, on Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 [CPR]. Since the Delegated and Implementing Acts supplementing these regulations have not yet been adopted, some modifications to this guidance fiche might be needed after their adoption.

This guidance does not represent a binding legal interpretation of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013. It is therefore essentially non-binding in nature and complements the related legal acts.

1. RATIONALE OF THE MEASURE

The support under the sub-measure "Investments improving the resilience and environmental value of forest ecosystems" includes climate change adaptation and mitigation, providing ecosystem services and enhancing the public amenity value of forest and wooded land.

2. CONTRIBUTION TO FOCUS AREAS AND CROSS-CUTTING OBJECTIVES

In the context of strategic programming¹ the forest ecosystem activities contribute to the Priority 4 "*Restoring, preserving and enhancing ecosystems dependent on agriculture and forestry*", and to the 5 Priority 5 "*Promoting resource efficiency and supporting the shift towards a low carbon and climate resilient economy in agriculture, food and forestry sectors*", and especially to the Focus area 5 E "*Fostering carbon sequestration in agriculture and forestry*".

¹ See Annex III of the Commission Working Paper "Elements of strategic programming for the period 2014-2020".

3. SCOPE, TYPE AND LEVEL OF SUPPORT

3.1. Type of operation

The eligible types of operations may be:

- Conversion of forest structure:
 - conversion of forest from stands with missing structural elements to indigenous close-to nature mixed stand (ecological forest).
 - conversion of indigenous coppice forest stands to close-to-nature mixed, mainly natural seedling forest stand.
 - conversion of non-indigenous forest to close-to-nature mixed forest, enhancing biodiversity by diversifying the forest structure and species composition.
 - removing the non-native and/or invasive species as one-off intervention².
- Planting may include:
 - planting broadleaves species in order to improve water quality (e.g. on acidic soils covered by coniferous forest).
 - introducing drought tolerant, heat resistant species (as part of assisted migration), shadow tolerant species under the main species (crown layer).
 - providing protection for the soil fauna and flora against heat and ensuring the optimal developing process of the forest soil.
 - establishment of bio-diverse forest edge structure with appropriate forest tree and shrub species which also can serve for better microclimate creation purposes.
- Investments in public amenity, environmental and protective functions may include:
 - establishment of walking paths, small scale recreation facilities, signposting, information tables, shelters and look-out points.
 - application of environmentally friendly material handling methods, such as investments in special "one-off" treatments³, technologies, actions which primarily serve environmental and/or public amenity purposes, but also may bring in a long term economic benefits, such as, thinning, pruning, under-planting

² However, this measure aims at covering the investments, not regular maintenance. In case regular maintenance is necessary, and goes beyond the legal obligations, such maintenance could be considered to be supported under the article 34 of the Rural Development Regulation.

³ One-off treatments are investments in improving the forest only once within the programming period or within the time line of the forest management plan. An example is thinning which could be implemented in 10-30 years frequency, depending on the tree species and stand type. Article 25 is a measure for "non-productive investments". It is not a measure for maintenance with regular interventions and only specific requirements may be addressed, not actions focused on sole economic interest.

or soil protection (it may include liming of acidic soil to restore it to better condition).

- Protection of habitats and biodiversity-related actions may include:
 - protection of certain habitats, species and areas under structural change against damage caused by wildlife, domestic animals or human action. These actions may include fences or appropriate individual protection facilities.
 - creation of cleared area for biodiversity interests (e.g. clearing of heath, rhododendron) and removal of unwanted non-native species.

3.2. Beneficiaries

The eligible beneficiaries may be:

- Natural persons
- Private forest holders
- Public forest holders
- Other private law bodies
- Other public law bodies
- Associations of above mentioned

3.3. Eligible costs and conditions

3.3.1. Eligible costs

Eligible costs may include;

- This measure aims at compensating for the difference of investments costs between normal and environmentally adapted species, provided the investment would not take place otherwise, without support.
- The costs of forest propagation material (seeds, seedlings) used for structural changes, planting, under-planting, forest edge etc., and the related plant prevention (e.g. fencing or individual plant protection as appropriate), including storage, transport and labor costs.
- The costs of materials and/or services, labor used for the above mentioned investments for improving the environmental or public amenity value of forests.
- Removing (cutting) of trees, thinning and pruning may be eligible if the main purpose of the investment is to improve the ecological value of forests, such as improving the species composition for environmental interests (removing of non-indigenous or not habitat specific tree or shrub species). This can also be applied to recreational interests.

- Regeneration of forests (restocking with the similar one) is not eligible as such. However, if the purpose is to change the structure of the forests primarily for ecological or climate change related interest it can be supported.
- The general maintenance or running costs are not supported through this sub-measure.

3.3.2. *Further conditions*

- The support under this sub-measure should not lead to any significant increase in the value or profitability of the forestry holding. However, the support may not exclude the provision of economic benefits in the long-run. The increase of the economic value of the forest should be marginal compared to the increase of the environmental or public amenity value.
- Investments shall be conditioned on the presentation of relevant information from forest management plans or equivalent instruments above a certain size set by the Member State and that should be in line with the relevant and appropriate level plans and strategies, such as biodiversity strategy, climate change adaptation plan/strategy, soil protection plans, watershed/water quality management/protection plans, public health related plans or programmes (concerning public amenity – recreation aspects), landscape management plans (concerning complex, district level plans and programmes in which ecosystem services provided by forests need to be supported by appropriate type and level of investments in forest areas).
- Standard costs could be applied, if appropriate, for example in case of thinning and pruning.

3.4. Principles with regard to the setting of selection criteria

See the European Commission document "*Guidelines on eligibility and Selection Criteria*".

It is recommended that the eligible project is in compliance with the relevant forest protection plan as regards the prevention of forest fires and other natural and biotic hazards and relevant above mentioned appropriate level strategies, programmes and plans. A special attention is to be paid to the selection of areas and species.

3.5. Links to other legislation

A link to the relevant legislation should be established in the Rural Development Programme.

3.6. Aid intensity/amount of support

The Rural Development Regulation does not set a maximum support rate for this sub-measure.

The basis for payment calculations should be established according to the article 62(2).

3.7. Co-financing rate(s)

This measure is among the measures which contribute to the compliance with the requirement stipulated in Article 59(6) of Regulation 1305/2013 and which requires that at least 30% of the total EAFRD contribution to the rural development programme shall be reserved for measures contributing to climate change mitigation and adaptation as well as environmental issues.

Furthermore, this measure can also benefit from a higher co-financing rate (75%) as it contributes to the objectives of environment and climate change mitigation and adaptation (Article 59(4)(b) of the RD Regulation). In case of the less developed regions, in the outermost regions and in the smaller Aegean islands this co-financing rate can be even higher (85% of the eligible public expenditure) as stipulated in Article 59(3)(a).

4. INDICATORS

In planning the indicators it should be taken into consideration the principles detailed in the Annex IV of Working Paper "Elements of strategic programming for the period 2014-2020".

5. VERIFIABILITY AND CONTROLLABILITY

Reference to be made to the "*Guidelines on verifiability and prevention of errors*".

6. BEST PRACTISES

The actions taken under this measure may be combined, as follow-up to this measure, with the measure "Forest-environmental and climate services and forest conservation" (article 34 of the Rural Development Regulation). This measure covers the investments which contribute to the increase of environmental or public amenity value of a forest. Therefore, these investments also can contribute to the objectives of the "forest-environment"-measure as laid down in article 34 covering the investments of the necessary interventions, while the article 34 covers the maintenance/or regular interventions going beyond the obligatory legal framework. Consequently, by combining these two different measures it is possible to build up a complete scheme for improving the environmental resilience of a forest covering all necessary aspects of a sustainable forest management.

Good examples of what could be done under this measure based on past experience (examples can be taken from ENRD website or brochures) and on the website of the European Commission – DG Agriculture and Rural development: http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/fore/publi/forestry_rurdev_2007_2013_en.pdf (see pages 51-52)

EU Rural Review No. 9: Forestry and rural development: http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/app_templates/filedownload.cfm?id=ED57142C-E0C7-3E97-E70E-E40EC9E8CCB1

The European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development Examples of Forestry projects: http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/app_templates/filedownload.cfm?id=6871F084-FDA8-A93F-FF0C-DC38AD30D86C