



SUSTAINABLE FOREST MANAGEMENT: October 18-21 2018, Alutaguse Parish, EE

in co-operation with the Estonian Fund for Nature

Background

Forests cover 1,600,00 sq km (35%) of the European Union and are a vitally important continental resource for local economies, people and biodiversity which cross borders and climatic regions. Yet forestry is one of the European issues that has little direct input from Brussels and is dealt with by individual nations as a national competency. Therefore this coherent and joined natural landscape is divided by national borders and managed by different government's policies which can hinder the sustainable management of this important resource across its natural area.

As a result Forum Synergies is focussing on Sustainable forestry as a topic for discussion and the sharing of experiences and ideas. It set up an initial scoping meeting in 2012 where a small working group started to plan a programme of activities around Sustainable Forestry and drew up a work plan. The group brought together representatives from 4 countries who agreed to deliver four workshops based around the following **topics**:

- (1) To raise **awareness** of the different services provided by sustainable forest management
To analyse **strategies** of how forests can be a lever for local development in rural communities
- (2) To share **experiences** of how rural communities are involved in looking after woodlands
- (3) To give local actors and authorities better **access** to practical knowledge about sustainable forest management

Ours goals were to:

- (1) To understand and communicate what **sustainable forestry means in practice**.
- (2) To disseminate the **EU Forestry Strategy** amongst practitioners and civil society.
- (3) To help formulate realistic, complementary and consistent **policies in and between member states**.
- (4) Propose **actions** and recommend **support**.

So far we have held two workshops, the first in the UK in March 2016 and the second in Serbia in November 2016. We now are organising the third in the series in Estonia.

So far we have identified these **elements** which are important factors in the context of sustainable forestry and which will be taken into consideration during our discussions:

- Sustainable management across the main European forest types (Mediterranean, Central European, temperate, Scandinavian)
- Dissemination of good practice at stakeholder level
- State Action Plans and programmes
- Member state coordination/cooperation/consistency at the stakeholder level and where appropriate try to link up rural development funding between and across state boundaries to improve consistency of management, sustainability and communication
- The role of forests at the heart of Europe's Green Infrastructure and in delivery of the 2020 Biodiversity Strategy

- Promotion of woodland and wood products and the communication of forestry benefits to decision makers and civil society.
- The cultural role of woodlands to communities and in the landscape
- The role and importance of small woodland owners
- The development of information systems
- Climate Change mitigation
- Forestry policy coordination at the National and European levels
- The impact of forests as a source for "green electricity", renewable resource
- The "access to forests" as an upcoming conflict between big companies and small owners.

Results of the Previous Workshops held in the UK and Serbia

At the first workshop, held in Somerset UK, we discussed many different aspects and definitions of forest management and resolved not to strive for any standard definitions of sustainable forest management. Instead we chose to focus on the values and principles which may guide the efforts to achieve sustainability, which we saw as a process rather than a static measurable condition.

We therefore agreed upon four key principles:

- A holistic respect for the health of woodlands and forests as natural organisms and systems, which have a validity and even sanctity in their own right, regardless of human intervention
- A sense of stewardship of forests on behalf of humankind now and in the future, rather than selfish or short-term exploitative use of forests
- A sense of communal responsibility for, and pride in, the forests; and of fairness in the provision and allocation of forest-based benefits and resources
- A global perspective, based on care for all the world's forests and on awareness of the fragility of global ecosystems and climate.

We agreed that these principles need to be held to the competing interests in forests from those who make a living from woodland products to those people who live in and around them through to the wildlife that depends on the habitats that woodlands create and maintain.

Above all we wanted to stimulate dialogue about all these interests to ensure that that they are complementary and not competitive.

The second workshop was held in the Tara National Park in Serbia and offered the opportunity to test and discuss the 4 Principles in a EU accession country that was moving away from a centralised government model.

Although the forests in Serbia were in reasonably good condition there are real signs that they exist in a quickly changing world and a series of challenges lie ahead. Currently economic activity is limited to local needs but it is clear that climatic conditions have changed over recent years which are causing problems through from pests and diseases as well as the increased incidence of fires. Alongside this there are also problems related to land abandonment by private owners and lack of funding for public bodies such as National Parks. There is also a lack of engagement at central Government level.

Therefore forests and especially their managers are having to meet the challenges of climate change in the short term and the economic pressures driven by EU accession in the medium term as both of these issues have the capacity to seriously disrupt the well-being of local communities through loss of jobs and possibly even a reduction in firewood. Although, tourism is of growing importance it is heavily dependent on an attractive landscape and the variety of activities which are delivered through the sustainable management of the forests.

- See report [link](#)

Venue

Alutaguse parish is situated in the Northeast part of Estonia around 180 km from the capital city of Tallinn. Alutaguse is one of the densely forested corners of Estonia, similar in appearance to the taiga. Swamp, mire, and dry boreal forests predominate here. Pine and birch forests are most widespread. There are a large number of treeless mires and very few meadows. The fauna of Alutaguse area resembles that of taiga to the extent that some incidental arrivals here – wolverine, Siberian jay and the great grey owl – are characteristic taiga species.

Extensive forests in Alutaguse are also home to flying squirrels and a large bear population. Golden eagles and white-tailed eagles nest here relatively frequently. Most of the 40 breeding pairs of osprey in Estonia have congregated in the Alutaguse and Karula regions. Mires are a natural part of the Alutaguse landscape. Estonia's largest mire system is situated here. The western part of the landscape region includes the protected Muraka and Ratva Bogs and Sirtsu Mire.

Human inhabitation is relatively recent and sparse in the Alutaguse region. Traditional occupations in Alutaguse include iron smelting from bog-ore, fishing (on the Narva River and along the shores of Lake Peipsi), lumbering, rafting, and woodworking. The villages around Avinurme are particularly famed for the latter. Since there was little farmland, but a great deal of forest, woodworking craftsmanship was passed down from generation to generation. Over time, villages became specialised in one type of product. Avinurme fairs were known throughout Estonia.



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