



Strategic Plan for Forests

An Overview | 2026

Photo: Bonnie Scheinman, KKL-JNF Photo Archive

Planning Forests in Israel - Decades in the Making

"The breathing lungs of Israel"

- **Strategic forest plan:** Forest area preservation was a central component in the earliest national planning frameworks.
- In 1951, the architect Aryeh Sharon and his staff, in their book "Physical Plan for Israel", defined five main planning elements: **agriculture, industry & transportation, parks, forestry & landscapes**, and **new cities**.
- **"The national plan determines forestry areas...that excel in characteristic vegetation, beautiful scenery, special natural qualities...the breathing lungs of Israel."**
- What was written 3 generations ago are correct also today. The forests protect against loss of land, house a wide variety of natural vegetation, the foundation and basis of the "breathing lungs of Israel"

**The Strategic Forest Plan –
Adding a forward-looking vision
for preserving and enhancing
Israel's forests.**

Some Facts on Israel's Forests

7%

An essential component (landscape, culture and natural values) of open spaces, comprising about 7% of state lands



Provides a wide range of ecosystem services

24/7

Social Value – A communal resource, a central place for activities and recreation that is open to the public 24/7 free of charge



Why is a Strategic Plan for Forests in Israel Needed?

**“Forests are among the world's
most productive land-based ecosystems
and are essential to life on Earth.”**

From Global Forest Goals and Targets of the UN Strategic Plan for Forests 2030

The expected population growth entails extensive urban development and accelerated infrastructure expansion. As a result, pressure on open spaces – including forests – will increase, both as areas for recreation, leisure, and tourism on the one hand, and as areas for construction expansion on the other.

Therefore, careful planning is required to provide leisure and recreation services to the population while safeguarding all the ecosystem services provided by forests.

International Forest-Related Conventions Ratified by the State of Israel:

The Convention on Biodiversity (CBD):

The forests in Israel serve as habitats for a wide variety of plants and animals, including endemic species. Preserving these forests contributes to efforts to conserve biodiversity.

United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD):

Arid regions constitute over 50% of Israel's land area. Forests at the edges of these regions help prevent desertification and soil erosion resulting from development processes.

Glasgow Leaders' Declaration on Forests and Land Use:

Preventing Forest Degradation and Restoring Forests will be achieved by investing resources in several key efforts, including:

- Conservation and Restoration of Forests and Ecosystems
- Increasing Funding and Investments from Public and Private Sources to support sustainable agriculture, sustainable forest management, forest conservation and restoration, and support for local communities.
- Ensuring Strong Systems and Policy Measures to accelerate the transition to a sustainable economy that promotes forest conservation, sustainable land use, biodiversity preservation, and meeting climate goals.

And more...



United Nations
Convention to Combat
Desertification



Convention on
Biological Diversity



PARIS2015
UN CLIMATE CHANGE CONFERENCE
COP21 • CMP11

Reasons for Advancing a Strategic Forest Plan in Israel

Strengthening and preserving the forests' public benefit

Open 24/7 and free of charge, forests offer leisure, recreation, and physical activity essential to Israelis' quality of life and physical and emotional well-being. The plan will enhance their accessibility, availability, and role in bolstering national resilience.

Developing tools for sustainable forest management

A strategic plan will advance the development of tools for conserving natural resources, reforestation and rehabilitating damaged areas, improving visitor infrastructure, and managing visitor activity sustainably.

Addressing climate change

Climate change—rising temperatures, shifting rainfall, and more frequent fires—threatens Israel's forests. A strategic plan will develop adaptation solutions, reduce negative impacts, and enhance forest services as a key element of Israel's climate readiness.

Leveraging forests for economic growth and sustainable ventures

Israel's forests attract local and international visitors. The plan will promote measures to establish economic infrastructure in and around forests, advancing local, regional, and national development while ensuring forest preservation.

Preserving biodiversity and ecosystems

Israel's forests are home to a wide range of plant and animal species, some of which are endangered. A strategic plan will optimize biodiversity preservation by protecting habitats and safeguarding ecosystems.

Reasons for Advancing a Strategic Forest Plan in Israel

Strengthening the status of forests in national planning:

The plan will help protect the status of forests within planning and development frameworks in Israel, safeguarding the long-term interests of the public and the environment.

Increasing public and partner involvement

The plan will help build processes to promote the involvement of the public, local organizations, and international partners in forest preservation, as well as in educational and public awareness activities.

Advancing research and knowledge development

The plan will identify essential and missing areas of research and knowledge and support the expansion of knowledge and technology for optimal forest management..

Strengthening the cultural and historical values of forests:

Forests are an important part of Israel's cultural and historical heritage. The plan will support the preservation of these values in cooperation with the community, and through the development of educational and public awareness activities.



Advancing a strategic plan for forests in Israel is essential for safeguarding the forests and their significant ecological, social and economic benefits. It will assist in protecting the forest as a resource, support forest planning processes and be a compass towards future sustainable forest management in Israel.



A Strategic Plan for Forests in Israel

Photo: Bonnie Scheinman, KKL-JNF Photo Archive

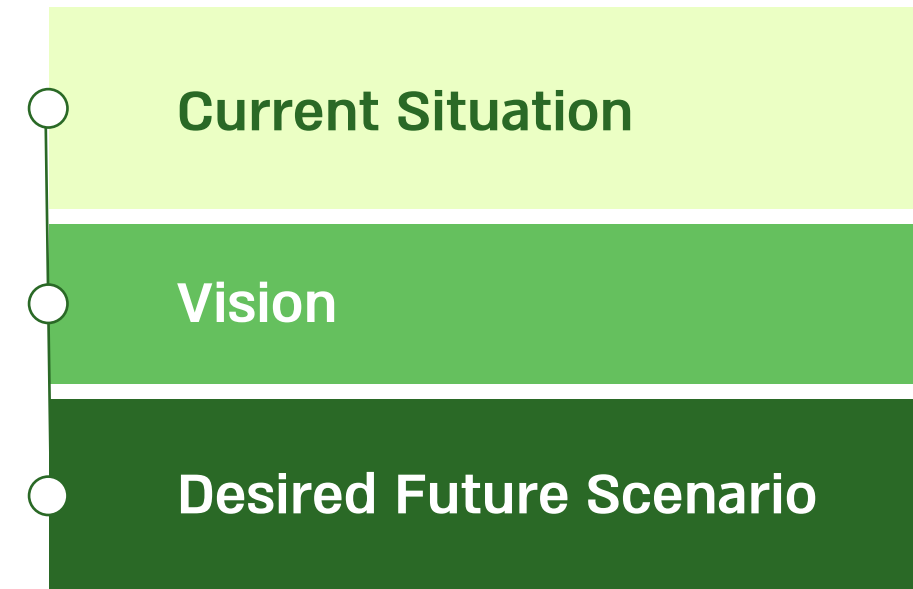
Stage A: Defining the Vision for Israel's Forests

Forest Vision

Israel's forests are a diverse and complex ecological ecosystem that contributes to the recreation and well-being of the Israeli public.

The forests shape the country's varied landscapes, help preserve biodiversity, and form a vital part of the network of open areas and ecological corridors in Israel.

Sustainable management and expansion of forest areas will be carried out in line with human and environmental needs in the country's various regions, while preserving natural, heritage, and cultural values, and addressing the expected trends and impacts of population growth and climate change in Israel.



Goals of the Forest

The goals of the forest include a variety of services based on the ecosystem and forest management development activities

Protecting forest areas and natural resources

- Positioning the forest as a central part of Israel's open space system
- Preserving and strengthening biodiversity
- Ecological restoration of damaged habitats, landscape design, and diversification

Providing forest ecosystem services

- Concept of the forest as public property – a resource always open to the public, offering cultural, leisure, and recreation services
- Providing regulation and provisioning services: soil and water conservation, carbon sequestration, pollutant absorption, pollination, grazing
- Helping to address climate change

Preserving landscape and cultural values

- Preserving and strengthening the landscape diversity characteristic of Israel
- Preserving and restoring cultural landscapes

Sustainable Management Principles for Forests

Sustainable forest management – Managing and using forest resources in a manner that preserves and cultivates biodiversity, productivity, capacity for renewal and the vitality of the forest, and its potential to fulfil a variety of ecological, economic and social functions, through its integration with other ecosystems.

- **Goal-oriented adaptive management** – planning and implementing forest management activities according to one or several defined purposes.
 - **Multifunctional** – forest management that achieves a variety of ecological, social and economic goals.
 - **Adaptation to the habitat** – Defining goals and adapting management activities to a specific habitat and its surrounding environment.
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- **Diversity, complexity and patchiness** – preserving and caring for a wide range of forest landscapes, habitats, plant formations, species and genotypes.
 - **Continuity** – managing the forest as a continuous system in space and time, maintaining ongoing vegetation cover.
 - **Preservation and enhancement of natural and heritage values** – planning and managing the forest with consideration for biological, landscape, and cultural values.
 - **Environmental protection** – minimizing the environmental impacts of forest establishment and management activities.
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- **Natural processes** – preference for relying on native species whenever possible.
 - **Informed intervention** – striving to achieve forest goals through thoughtful intervention in the field, while considering practical limitations.
 - **Vitality, resilience, and stability** – designing and managing the forest to create a healthy, robust system capable of withstanding disturbances, recovering, and returning to full function (a resilient system).

Threats to the Forest in Israel

Photo: Michael Hourj, KKL-JNF Photo Archive

Threats to the Forest and Ways of Coping

In small, densely populated Israel, there is intense competition over every piece of land. The soaring demand for housing and employment (driven by population growth, the highest in the west) constantly reduces the extent and quality of open spaces. Forests are among those affected.

A thorough understanding and analysis of the threats facing forests is essential. Without this knowledge, we will be unable to address the challenges that lie ahead.

Threats:

- **Ecological threats and the climate crisis**
- **Environmental threats**
- **Initiatives that harm the forest itself**
- **Fragmentation**
- **Threats to the statutory status of the forest**



First Tool

Classification of Forests

Overall Goal

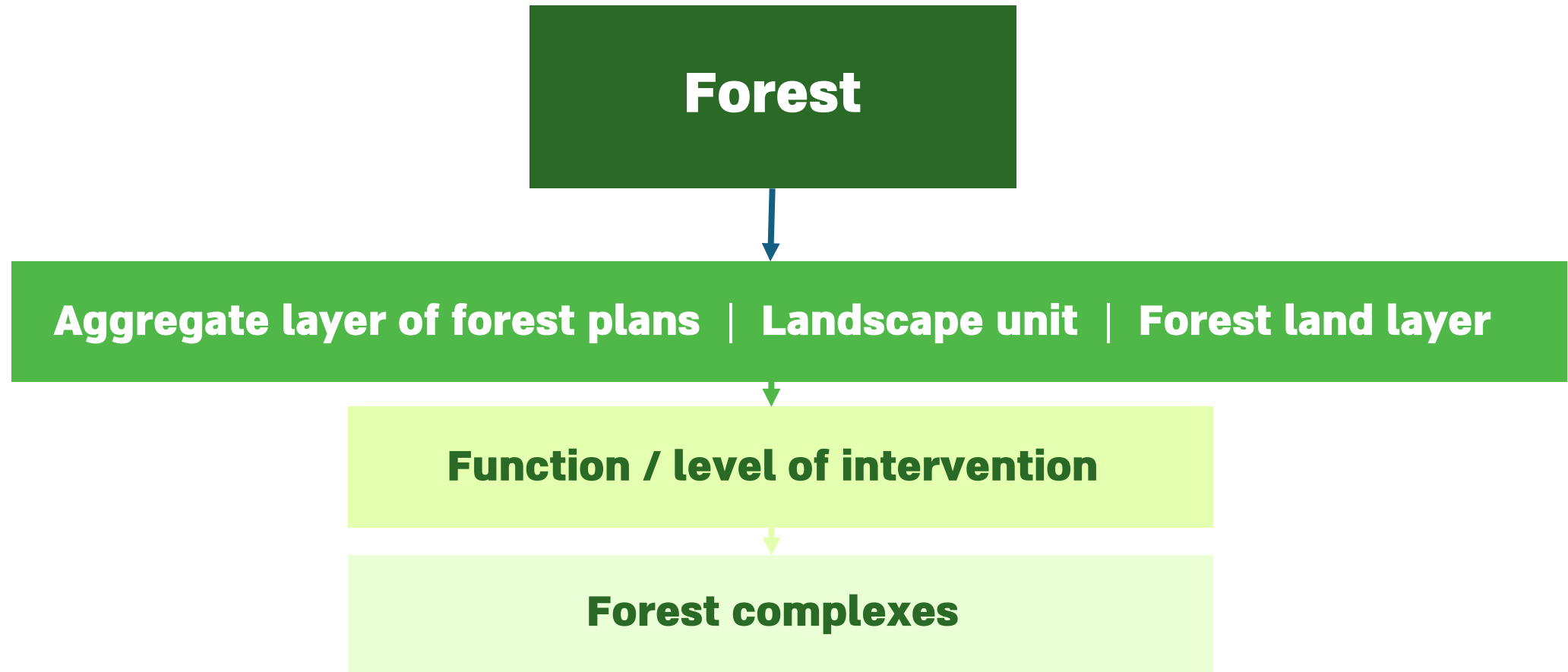
Creating a unique identity for each forest unit/complex

1. Spatial perspective
2. Guiding planning and implementation stages at detailed levels
3. Strengthening forest protection
4. Improving resource allocation
5. Creating guidelines that define forest complexes at a scale suited to the strategic plan and statement of intent

In detailed planning, each land unit will be refined

(for example: an area of high intervention will include zones with varying levels of intervention)

Stages of Spatial Analysis



Proposed Terminology

- **Forest ecosystem services** – ecological services provided by forest areas
- **Forest functions** – main functions within a forest complex:
 - Forest area oriented towards recreation and leisure
 - Area oriented toward forestry system functions
- **Forest complex** – adjacent or nearby forest areas with similar levels of intervention and functions.

Characterization of Forest Areas by Function

Principles:

Forest system services (forest functions), level of intervention

Each function has two levels of intervention:

- **High/medium** for forest areas oriented toward recreation and leisure.
- **Low/targeted** for forest areas oriented toward ecological forestry system functions.

Second Tool Legislation

Photo: Albatross Aerial Photography KKL-JNF Photo Archive

Legislation – Forest Declaration – Strengthened Legal Framework for Forest Protection

Proposed ‘Forest Law’

Alongside the strategic plan, and in coordination with relevant stakeholders and ongoing processes, KKL-JNF is working with the Ministry of Agriculture to draft a new Forest Law that will replace the existing Forest Ordinance.

Formalizing an Updated Forest Law

- **Will establish comprehensive legal protection** for Israel's forests and create a regulatory framework governing human presence and activities within forest areas.
- **Will establish a public body ("Forest Council")** to oversee and approve forest management in line with national planning policy, and grant KKL-JNF the authority to implement it, including enforcement and preventive powers. The law will also enable the adoption of regulations for implementation.

Third Tool

Establishing Principles and Guidelines for Visitor Management

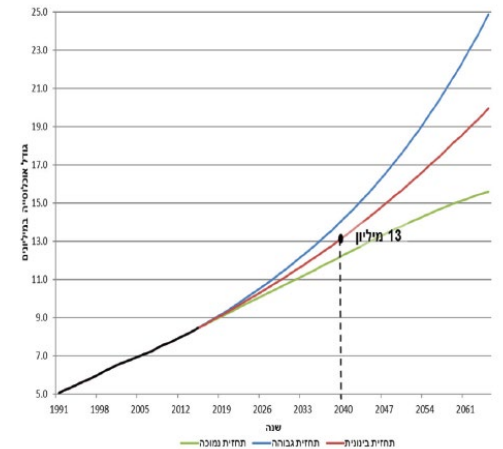
Preparing the Visitor Reception System for Projected Population Growth

The challenge – Population growth entails extensive urban development and infrastructure. At the same time, pressure on forests will increase due to higher demand for recreation and leisure.

A thoughtful response is required – to provide recreation and leisure services while ensuring the forest's ecological and landscape values are preserved.

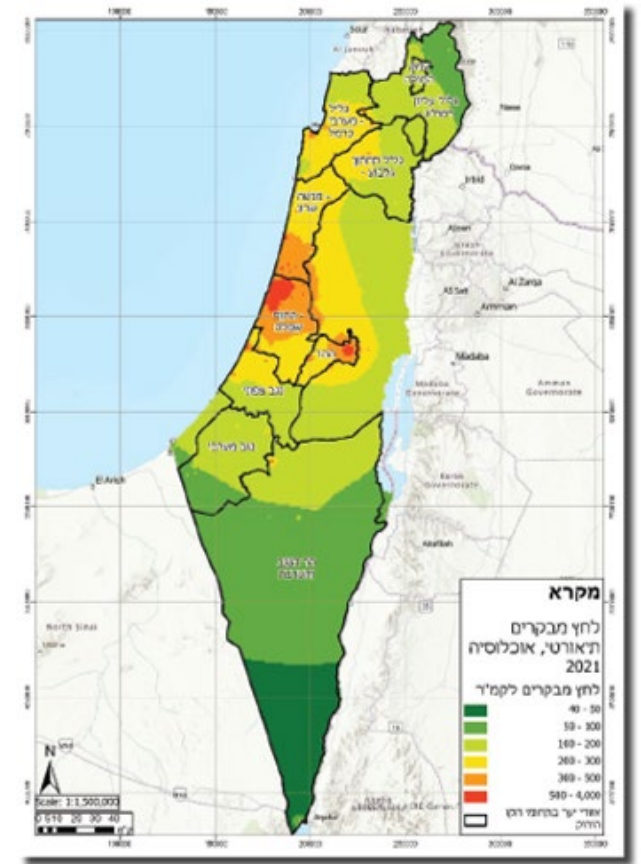
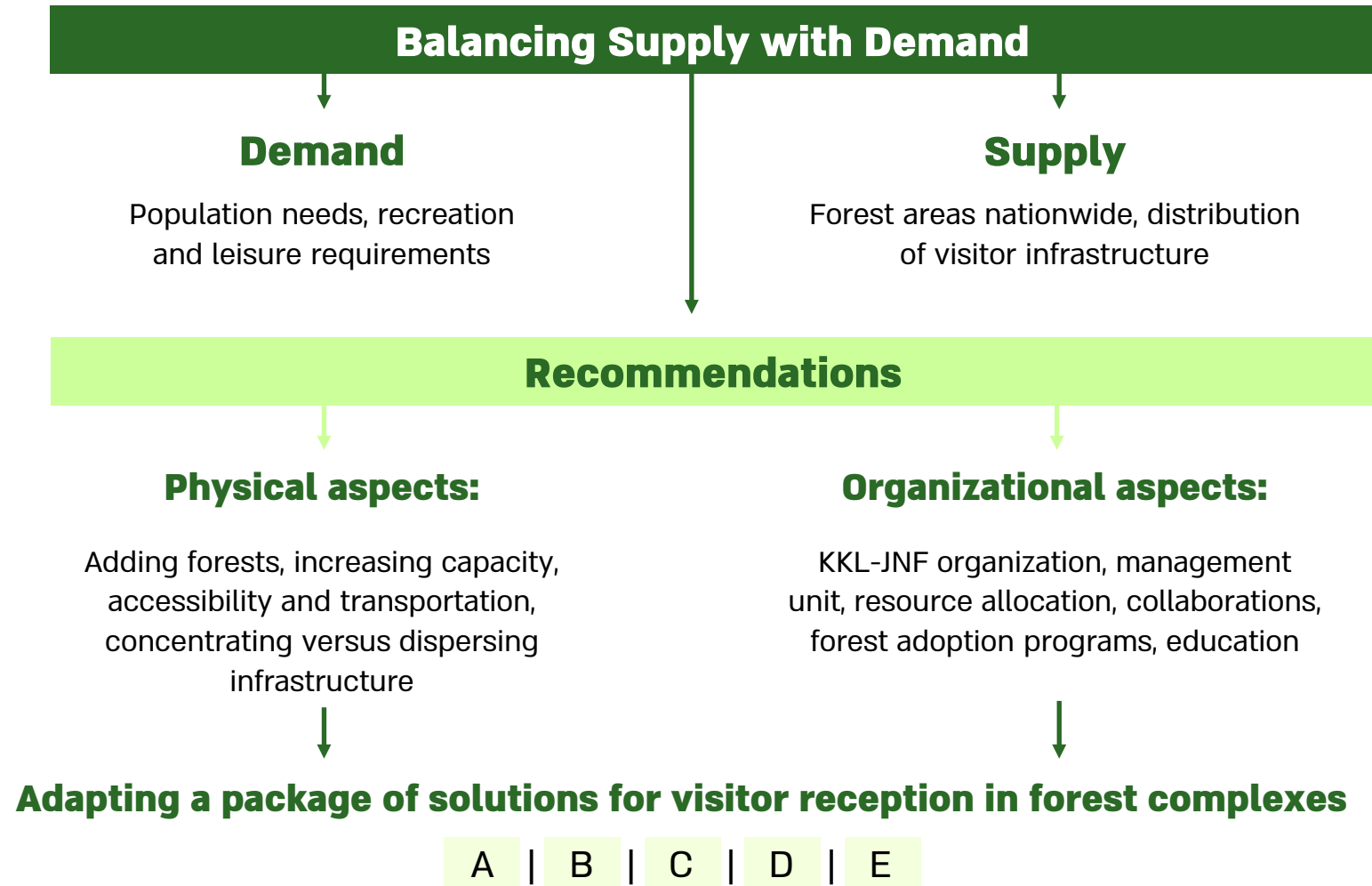
Proximity of forests to urban centers – forests are increasingly used as the main open spaces for cities.

The forest as a platform – adapting to diverse and changing patterns of use, such as outdoor schools, learning and workspaces in the forest, etc.



* Population growth in Israel according to three projections, 1991–2065

Methodology



Recommendations for Policy on Providing Forest Areas for Visitor Reception

- **Increasing the capacity of existing forest areas for visitors**
Mainly in forests near densely populated areas, using high-intervention measures: bringing the forest closer to the city, locating visitor infrastructure along the city-forest interface, utilizing buffer zones, and emphasizing the development and planning of forest-city connections.
- **Adding forest areas**
Expanding forest configurations in suitable areas with statutory availability.
- **Developing connectivity from city centers to forest sites**
Creating networks and links between forests and communities, improving public transport access to forests, and enhancing accessibility for populations without private vehicles.
- **Dividing forests by development and intervention levels**
Using forest classification to determine function, including division by intervention levels, to guide the placement of visitor infrastructure in appropriate locations. Forest classification is part of long-term planning and serves as a basis for refining land units in master plans, statutory planning, architectural development, and long-term ecological interface plans.
- **Principles for siting visitor infrastructure**
Creating a balance between the need to provide visitor facilities and protecting forest areas and the forest ecosystem's functions.

Principles for Concentrating Visitor Infrastructure and Placing Visitor Facilities

- **Concentrating infrastructure in suitable locations** – identify cleared areas, points of interest, public demand surveys, etc. Ensure high accessibility from communities or transport routes, close to public transport stations..
- **Optimal use of natural infrastructure** – leverage the forest itself, including trees, shrubs, terraces, stone ridges, land folds, forest clearings, and rock trails as climbing walls. Use local and natural materials, with flexible land impact during construction and maintenance.
- **Preference for locating infrastructure at forest edges and near urban areas** – concentrate along forest perimeter roads, at forest entrances, and near “forest gateways.” Avoid placing infrastructure deep within unspoiled forest whenever possible.
- **Physical considerations** – surfaces should be suitable, accessible, relatively flat, and comfortable for large groups of visitors.
- **Convenient connectivity** – from the city to the site via bicycle and walking paths, transport, gathering points, and parking facilities.

Fourth Tool

Stream Management and Establishing Guiding Principles

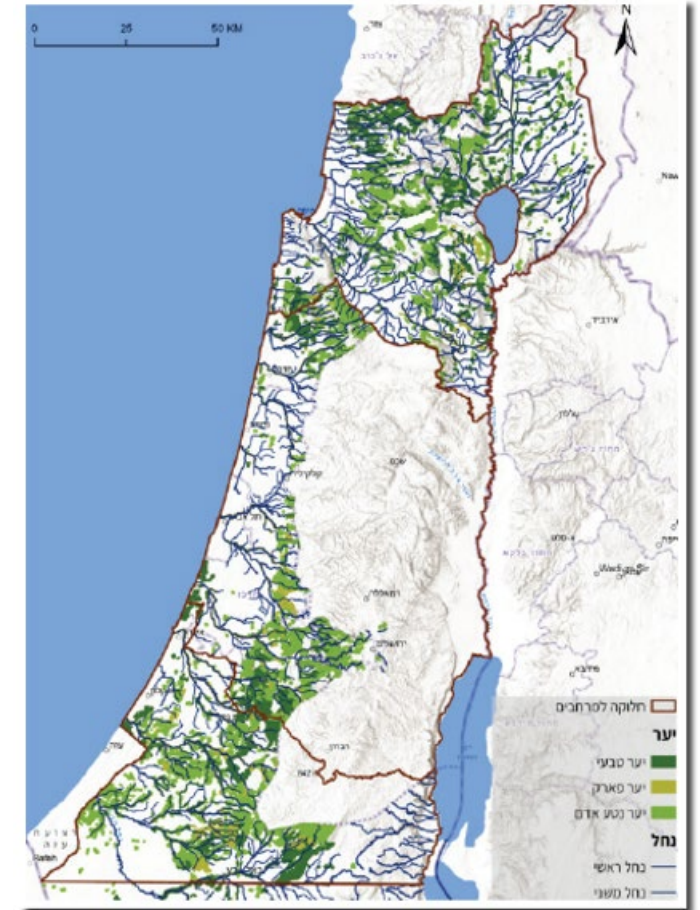
The Relationship Between Israel's Streams and Forest Areas in a Single Master Plan

Of approximately 9,000 km of streams in Israel:

- **About 15% of streams at the national level** – 1,350 km – pass through forest areas.
- **North of Be'er Sheva, about 24% of all regional streams** – 1,235 km – flow through forests.

Streams Passing Through Forest Areas by Region:

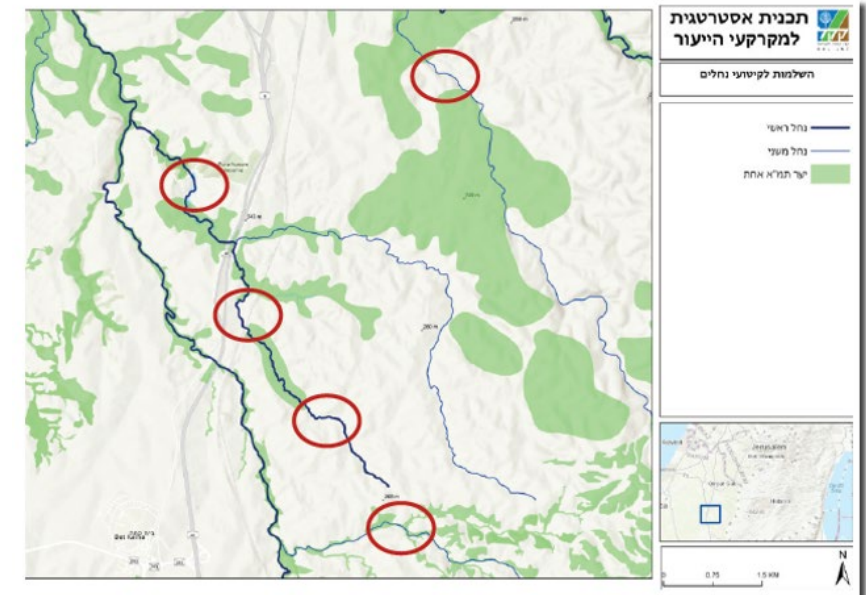
Region	Total Length (km)
North	325
Center	310
South	725



The Stream and the Forest: Complementary/Supporting Ecosystems

Adding and restoring stream segments at critical points enhances the forest's optimal role.
A structurally complex forest with diverse plant species can:

- Reduce runoff into the stream, thereby lowering water pollution.
- Reduce surface water flow, helping to limit bank erosion and undercutting.
- Help regulate water flow in the stream and along its banks, contributing to flood reduction.



Every forest plan that includes a stream should address the stream's values and inherent potential. In some cases, the stream is the core of the forest; in others, it is part of a wider forest system.

A key principle of effective forest management is continuity, to be advanced through tools such as statutory continuity and joint management bodies.

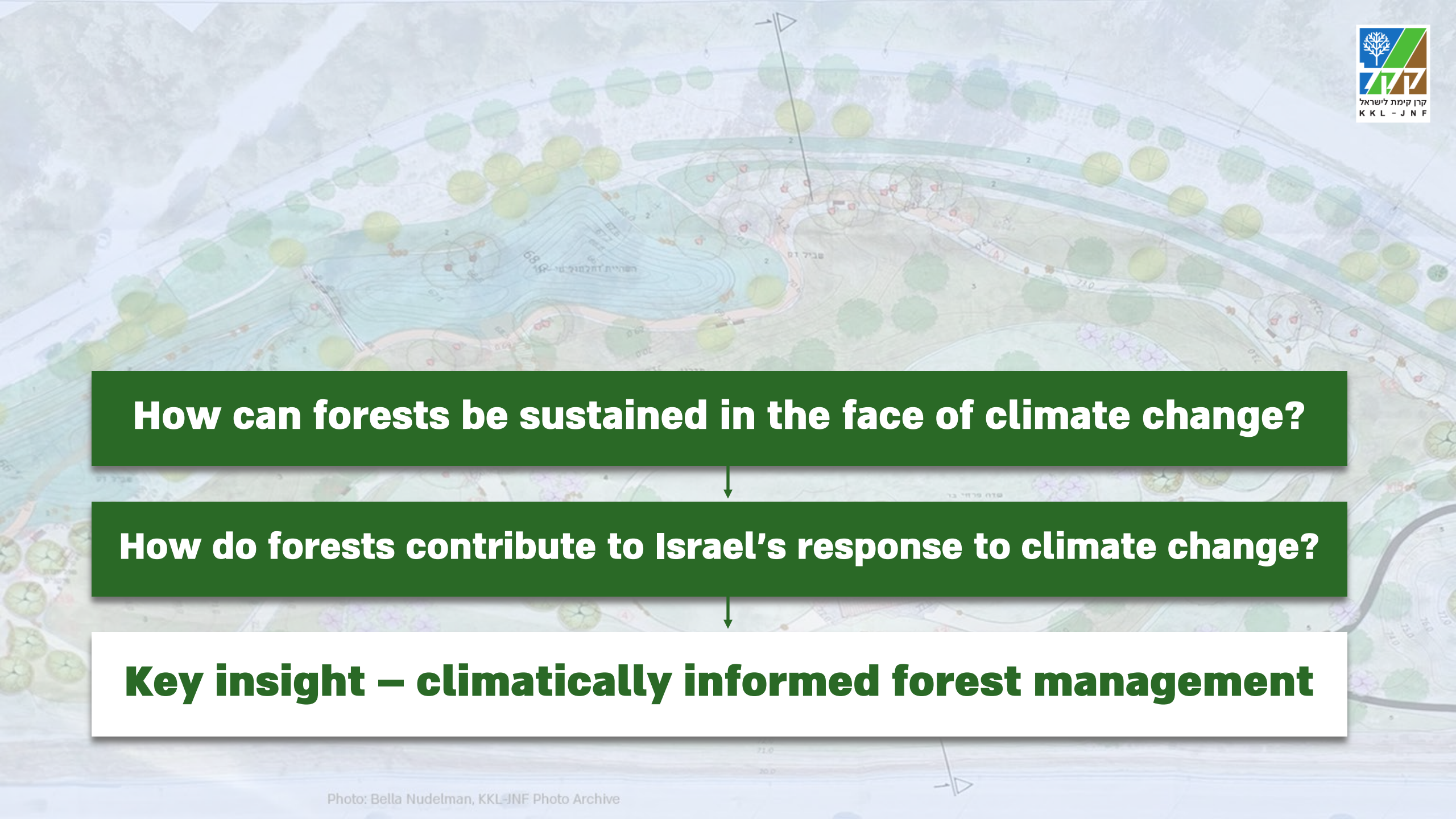
Fifth Tool

Preparing for Climate Change

International Conventions that Israel is Signatory to:

- **CBD: The Convention of Biodiversity**
- **UNCCD: UN Convention to Combat Desertification**
- **UNFCCC: UN Framework Convention on Climate Change** – Paris Agreement 2015
- **The European Green Deal**
- **Glasgow Leaders' Declaration on Forests and Land Use**

**The strategic forest plan
currently promoted by KKL-JNF
provides an appropriate framework
in response to UN resolutions.**



How can forests be sustained in the face of climate change?

How do forests contribute to Israel's response to climate change?

Key insight – climatically informed forest management

Recent Examples of Preparedness for Climate Change

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- **Grazing, thinning and firebreaks to reduce forest fire spread**
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- **Selecting climate-resilient species**
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- **Creating limans (shallow dams) in dry streambeds in the Negev to trap floodwater and utilize every drop**
-
- **Creating reinforced terraces in flash-flood prone areas to prevent erosion (example: Bustan Oshrat in Nahariya)**
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Sixth Tool

Updating the Forest Management Doctrine and Adapting it to Climate Change

Forest Management Principles

- **Goal-oriented adaptive interface:** Planning and implementing forest interface actions according to defined objectives, with ongoing monitoring to assess their success over time.
- **Diversity, complexity, and integrity:** Preserving and nurturing a variety of landscapes, vegetation structures, species, and genotypes within the forest.
- **Encouraging natural processes:** Relying as much as possible on natural processes, self-organization, and local species that have undergone selection and adaptation.
- **Informed intervention:** Achieving forest management goals through interventions tailored to the site.
- **Uncertainty:** Regarding the pace, intensity, and spatial manifestation of climate change in Israel, and its impact on the ecosystem in general and on the forest in particular.

Seventh Tool

Long-Term Planning and the Forest Planning and Management Process in Israel

KKL-JNF Long-Term Planning

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Long-Term Management Process

- **Strategic Forest Plan** – a compass for policy direction.
Provides guidelines and defines forest classification.
Valid for 25 years.
- **Forest Master Plan** – a dedicated master plan for the forest. Valid for 20 years.
- **Statutory Forest Plan** – statutory planning.

- **Architectural Planning** – according to the Planning and Building Law and the approved statutory plan.

- **Long-Term Ecological Forest Interface Plan** – a dedicated action plan for a land unit, based on required management and interface actions. Valid for 10 years.

In Summary:

- **Implementing the plan will realize the forest vision.**

- **The plan is based on all planning processes in Israel.**

- **The plan serves as an organizational compass for forest management in Israel and highlights management tools and required resources.**

- **The strategic plan is a significant milestone for the management (planning and implementation) of forests in Israel.**

Thank you!



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Photo: Bonnie Scheinman, Jini Agency, KKL-JNF Photo Archive