

# EDITORIAL

## *IS THE PROFESSION OR THE SYSTEM TO BLAME?*

Last year the Croatian Parliament passed a new Forest Act (Official Gazette 68/2018), which came into effect on August 4th, 2018. We discussed the new Forest Act in this column in *Forestry Journal* 7-8/2018, where we expressed our opinion and reiterated our objections, but they were generally ignored. In the light of mostly negative opinions about forestry and the forestry profession in the media, the question in the headline becomes understandable. Whether there is truth in criticisms of the transparent or non-transparent way in which the company Croatian Forests Ltd does business is not on us to decide - there are institutions responsible for such issues. However, we shall mention in brief several of the articles from the new Forest Act and the Regulations that prescribe how to manage forests.

According to article 2 (3) of the Forest Act, the Government of the Republic of Croatia manages forests and forest land and follows, among other things, “the principle of efficient management of forests and forest land in order to ensure the fulfilment of current and future ecological, economic and social functions on the local, national and global level, being in public interest, by taking into account the socio-economic importance of forests and forest land of the Republic of Croatia” ...”to do so, these activities must be in accordance with public interests ... and all together must be based on the principle of sustainable management of the natural resource.” The principle of sustainable management, according to article 3 (3) is fulfilled with “an efficient use of resources, whereby the contribution of forests, the forestry sector and forest-related sectors to rural development, growth and creating work places is optimized.”

Do we respect the regulations and principles, and if we do, to what extent? We shall only highlight a problem, and leave it to the readers to influence the finding of a solution. For example, do we use all forest resources efficiently? In the case of biomass as an energy source, the contracts which Croatian Forests Ltd recently cancelled, which is praiseworthy, were very profitable for private pockets, but whether they were equally profitable for the society is another question. What is the real goal of management according to the principle of sustainability? Will there be any sanctions for those who did not use cheap energy sources optimally (to generate electricity and heating) and did not respect contracts, as well as for those who signed these

contracts? Take, for example, wood assortments as raw material to be improved with added value: despite the fact that several wood processing companies publicly confessed that wood assortments were sold at prices that were below market value, insistence on non-market business practices continues. They say that supply (which is limited by annual increment of wood mass) is up to three times lower than demand (which, using the logic of economics, should lead to an increase in prices), but also that cheaply obtained wood raw material is mostly “improved for export” only through primary wood processing. If wood as raw material participates in the manufacture of furniture with 17 % of the value on average, then it is not hard to conclude that by exporting “such minimally improved” raw material we export work places both in the wood industry and in the auxiliary industries (glues, dyes and varnishes, and similar). Why do all wood processing subjects want their own sawmills, and where is the sawn timber stock market which would supply the final processing companies? As silviculturalists and forest planners we ask ourselves what use are all silvicultural and planning activities and costs (cleaning, tending, thinning, establishing stands, protecting, and others, geared to favouring trees - bearers of production and classifying them by quality into wood assortments pursuant to the Regulations on Forest Planning), if the goal of production is to obtain the highest quality of wood assortments, which are then devalued with non-market prices? It is an indubitable fact that such prices generate high profit but minimal added value. Add to this the relatively poorly educated work labour (why should they need engineers?) and you get the non-optimal use of wood assortments. This is what we call squandering the national wealth. Low profits also jeopardize the optimal fulfilment of the ecological and social function of forests, which is estimated to be several times higher than the production of wood mass. If the profession has managed forests for over 250 years on the principles of sustainable management and has succeeded in preserving the optimal structure and quality of Croatian forests despite groundless opinions of the amateurs from the “Green Cadre” and others, including some protectors, we have an answer to the question in the headline.

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