

Forests in Poland: sustainable forest management and education on forest



Author: Piotr Bieniek

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Aims and objectives of the State Forests in Poland

In accordance with the provisions of the Forest Act of 28 September 1991 (with its later amendments) and the regulations and ordinances resulting from it, the main aim of the State Forests is to manage the forests according to the principles of universal protection of forests, maintaining their permanence, continuous and sustainable use of all forest functions and augmentation of forest resources.

This aim is pursued through sustainable, multifunctional forest management in accordance with forest management plans drawn up for each forest district for a ten-year period. Each plan sets out objectives of silvicultural management and protection of specified parts of forests (stands) and methods of achieving them.

The State Forests administers the state-owned forests (other than national parks, the land administered by the Agricultural Property Agency or leased under a perpetual lease agreement). This involves managing forests and other land and property, monitoring forest condition, keeping and updating data on forest area size and timber resources, monitoring and forecasting the level of fire hazard and the occurrence of insect pests and fungal diseases of trees (The act on forests of 28 September 1991).

Forest functions

Forests fulfil diverse functions, either naturally or as a result of human activities:

- Ecological (protective) functions: favourable impact on shaping of the local and global climate, regulation of water cycle in nature, prevention of floods, avalanches and landslides, protection of soil against erosion and landscape against steppization;
- Social functions: providing health-improving and recreational conditions for society and contributing to the labour market;
- Productive (economic) functions: primarily production of renewable biomass, including timber and non-timber products.

The statutory obligation of the State Forests is to pursue sustainable forest management in order to ensure preservation of forests, increase of forest resources and their continuous multifunctional utilisation (The act on forests of 28 September 1991).

Sustainable forest management

According to the act on forests of 28 September 1991, a “sustainable forest management means activity seeking to shape the structure of forests and make use of them in a manner and at a rate ensuring the permanent protection of their biological diversity, a high level of productivity and regeneration potential, vitality and a capacity to serve – now and in the future – all the important protective, economic and social functions at local, national and global levels, without harm being done to other ecosystems” (Art.6, point 1a).

“Sustainable forest management is engaged in pursuant to a Forest Management Plan or simplified Forest Management Plan, with account in particular being taken of the following objectives: 1) the preservation of forests and of their favourable influences on climate, air, water, soil and conditions for human life and health, as well as the natural balance; 2) the protection of forests, especially those that, with their associated ecosystems, constitute natural fragments of native nature, or else those particularly valuable in terms of: a) the preservation of the diversity of nature, b) the preservation of forest genetic resources, c) valuable features of the landscape, d) the needs of science; 3) the protection of soils and areas particularly vulnerable to pollution or damage, as well as of special social significance; 4) the protection of surface and underground waters, and drainage-basin retention, in particular in divide areas and areas of the alimentation of bodies of water by groundwater; 5) the production – on the basis of rational management – of wood, as well as raw materials and by-products of forest utilisation” (Art 7.1).

Promoting sustainable forestry

The United Nations declared 2011 as the International Year of Forests (IYF). Its motto was “Forests for the people” and it was intended to increase social awareness of how important forests are for our lives and how necessary they are for the survival and wellbeing of people in the whole world.

The State Forests in Poland were actively involved in promoting forests and sustainable forestry. Five themes based on the United Nations motif were used to promote the important role forests play in human life: “More forests in Poland”, “Forests in Poland are for everyone”, “Forests protect lives”, “Forests as employer and business partner”, “Wood as sustainable resource”.

which 1190 thousand hectares are located in areas administered by the State Forests, which accounts for nearly 16.7% of their territory. Six new PFCs were created in the late 2011 and two existing ones were enlarged.

Promotional forest complexes were also created to carrying out trainings for foresters. Forestry specialists (Chief foresters, supervising engineers etc.) conduct technical training programs to provide foresters with updates on a wide variety of topics such as silviculture, timber harvesting, site preparation, forest plan management and/or natura 2000 network. There are several training programs conducted annually depending on needs (Forests in Poland 2012).

At the level of forest district are carried out some projects which are prepared by (*Centrum Informacyjne Lasów Państwowych w Warszawie, Stowarzyszenie Wspierania Międzynarodowych Wymian Studenckich*) The State Forests Information Centre in Warsaw, Erasmus Student Network (ESN). In 2013 was implemented a project named "The Erasmus' Forest" (*Las Erasmusa*). The aims of the project were educational activities concern the role and condition of Polish forests combined with the action of afforestation of forest area (2000 beech seedlings).

Nature and forest education in the State Forests

Nature and forest education in all organizational units of the State Forests is based on **The Programme for Forest Education of Society in Forest Districts**, in force since 1 January 2004, which helps in planning and targeting educational activities.

The Forest Culture Centre in Gołuchów (near Warsaw) plays a special role in providing forest education. Many educational and cultural events initiated by the Centre, such as the national story-telling competition "Tales from the Forest Clearing", the national amateur art competition for foresters, the educational festival "Meeting with Forest" and the "Earth Day" festival have become permanent items in the educational calendar of Poland. In 2011 alone, nearly 170 thousand people, mainly children and youngsters, participated in educational events, such as art and photographic competitions and various exhibitions.

A popular form of forest and nature education is the educational portal provided by the State Forests at www.erys.pl, which attracts several hundred thousand visitors each year.

The educational activity of the State Forests is financed mainly from the Forest Districts' own resources and from the national and regional funds for environmental protection. The money is used to create new educational centres, for training, purchase of educational materials and for publishing information and literature.

The State Forests, including the PFCs, at present offers the following facilities to the visitors: 50 education centres, 246 forest exhibition rooms, 509 teaching shelters and "green classes", 935 educational trails, 1681 educational points and 3142 other facilities.

The State Forests also offers a wide range of tourist facilities which are available to visitors of any age and social group. There are nearly 4.5 thousand beds available in recreation and training centres and in foresters' and hunters' lodges. They provide a welcome rest after a day of walking, cycling or horse riding. There are over 20 thousand kilometres of walking routes, nearly 4 thousand kilometres of cycling routes and about 7 thousand kilometres of horse riding routes. Additionally, the visitors can use almost 100 sports facilities and 650 other facilities (The State Forest in Figures 2012).

Centre for Nature and Forestry Education in Rogowo.

The Centre for Nature and Forestry Education in Rogowo was established in 1996 as a joint of the Warsaw University of Life Science - SSGW (*Szkoła Główna Gospodarstwa Wiejskiego*) and the Directorate-General of the State Forests.

The main goal of the centre is improving skills of the forest service, forest and nature education for children and youngsters as well as realisation of the academic tasks of the SSGW. The centre promotes understanding, appreciation and conservation of the natural environment. It organises training courses and conferences, creates educational programs and conducts ecological workshops as well as publishing.

Faculty of Forestry

There are three well-known universities in Poland having a faculty of forestry such as the University of Agriculture in Krakow, the Warsaw University of Life Science and the University of Life Science in Poznan. The universities cooperate mainly with the State Forests and are supported in many projects and research.

Training in the State Forest

There is an opportunity to undertake an apprenticeship in the State forest. This is an offer referred to forest alumni. The practice usually last a one year.

The General Director's ordinance of the State Forest (2009) gives graduates the opportunity to do an internship not only in the State Forests but also at other businesses and institutions relating to forestry. There is also possibility to take on a practice at the foreign institutions referring to forestry or conduct economic activity related to forest management and forestry. For example: national parks, academic institutions in the field of forestry, Bureau of Forest Management and Geodesy, Forest Reproductive Material Office and forest schools as well as forest units of territorial administration.

Summary

Sustainable forest management comprises all those direct and indirect measures of protection, tending and utilization which ensure the permanent conservation of forests. Sustainable management maintains the natural plasticity and diversity of life forms which enable forests to evolve and provide human benefits from their ecological, economic, social and cultural functions in perpetuity (Heuveldop, 1994).

References

The report is based on the materials obtained from:

1. Forests in Poland 2012 / 2013.
2. The State Forest in Figures 2012 / 2013.
3. The Act on Forests of 28 September 1991.