

Jelle Behagel		
Affiliation	Forest and Nature Conservation Policy Group, Wageningen University	
Session Chair	Session 4.1	The politics of forest governance: understanding power and global complexity.
Presentations	Session 4.1	<i>The politics of forest governance: understanding power and global complexity.</i>

Abstract Session 4.1 – Forest fantasies: politics and forests in the Anthropocene.

Global policy initiatives to use forest conservation and restoration to counter climate change and halt biodiversity loss are gaining in popularity. These initiatives include forest conservation projects, global carbon markets, and political calls for large-scale reforestation. They are part of national climate commitments under the Paris agreement of 2015 and other global policy initiatives such as the ‘Bonn Challenge’ and the New York Declaration on Forests. While these commitments and initiatives have the power to mobilise many people, they also tend to ignore challenges of political resistance by vested interest and power structures, as well as feasibility of practical implementation of specific forest campaigns. We therefore call them fantasies, as the power these initiatives have to move and affect people play a large role in the enthusiastic adoption of them by states, companies, and civil society. This paper explores the role that forest fantasies play in policy and politics. It introduces the concept of fantasy as an analytical tool to study how political discourses, markets, forests, communities, and emotions are all articulated in fantasies that shape policy pathways for the future. The research explores three empirical examples: global zero deforestation commitments, private reforestation campaigns, and media uproar about the burning of the Amazon. The paper then details (1) how forests are articulated in global discourses on climate change and biodiversity loss; (2) how forest fantasies articulate and give shape to objects, discourse, and emotions; and (3) how fantasies of forest and nature connect emotions and desire to political objectives and ideals. The paper concludes with a reflection on the global fantasy of forest as the solution to global crises of climate change, biodiversity loss, and growing inequality.