

# EDITORIAL

## *CIVIL INITIATIVE TO ENGAGE IN COLLECTIVE TREE PLANTING ON OCTOBER 25, 26 AND 27*

The headline of the editorial was prompted by a civil initiative sweeping through Croatia in recent times. The Facebook group, which calls for “three enjoyable days of planting trees across the State” under the motto “Plant a tree, don’t be a stump”, is imbued with enthusiasm and a wish to raise the awareness of Croatian citizens of the need to preserve and protect the nature; however, there are also more radical views on the forestry profession and the company Croatian Forests Ltd. Among others, they ask why there are no public afforestation activities and conclude that the reason lies in the fact that cutting trees has priority over planting them. There is an underlying statement: “They cannot fell more than we can plant!” The campaign was prompted by large-scale planting campaigns in some countries such as India and Ethiopia. Another incentive to the campaign was provided by the devastating fires taking place in the lungs of the world, the Amazonian rain forest. The will and wish to plant trees deserves full credit, but we cannot be compared with the countries with different climatic and habitat conditions, in which felling or forest fires result in deforestation, loss of forest soil and inability of forests to regenerate. The situation in the Republic of Croatia is diametrically opposite: reforestation is an ongoing process; in other words, the forest spreads into abandoned agricultural and other areas, so that currently almost half of the country is covered with forests of different age categories. This campaign reflects the concern of the ordinary person, but also contains certain ill founded hysterical reactions targeted at foresters in Croatia.

In view of the ever more frequent and unfounded attacks on the forestry profession, which has gone out of hand, it is time for the profession to voice its opinion. We can do it in two ways: we can either put forward professional and well founded arguments, or retaliate in the same impertinent manner in which we are being attacked. To start with, for those who are ready to listen, let us stress that felling is a silvicultural operation. A forest or a tree has its beginning, followed by growth through different silvicultural stages until it reaches its optimum and finally the stage of “dying”. The task of the forestry profession is to deal with this last stage by cutting down old trees, making profit for the society by processing these cut trees, and ensuring natural regeneration in even-aged stands in the years of good seed mast. Before any negative attitude on a felling operation is taken, it would be advisable to inspect closely the area which was until “yesterday” covered by an old oak forest and check what is being planted in this area, if anything. In a selection forest of, e.g. beech and fir, felling is applied to remove old mature trees and those trees which prevent young trees from reaching the necessary light for growth. Reforestation with seeds or with so-called “trained” seedlings is applied only in those areas in which natural seedling has not been completely successful or in areas badly affected by fires. Maintaining the forest in a perpetually stable condition is the principle of sustainable management. This principle is something that Croatian science and practice is rightly proud of and for which it receives acknowledgement from the global forestry world.

What does the company Croatian Forests Ltd do, some protesters ask? The task of the company, as a state-owned company which

has been entrusted by the State with caring for the forests, is to manage forests and carry out all the jobs set down in management plans, in line with the Forest Act, the forestry policy and strategy. There is no question here of chaotic and disorganized management. Management plans for every management unit prescribe the execution of ten-year activities. These plans are verified by expert committees and approved by the corresponding minister. They also contain regulations and rules set down by the Ministry of Environmental Protection. As seen from the above, nothing is done on an amateur basis - everything is firmly grounded on scientific and expert knowledge of the forestry practice, which has been acquired through 250 and more years of organized forestry. Climate change, damage caused by ice and wind, as well as pests, to which forests have been particularly exposed in recent times, make work in forestry even more difficult and require even more expertise and knowledge - certainly not amateurism. This is the reason that as far back as the 18th century it was realized that management of forests required not just a college degree but academic education. In Croatia, this was put to practice in 1898, when the Forestry Academy (the present day Faculty of Forestry) was opened as the fourth institution of higher education within the University of Zagreb.

A battle against excessive felling should be fought in parts of privately owned forest areas, yet the above groups fail to grapple with this problem. Allow us to be impertinent enough to ask: who are “they” who are not allowed to perform felling operations? Perhaps those who have studied forestry for five years, acquired knowledge of botany, higher mathematics, chemistry, meteorology, plant anatomy and physiology, pedology, dendrology, dendrometrics, silviculture, ecology, forest planning, forest protection and other fields, and who have, when receiving their degrees of graduate engineers of forestry, pledged to adhere to expert forestry principles in their work? Such professionals are then lectured by those who have “googled” something about forestry and who have gained their knowledge of forestry at weekend outings in forests. We would welcome with open arms their expert advisors, which they claim there are many, to finally come out and engage in public debates. We would expect from these groups to support us in opposing the move to cut down on non-market forest function fees, which are used to finance the construction of fire breaks, fire suppression, reforestation of burnt areas and demining areas. Obviously, they prefer these fees to be “pushed” into parafiscal levies. While the Croatian government expects from the company Croatian Forests Ltd to pay into the state budget, the German government invests 500 million euro into the recovery of forests, since over 110,000 ha of forests dried only last year.

We have nothing against making city areas green, but this should be carried out in a planned manner, both as regards the choice of areas and the choice of tree species, taking into account their ecological and biological requirements. Planting anything and anywhere, as seen from the initiative, is irresponsible both for the area and for the plant.

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