

# EDITORIAL

## DISORIENTATION IN PRIVATE FOREST MANAGEMENT

This column has frequently viewed the condition and methods of state forest management from a variety of aspects. This year, when we celebrate the 250th anniversary of Croatian forestry, we record upward and downward trends in the past period, which have generally been influenced by the political situation. After about 50 years of a significantly rising trend, the past several years have witnessed stagnation and then a downward trend. The reasons for this is the irresponsible abandonment of the principle of sustainable management and the comprehensive use and management with the forest as a renewable resource and a highly complex ecosystem, and the comparison of a forest to a factory plant.

State owned forests (about 78 %) are managed by the company Hrvatske Šume Ltd. What about private forests, however? Naturally, they are managed by private forest owners. According to the Forest Law, these forests should be managed in the same way as state forests. Article 8 of the Forest Law states that the Company, but also the forest owners, are obliged to manage forests by sustaining and advancing biological and landscape diversity and by taking care to protect the forest ecosystem. Among the 12 items, one states that tending and cutting a forest should be performed in such a way as not to inflict permanent damage to the ecosystem ... Under Article 9, all forest owners have a duty to manage their forests in accordance with management plans ... Article 10 stipulates that all those concerned should repair the damage from devastation, illegal felling or clearing of forests. What we would particularly like to point out is contained in Article 13 of the Forest Law, which says that the timber felled in the forest and outside the forest, as well as other forest products, may be extracted from the forest only if they are adequately marked and if they are accompanied by adequate documents. Do private forest owners observe the Forest Law, who controls this and in what way? More recently, there have been almost daily reports from the field of uncontrolled felling actions, one might even say ruthless „pillages“ of private forests. Who is in charge of marking trees for felling and are the trees marked at all, who classifies the assortments and where do dubious labels on the assortments come from, how and with what documents are the assortments exported and finally, can all this function so well without some shady deals being made? Do certain private forest owners take advantage of the difficult economic situation, on their own accord or under someone's coercion, believing that everything is allowed in a problem situation, while *quasi* entrepreneurs are becoming obscenely rich? Even if an action is undertaken to stop this, we have to wonder if the whole thing will end in the same way in which the action against the theft of gravel ended? Otherwise, forest management plans have so far been approved by the Ministry on the proposal of the company Hrvatske Šume Ltd, but now this is done by the Advisory Service for Private Forests. We say now, because until 2006 all services in private forests were approved and generally well performed by the state company (Forest Entrepreneurship, Public Company Hrvatske Šume, and then Hrvatske Šume Ltd). The care of private forests

was entrusted to forest experts and smaller departments. As early as 2003, the European Union passed a number of declarations, conventions and directives aimed at supporting rural development and highlighted the importance of private forests in terms of sustainable development. About 40 % of the subsidies related to forestry. This was the main incentive for the Government of the Republic of Croatia, on the basis of the Forest Law (OG 140/05), to pass a Directive on 2nd July 2006 concerning the establishment of the Forest Advisory Service with public jurisdiction. The Service was, however, abolished in 2010 due to financial reasons (it was considered parallel (double) cost), and the affairs were returned to the company Hrvatske Šume Ltd. On November 14th, 2013, the Croatian Parliament discussed a Proposal on changes and amendments to the Law on the Agricultural Advisory Service, and the competent Minister explained why the changes were necessary (the use of EU funds for rural development as early as 2014), as well as the reasons for changing the name and for the urgent procedure. Thus, according to the new Law on the Advisory Service, forestry was „engulfed“ in the somewhat changed and amended Agricultural Advisory Service, now under the general name of „Advisory Service“. This service is a specialized public institution for advisory affairs in the field of agriculture, rural development, fishing and improvement of management of privately owned forests and forestland. It acts through the central office and its branch offices (21). As seen from above, forestry has once again been excluded from the name and placed at the end of the sentence as an afterthought, because our „highly capable“ negotiators with the EU forgot that Croatian forestry with almost 80 % of state forests is not just one little part of agriculture as it is in the EU. Damage is now being compensated by drawing the means only through rural development. The new Law and Statute of 27th February 2014 again took the jobs related to private forests from the hands of the company Hrvatske Šume Ltd. According to the reports from the field, the efficiency is questionable, to say the least.

Disorderly land registers, the organisation of which the state continuously shuns despite the fact that almost all the expected investments and development depend on their settlement, small private forest holdings, the unwillingness of private forest owners (with a few exceptions) combined with insufficient help by the state to merge, which would ensure coherent forest areas for rational management according to the principle of the ideal share, are the causes of the chaotic situation. In vain are management plans for private forests when these forests are reduced to a cadaster plot, however big/small it may be. Merging into cooperatives, like in the EU, would make it possible to employ forest experts who would manage forests in the name of private forest owners according to the Forest Law and who would be the responsible partners of the Advisory Service and the competent Ministry. Judging by the current situation, there are no such integrations and the question is whether the legalized system can function successfully.

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