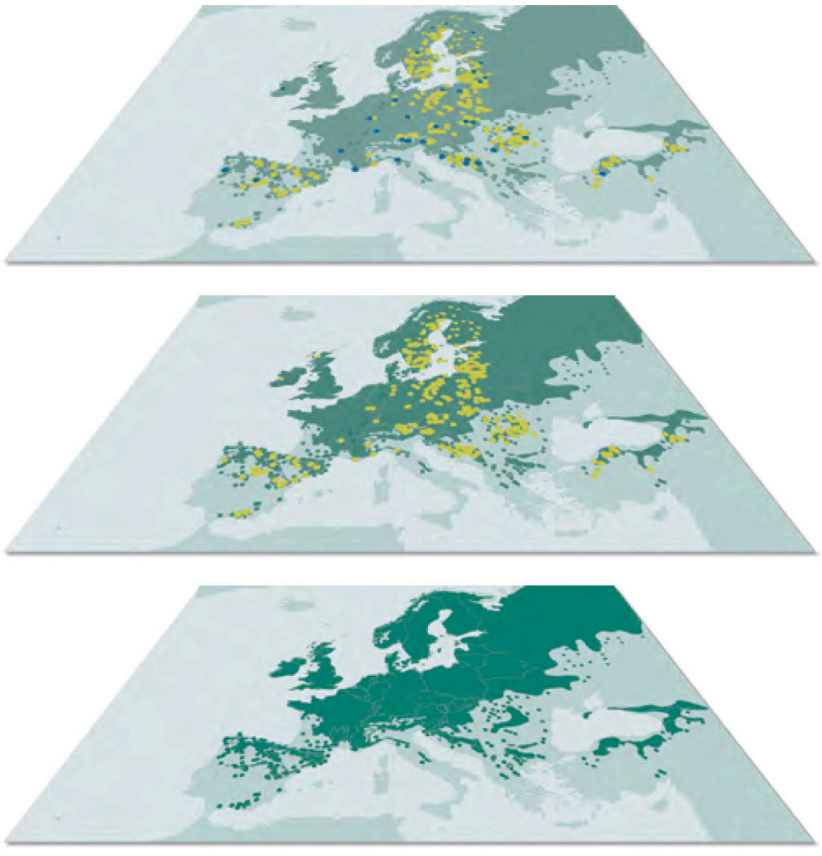
# What is the GENETIC CONSERVATION UNIT (GCU) NETWORK ?

The Pan-European Genetic Conservation Unit (GCU) network safeguards the genetic diversity of Europe's forests. This is achieved through a set of selected forest areas, called Genetic Conservation Units (GCUs).

A GCU is a forest area formally designated for the protection of forest genetic resources (FGR) of one or more tree species. These areas are managed so that natural processes can take place, ensuring the long-term survival and adaptability of tree populations.

Forest genetic resources are the heritable (genetic) diversity within tree species. They represent the hidden part of forest biodiversity, allowing species to adapt to changing conditions. While forests provide products such as timber and carbon storage, as well as many other ecosystem services, it is the genetic resources that enable trees to continue delivering these benefits in the future.

The aim of the GCU network is representation: to capture the main range of genetic diversity across Europe. This does not mean including every forest population but rather creating a core network that is as small as possible without losing essential genetic diversity.




Distribution range, genetic conservation units and core network of the species *Pinus sylvestris* (EUFORGEN 2021).

**Further reading:**
EUFORGEN. 2021 Forest Genetic Resources Strategy for Europe. European Forest Institute.
http://euforgen.org/FGRS4E

EUROPEAN FOREST INSTITUTE