

This case study is one of several produced by the **CLARA** network to coincide with the publication of the IPCC Special Report on Land. We're showcasing **CLARA** member climate solutions which demonstrate the **rights-based, low-emission development pathways** needed for reducing emissions while **promoting livelihoods** and **ecosystem integrity**.

# Preventing Forest Harvesting for Biomass Fuel to Protect Forest Carbon Stocks

WOLF and PFPI are using legislation and litigation against bioenergy to protect forests and achieve climate goals in Slovakia and the EU

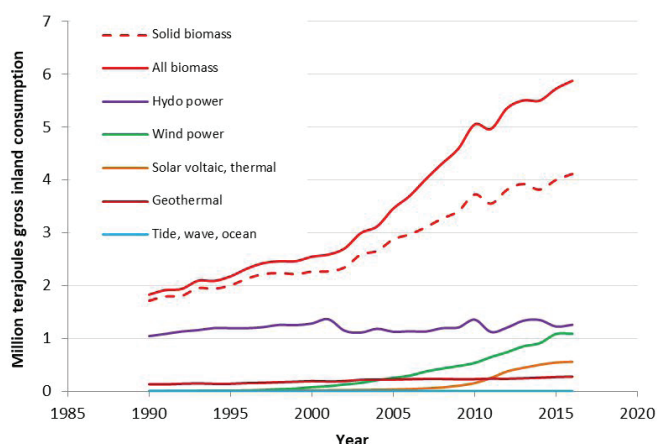


Figure 1: Renewable energy inputs in the EU. Data from Eurostat.

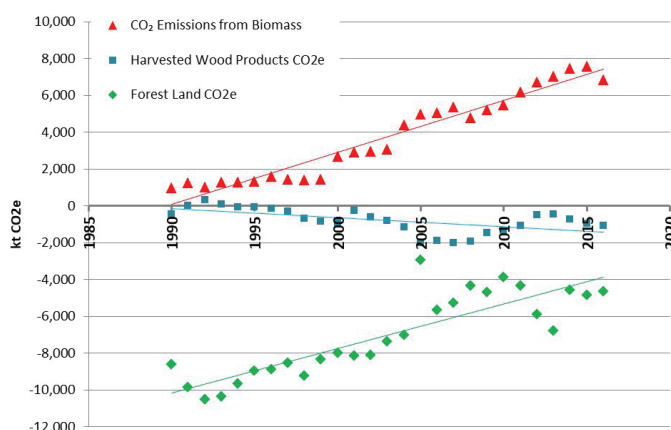


Figure 2: UNFCCC emissions data for Slovakia

## Organisations and individuals involved

WOLF Forest Protection Movement, Slovakia

Peter Sabo, [peto@wolf.sk](mailto:peto@wolf.sk)

Partnership for Policy Integrity (PFPI), United States

Mary S. Booth, [mbooth@pfpi.net](mailto:mbooth@pfpi.net)

## Location

Slovakia and worldwide

**THE IPCC IS CLEAR THAT** mitigating climate change requires both reducing emissions and increasing carbon sequestration, particularly in forests. However, an increasing amount of renewable energy worldwide is generated by burning forest wood, which numerous studies show increases emissions relative to fossil fuels over mitigation-relevant timeframes while reducing forests' ability to sequester carbon. Despite this, EU regulations treat forest biomass as having zero carbon emissions, and bioenergy constitutes around 65% of EU renewable energy (**FIGURE 1**).

Exploitation of forests appears to co-vary with a reduction in Slovakia's forest carbon sink, as shown in **FIGURE 2**. Alarmed

by destruction of Slovakia's ancient forests, in 2013 Wolf Forest Protection Movement (WOLF) helped pass legislation (Dec. 2018) that confines biomass subsidies to plants that burn only mill residues or energy crops. If the legislation is effective, this will reduce direct emissions by at least 1.3 million tonnes CO<sub>2</sub> per year and could help restore forest carbon sequestration rates. WOLF has also worked to protect forests from logging by buying land (thus far, a total 270 hectares in the Cergov and Strážovské Mountains, and in the High Tatras); by establishing strictly protected areas (thus far totaling 880 hectares); by establishing 10% of Slovakia as non-intervention areas (currently at 1.7% but the Slovakian Ministry of Environment set aside 75% of the National Park territory as core zones and a total of 11 new proposals for protected areas have been submitted); and by promoting a EU "Wilderness Directive" with the goal to set at least 5% of the area of every EU member state as non-intervention areas.

PFPI's contribution has been to initiate a lawsuit challenging the EU's subsidies for burning forest wood for energy and the treatment of bioenergy as carbon neutral. A group of NGOs and individuals, including WOLF, filed a lawsuit against the EU Commission and Council in March 2019. The suit is described at [www.eubiomasscase.org](http://www.eubiomasscase.org).

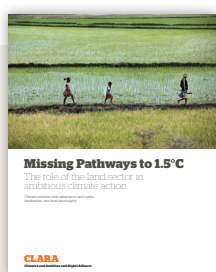
# Testimony

**Mary Booth, PhD; Director, Partnership for Policy Integrity**

“Eliminating renewable energy subsidies for wood-burning power plants is essential if we are to restore forests and address climate change. Wood-burning power plants emit more CO<sub>2</sub> per megawatt-hour than coal plants, and the increase in emissions lasts for decades. We need to reduce emissions immediately, which means growing forests, not burning them for energy.”

## ‘Missing Pathways’ to climate action

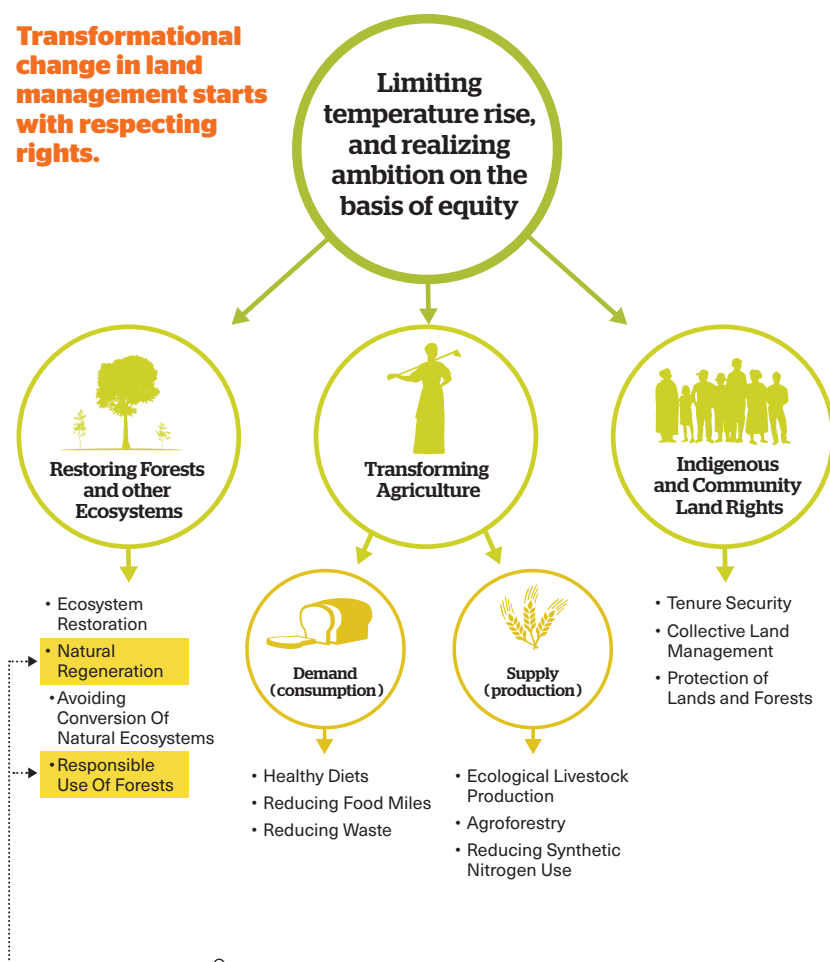
Last year, CLARA published the report ‘Missing Pathways’, identifying areas of global mitigation ambition rooted in land rights, restoration, agroecology, and food system change.



This example follows ‘Missing Pathways’ to climate action by...

Emphasising the role that can be played by forests in climate action, whilst showing that intensified biomass harvesting is incompatible with restoring and expanding forests to increase carbon sequestration and to protect biodiversity. Reducing harvesting of wood for bioenergy is fundamental to protecting forests around the world, and for freeing up resources for real climate action, including forest preservation and the deployment of true zero-emissions renewable energy. Total ecosystem emissions from harvesting wood for fuel are dramatically higher than just the CO<sub>2</sub> that can be counted coming from smokestacks, meaning any reduction in the use of forests for fuel will help reduce emissions in both the land and energy sectors.

**Transformational change in land management starts with respecting rights.**



WOLF and PFPI are working to ensure **responsible use of forests** and management that allows their **natural regeneration** towards carbon sequestration and biodiversity goals, rather than burning them for energy, a process that increases emissions and destroys habitat.

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