

International attention for protective forests

Conference on protective function and forest management in times of climate change

With climate change, the protective function of forests and the question of how this can be ensured in a sustainable way are increasingly coming into the spotlight internationally. The FAO, the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation, together with the EU's Alpine Space Strategy EUSALP, held a conference on "Protective functions of forests in times of climate change" and at the same time set up a new working group on "Protective forests and protective forest management".

"Tyrol is a good place to raise the international community's awareness of the importance of forests. The fact that the forest is our most important protective shield against natural hazards and that it must be maintained, managed and adapted to the changed conditions caused by climate change is nothing new in Tyrol", said deputy governor Josef Geisler who welcomed the participants from 15 countries.

70 percent of the Tyrolean forest fulfil a protective function and protect inhabitants from avalanches, mudslides, rock falls and erosion. For some years now, forest owners have also been working with the support of the forestry service Tyrol to gradually adapt the forests to challenges such as higher temperatures and drought. "Europe has a longstanding tradition here", said Yuka Makino from the FAO and Florian Rudolf-Miklau, head of the EUSALP action group "Natural Hazard Management and Climate Change Adaptation" from the Federal Ministry for Sustainability and Tourism, invited to an exchange of experiences at the Innsbruck Town Hall and in the protective forest in Neustift in the Stubai Valley.

The aim of the international conference held in Tyrol was to develop a common understanding of the multifunctionality of forests across borders. "In many countries, the term "protective forest" is used to refer to the fact that the forest is placed under protection. In our country, however, the forest fulfils a variety of functions," says Josef Fuchs, Tyrol's Forest Director. Protection, economic, recreational and environmental functions do not exclude each other. On the contrary, sustainable use and active adaptation to climate change contribute to safeguarding all functions, in particular the protective function.