

## Preparing for World Forest Congress 2021 in Seoul

# Korea Forest Service to Host Global Forest Meetings in June

By Yoon Young-sil

**T**he Korea Forest Service (KFS) will host the 15th World Forest Congress in 2021. The congress is the largest global gathering of foresters held in every six years to strengthen international cooperation on forest restoration and combating desertification. In the Seoul congress, says Minister Kim Jae-hyun of the KFS, the role of forests will be ever more highlighted as 2021 is the year in which the Paris Agreement on climate change will be implemented and the achievements of the Aichi Biodiversity Targets will be evaluated. As part of its preparations for the congress, the KFS will host two international events in June -- Asia-Pacific Forestry Week 2019 and the 28th Session of the Asia-Pacific Forestry Commission. Through these events, Kim says, the KFS will bolster cooperation with other countries to achieve the global forest goals and targets. At the same time, the KFS will share Korea's reforestation experience and programs on forest-based job creation and economic growth. The following are excerpts from an interview with Kim. – Ed.



Korea Forest Service Minister Kim Jae-hyun

**Asia-Pacific Forestry Week 2019 and the 28th Session of the Asia-Pacific Forestry Commission are scheduled to be held in Songdo Convensia next month. What is the significance of the events and what is the Korea Forest Service hoping to achieve at the events?**

The Asia-Pacific Forestry Commission holds a session every two years so that government representatives gather together to discuss various forest-related issues. The Asia-Pacific Forestry Week, meanwhile, is a quadrennial conference attended by the general public as well as governments, international organizations and NGOs. This year's conference

is expected to be attended by more than 1,500 persons, including representatives from 46 governments, international organizations and NGOs.

This year's topic is Forests for Peace and Well-being. Expected to be discussed are peace implementation with forests playing a crucial role in troubled, desertified and poverty-stricken regions and forest welfare improvement for leisure, healing and job creation purposes.

The Korea Forest Service is planning to take advantage of the opportunity for international-level discussion of forest industry issues, such as climate change response, reforestation and biodiversity

preservation, building up the momentum for World Forestry Congress 2021. At the same time, we will share our forestation know-hows and promote our efforts for enhancing employment opportunities and related economic growth.

The Asian Forest Cooperation Organization was officially launched in April 2018, led by the Korea Forest Service. What is the organization's purpose and what projects has it been engaged in so far?

We suggested the establishment of the organization at the special South Korea-ASEAN summit in 2009 in order to better respond to climate change in Asia.

We are expecting that South Korea will be able to take a bigger international role for forestation and reforestation in Asia and lead various negotiations in the industry by sharing our successful cases in the organization.

South Korea and the 10 member countries of the ASEAN concluded a forest cooperation agreement in 2011 as the first step for the organization's establishment. Since then, the two sides have collaborated in various projects for forest restoration, advanced forest management based on geographic information and satellite imaging systems, and income source development for mountain village residents.

In this context, a regional education and training center of the organization was opened in Yangon, Myanmar in July 2018. In addition, the membership of the organization has been expanded to cover the entire Asian continent. Collaboration projects for green Asia will be launched in the entire continent down the road.

### **Seoul will host World Forestry Congress 2021. What is its significance and what preparations are required for it?**

Hosted every six years by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the congress is the largest conference in the global forest industry. Governments, international organizations, scholars, experts and enterprises participate in it to discuss climate change response, forest restoration, biodiversity enhancement, and other topics.

The 15th congress is held in Seoul

from May 24 to 28, 2021. Over 30,000 persons from approximately 160 countries are expected to attend the conference.

The upcoming conference is highly significant in that the Paris Agreement will be implemented in 2021 and new biodiversity goals will be set at the conference.

There, we will promote our successful forest policies regarding greening, climate change mitigation, smart forest management based on information and communications technology, forest tourism, and forest job creation.

We have been making thorough preparations for the 15th congress since the decision on the venue was reached. Asia-Pacific Forestry Week 2019 and the 28th Session of the Asia-Pacific Forestry Commission are preliminary events for the congress. In addition, we are about to sign a business agreement for the congress with the Food and Agriculture Organization. Our preparations will accelerate once the business agreement is signed.

### **What are the Korea Forest Service's current international cooperation projects?**

We are currently engaged in various bilateral cooperation projects and official development aid projects in a number of developing countries.

Our bilateral cooperation is currently underway in 32 countries. We have built bilateral cooperation networks with Asian, American, African and Middle Eastern countries by holding both regular and irregular meetings for policy and information exchange as well as supporting South Korean companies' expansion of their forest businesses abroad.

In 2012, we initiated pilot Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation Plus (REDD+) projects in Indonesia, Cambodia, Myanmar and Laos to better respond to climate change by reducing greenhouse gas emissions attributable to forest destruction.

The pilot REDD+ projects are expected to help reduce 700,000 tons of carbon dioxide a year, which is equivalent

to the annual emissions of 50,000 South Koreans.

Also, we set up the Korea-Indonesia Forest Center in Indonesia in 2011 and the Korea-Mekong Forest Cooperation Center in Cambodia in 2016. We have strengthened our cooperation with South-east Asia via the centers.

At present, we are moving ahead with official development aid projects for peatland restoration, ecotourism and so on with countries around the Mekong River. The centers are taking a leading role in the projects.

As of now, we are engaged in official development aid projects worth a total of 12.9 billion won, providing 5.3 billion won for Indonesia and Mongolia through bilateral cooperation, and providing 7.6 billion won in multilateral projects led by the seven international organizations including the Asian Forest Cooperation Organization and the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification.

### **Problems related to particulate matter are becoming more and more serious in South Korea. What are the Korea Forest Service's countermeasures?**

We are planning to organically interconnect forests inside and outside cities for ecological health improvement so that forests' particulate matter absorption and adsorption capabilities can be utilized to the maximum extent possible.

Functional forestation and tree replacement will lead to better ecological health of forests, which will result in more fresh and cold air flowing into cities.

Linear wind paths connecting the inside and outside of cities will be created based on the forest connection and more forests will be made in and around particulate matter emission sources, densely populated living spaces, large buildings, etc.

We are working on urban forest management techniques and guidelines so that urban forests can be expanded in individual cities.

**The Korea Forest Service has planted trees in Mongolian deserts with a combined area of 3,000 hectares since**



KFS Minister Kim speaks at a talk concert for young job seekers held at Konkuk University in Seoul on May 23.

**2007 to block yellow dust and particulate matter. What is the effect of the tree planting and to what extent has it been successful?**

The project covers the Gobi Desert in Mongolia and the Kubuqi Desert in China, two of the major sources of yellow dust.

In Mongolia, we conducted the tree planting for desertification prevention and yellow dust reduction from 2007 to 2016 and are currently transferring plantations and creating urban forests in Ulaanbaatar, which will continue until 2021.

Our efforts have improved the public awareness of the importance of forests in Mongolia, leading to yellow dust and particulate matter reduction.

**North Korea is one of the countries where forest destruction is fastest in the world. What is the Korea Forest Service planning to do concerning the issue?**

The most important prerequisite for forest cooperation between the two Koreas is their agreement between themselves and cooperation with the international community.

Forest restoration in North Korea supported by South Korea's experience and expertise can be smooth only after the prerequisite is satisfied.

Participation from the private sector is very important for continuous and

large-scale cooperation. We are continuously building cooperation networks with entities in the private sector willing to join our efforts.

**How can the South benefit from reforestation in the North?**

The various benefits include unification cost reduction, less particulate matter from the North, more carbon credits for the South, and many more.

When Germany was unified, 10 percent of the total unification cost of approximately 1,200 trillion won had to be spent on environmental restoration with 54.3 percent of East German forests damaged. This implies that early reforestation in North Korea can make the same process in the Korean Peninsula much more economical.

The particulate matter from North Korea, in the meantime, currently accounts for 15 percent of that in Seoul and its surrounding areas. The National Institute of Forest Science announced in 2017 that reforestation in the North would reduce South Korea's average particulate matter concentration from 26.5 to 24.9 micrograms per cubic meter. In addition, the reforestation is expected to bring South Korea 100.6 billion won of carbon credits a year.

Even more benefits can be obtained in the long term. For instance, clean for-

est products such as mushrooms and wood can be brought to South Korean consumers from the North and forest ecotourism can gain more popularity based on the excellent forest resources of the two Koreas, not to mention job creation in the industry.

**South Korea is one of the most developed countries in terms of forestation. What is the current status of the Korea Forest Services' overseas plantation projects?**

South Korea began to invest in overseas forests in 1968, starting from Indonesia, and South Korean companies boosted the scale of the investment in 1993. Until 2018, the 37 companies and organizations including the National Forestry Cooperative Federation, LG International, Eagon Corporation and Hansol Home Deco planted trees in 484,000 hectares of land in 14 countries such as Indonesia, Vietnam, New Zealand and Paraguay. The area is about eight times the area of Seoul.

In the long term, the area is slated to be increased to at least one million hectares by 2050 and more policies will be prepared for investment diversification and new business model development. At the same time, cooperation will be expanded with Latin American countries, which have large potential in terms of forest development, and a series of pilot projects will be underway along with consulting and project financing.

**How is the Korea Forest Service creating jobs for young job seekers?**

We have hosted open forums to better listen to them with the youth unemployment rate on the rise in South Korea. The open forums are divided into recruitment fairs, personal consulting sessions for those wishing to get a job or start a business, and talk concerts where young job seekers and our executive members, including myself, have free discussions.

We are providing job experience in their fields of interest and startup support programs as well so that they can explore their career options in the industry with greater ease. 