



Presidential Annual letter 2025/2026 to all Pro Silva members

Dear ladies and gentlemen, members of Pro Silva,

Welcome to the Presidential Annual Letter, in which I summarize important steps that our organization has taken in 2025 and our plans for 2026.

Strategy

In Spring, 2025, we developed the draft of our new Strategy 2030+. We subsequently discussed it with representatives of all 22 branches and the final fine-tuning of the text took place during April. In May, Strategy 2030+ was adopted at our Annual Meeting on Sardegna (Italy). The official electronic version of the Strategy was received by all branches and can be downloaded at any time from our website: <https://www.prosilva.org/close-to-nature-forestry/pro-silva-strategy-2030/>

The layout for individual translations into your national languages has been offered to all branches. This offer is still valid and the Pro Silva board will deliver the layout free of charge. However, you will need to provide us with a professionally executed translation into your language. So far, we have the official text of our Strategy 2030+ including the short version for media and public in the following languages: English (original), German (joint translation prepared by ANW Deutschland, Pro Silva Austria and Pro Silva Switzerland), Spanish, Slovak, Slovenian and Montenegrin, and we have most recently received a Portuguese translation.

Position in EC and our policy influence

During 2025, a number of international activities took place that are important not only for us, but for the further development of forestry in general.

- i) European Commission, Directorate-General for Environment (DG-ENV): The European Commission is creating its voluntary certification system for “closer-to-nature” forest management (following the European guidelines). This activity is generating a number of discussions about meaning and benefits of new certification system. We had the opportunity to present our positions at a meeting in Brussels, which was organized in March by EUSTAFOR with the participation of European Commission staff and invited experts. We present our principles in such a way that, when they are applied consistently and over the long term, the entrusted properties outperform the criteria used by more lenient certification systems.



Our colleagues at ANW Deutschland organized a meeting with representatives of the European Commission in northern Germany (Mecklenburg–Vorpommern) in April to present a simpler and more practical approach to certification using remote sensing data and advanced analytics of this data. I would like to thank ANW for their very active approach.

The issue of forest certification was further developed with the presentation ceremony of the new AEFC certification system (Association for Ecological Forest Certification), which took place on September 24 in Brussels in the European Parliament building. The AEFC certification system sets stricter rules for forest management than in the FSC certification system. It was created by a group of experts in Finland and has now begun to develop its activities with the aim of linking responsible business in the wood-processing industry with responsible close-to-nature forestry. Only practice will show how universally applicable it will be, for example, in southern regions of Europe. Pro Silva was invited on numerous occasions to comment during the development phase of this certification system and we also attended the ceremonial presentation.

We have long held the position that we do not want to be the arbitrator in determining who is managing the forest close-to-nature and who is not, although this role has been repeatedly offered to us in connection with certification systems. We consider the willingness and ability of foresters and forest owners to decide on a change in management and to start implementing this change with the first structuring thinnings in even-aged monocultures to be the most important. However, such properties will not pass close-to-nature certification standards in the first decades.

- ii) European Commission, Directorate-General for Climate Action (DG-CLIMA): In the autumn, we were approached by DG-CLIMA with a request to cooperate on the Guidelines for Resilient Landscapes project. It is similar to the Closer-to-nature forestry guidelines project, but it is focused on strengthening climate resilience in Europe's rural landscapes. Of course, forests play an important role in this. In December, a workshop and meeting were held in Helsinki, Finland, where I presented our management principles, exemplary forests and other activities, as well as our approach to forestry at the landscape scale. In 2026, we will work on a chapter dedicated to forests for this project.



iii) Climate change is currently intensifying; the hemiboreal forest area is preparing for changes in management and looking at Central European forestry in temperate forests. There was a conference on this topic in Riga, Latvia, in September, and I had the opportunity to represent our organization and present forest transformation practices in the Baltic States and give examples from Central and Eastern Europe.

Pro Silva membership

It is my pleasure to congratulate several of our branches on their significant anniversaries, and especially when we see their continuous development. In March, our Irish friends celebrated 25 years since the founding of Pro Silva Ireland. I like to tell everyone that if anyone wants to learn how to start from scratch and what can be achieved and positively changed in 25 years in plantation forestry, they should go to Ireland.

The Czech branch of Pro Silva Bohemica celebrated their 30th anniversary and in the same year, thanks to their activities, an amendment to the Forest Act was implemented, which opens up more possibilities for uneven-aged forestry and moves away from the strict age-class forestry. This was helped by examples from the practice of Czech foresters, who often dared to go beyond the former law to show that forests can be irregular and that age is not the main variable that interests us in forests.

The most important milestone was undoubtedly the 75th anniversary of the founding of ANW Deutschland—the German branch of Pro Silva. As it was founded long before our European association, it retains its original name, although it is a key member of the Pro Silva family. The German branch is the largest of Pro Silva, bringing a huge number of activities and inspiration, and also offering the most examples of nature-friendly forests from the lowlands of northern Germany to the Alps in the south. I recommend the latest issue of the magazine Dauerwald to everyone, where you can get acquainted with the whole history of the organisation: <https://www.anw-deutschland.de/p/zeitschrift-der-dauerwald>

Looking back, we must once again thank the Pro Silva Italia team. The annual meeting took us to an area and forest ecosystems where we could not even define twenty years ago what close-to-nature forestry is. The shift that the Italian colleagues presented is a major shift for the entire Pro Silva. And the way the branch operates internally in such a naturally diverse country is also admirable—from the mountain forests in the Alps to the evergreen vegetation in the south of the country, work in the regions etc.



In July, colleagues from ANW organized a meeting with Ukrainian foresters, which aimed not only to present forestry in Saxony, especially in the mountain areas on the German–Czech border (inspiration for Carpathian management), but also to present the possibilities of establishing a Pro Silva branch in Ukraine. I would like to thank my German colleagues for the excellently prepared event.

Thanks to a visit to Riga, Latvija, I was able to discuss with Estonian foresters the establishment of a branch in Estonia; we are in occasional contact with two groups and we hope for further progress in 2026. Similar communications also took place in 2025 regarding the establishment of a branch in Romania. In both cases, we proceed according to the standard practice and the relevant interest groups must implement the required steps to establish a branch.

The good news for us is the very positive development in Sweden. A spring field meeting is already being planned and the communication so far with the preparatory group is very much on track to enable us to vote on the establishment and acceptance of Pro Silva Sweden into our family at our upcoming annual meeting. Thank you to everyone in Sweden for the truly positive and friendly communication.

Professional office and employee

The most important news of 2025 is this: On December 16, we were awarded financial support in the form of a grant to advance the professionalization of our activities. In the fall of 2024, we had the opportunity to present our activities and the principles of close-to-nature forestry at a workshop in the European Parliament in Brussels. There, we were approached by a representative of the European Climate Foundation (ECF) and offered cooperation. Subsequently, we held negotiations with ECF, and our board member Anne Crespin prepared project documentation for sponsoring our organization and led operational communications with ECF. The award of the grant moves us significantly forward and will allow us to fulfil what we set out in our 2030+ Strategy. In the spring of 2026, we are opening our professional office in Belgium!!!

Goals for 2026 – Action plan

With this financial support, we now have the opportunity to fulfil our goals as defined in the 2030+ Strategy, which allows me to state three main objectives for 2026. These objectives—this year's action plan—correspond to the three Development Areas of our 2030+ Strategy.

Development Area 1 "Network": As mentioned at our annual meeting, we need to improve and intensify our communication within the organization, improve our work in and with the



media, be better informed, and, in short, be better connected and function as an unmissable force in the European space. With the opening of our office in Belgium and the employment of a professional administrator, communication will improve.

In addition, we have a large project submitted under the LIFE program; you will surely remember our communication during the preparation of the project. If we are successful, communication within the network will be the basis for its successful delivery. This project would also bring another employee onboard.

Development Area 2 "Advocacy and Communication": Revisiting Pro Silva Principles. If we are to continue to be a respected partner of forest owners, European Commission officials, and scientists for joint projects, we must respond to rapidly changing conditions due to climate change and the unstable wood market, as well as new challenges in the provision of ecosystem services by forests, carbon sequestration, etc. All these aspects need to be incorporated into our principles, which were published in 2012. Therefore, we ask for your cooperation in updating this fundamental publication of our organization and to finalize the text at our annual meeting in Hungary (September 9th-11th).

Development Area 3 "Demonstration and Information": Unify the methodology for recording and presenting basic data from our network of exemplary forests and reference stands. In this regard, we have a number of data sets from various countries, information on our website thanks to the immense efforts of my predecessor Eckart Senitzka, and now we also have the latest concept from Germany: ANW is implementing a project to unify the basic parameters and data of exemplary forests. I had the opportunity to attend a working meeting in Berlin in January last year, and the example from ANW will certainly be inspiring for us.

General videoconference

Dear friends, I have taken the liberty of introducing you to the most important events of the past year—there were many more and hopefully no one will blame me for not mentioning everything.

Since we face major challenges in the form of at least three main goals for 2026, it is necessary for us to meet by videoconference and discuss the next steps together.

Our video conference will take place on **Thursday, January 29, 2026 at 4 p.m. CET** - here is the link to join it [Meeting of presidents | Réunion-Joindre | Microsoft Teams](#)



It is important for us that representatives of all our member countries—that is, 22 branches in Europe and of course our international committee consisting of 12 people—participate if possible. If one of the presidents of individual branches is not able to attend the meeting, please delegate your role to someone else from your committee.

I wish you personally and to our organisation, positive steps in the 2026.

Sincerely yours

Tomáš Vrška

Pro Silva President