

International workshop

Strategic intentions of wind calamity management on protected territories

Štrbské Pleso, Slovak Republic, May 4-6, 2009

Statement of Minister of Agriculture of the Slovak Republic Mr. Ladislav Becík, presented by Prof. Július Novotný, Director General of the Forestry Section at the Ministry of Agriculture and Chargé d'Affaires of Government of Slovak Republic for the Protection of Spruce Forest and Spruce Biotopes.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Forests in Slovakia are the most important component of the environment. They are irreplaceable in stabilization of the landscape. They fulfil many significant functions including public beneficial ones (interception, regulation of water flows in streams and rivers, stabilization of slope areas, windblown sands, protection of timberline, avalanches prevention, and many others). They form a living environment for various flora and fauna species. At the same time they produce the most important (in addition to foodstuffs) and renewable raw material – wood (wood biomass) as well as other non-wood products.

The government of the Slovak Republic in accordance with the trend in developed countries creates preconditions for increasing forest coverage in Slovakia. At present forest coverage is 41%. In future it could reach almost 48-50%. On the other side due to global climate change the process of forest ecosystems weakening, decline and dieback has been going on. Many research projects deal with this process, especially with reaction of forest ecosystems to climate change, or they are aimed at mitigation and halting this unfavourable trend.

In comparison with neighbouring countries a specific feature and advantage of the forests in Slovakia is the fact there are very diverse natural conditions and different types of forests, from lowland forests up to high mountainous ones, on relatively small area. Another positive fact is there is preserved a wide range of autochthonous tree species and forest communities. Thanks to that it was possible to declare on the territory of Slovakia 9 national parks, 14 protected landscape areas and 703 small-area protected territories. Almost 57% of Slovakian forests are located on protected territories what is the greatest proportion of all EU states.

Importance of forests and forestry will grow not only from the environmental viewpoint but from the viewpoint of wood production as well. Presuppositions for increasing wood production are favourable. Wood as renewable raw material will have great prospects after exhaustion of fossil raw materials. Wood (wood biomass) will be used in two ways.

Also in future wood will be a basic decorative component, of course depending on its structure and texture. With ongoing development humankind will feel increasingly more intensively a need of return to nature and to natural materials as well. Thus wood will be with its natural aesthetical structure one of the most demanded material that influences the quality of life significantly. Wood will be used continuously as construction material as well.

Forest biomass will be main component for the production of biofuels, plastic materials, secondary oils, paper and other non-traditional productions. Forest biomass will be used also for production of energy, mainly heat and electricity what should contribute substantially to reducing emissions. Mentioned tendencies will be characteristic for the whole world not excluding Slovakia as the EU member country. The importance of the production of non-wood products as forest berries, edible mushrooms, moss, lichen and other commodities will be on increase as well.

Game management will play an important role as well. It will be aimed at preservation, improvement, protection and optimal use of the gene pool of game as a natural wealth of Slovakia. Our country has quite many forest biotopes close to nature, thus main species of forest game will have relatively good living conditions even at the beginning of the third millennium.

As I have already mentioned injurious agents affect very negatively the existence of forest stands what brings about also fulfilling of their functions. Wind calamity of November 19, 2004 was a good evidence of that. It damaged considerable part of the forests in Slovakia. It was the heaviest calamity for last 100 years. It affected forests in Tatra Mts. National Park as well as Low Tatra Mts. region where the Low Tatra Mts. National Park is situated. The windthrow disaster damaged more than 5 million m³ of wood. A considerable part of calamity wood was on the territories with the highest degree of protection what meant that for processing of this wood an exception from the act on nature and landscape protection was needed.

It is well known that if wood from calamity is not processed quickly an outbreak of bark beetles follows, especially in spruce forests. Current reality is the best evidence. Wind calamity of November 2004 has grown into vast bark beetle calamity that cannot be compared

with any similar situation in Europe for the whole period of the management of forests. Spruce forests in Slovakia are endangered to such extent that their existence has been threatened. Current bark beetle calamity cannot be managed without direct intervention of state. Therefore the government dealt with this issue and created a post of government assignee for spruce forests and at the same time it adopted many important decisions aimed at mitigation and halting spruce forests dieback. It is a pity that we must state that even after more than four years we have not reached unanimous conclusion how to process calamity wood on protected territories in a way to reduce the risk of bark beetles outbreak to the possible minimal level for affected area as well as surrounding stands.

It is a serious issue also with regard to occurrence of windthrow disasters also in future. We have not prepared yet a scenario of measures that should be taken after such disaster. I think that main mission and task of this workshop is to find solutions for the mentioned issues.

The programme of international expert meeting follows up the international workshop organized by the government of the SR, FAO and EEC/UN in April 2005 held in Sielnica near Zvolen.

The aim of this meeting is following:

- Analyse situation in damaged forests four years after the calamity,
- Assess applying and contribution of the Declaration, adopted at the meeting in 2005, to the elimination of disaster consequences,
- Inform international (professional) community about experiences and problems of forest managers with calamity management,
- Raise awareness about the need and importance of the measures aimed at bark beetles outbreak in the framework of the concept of multifunctional forest management,
- Discuss about procedures and processes in the management of elimination of windthrow disaster consequences and subsequent bark beetles outbreaks in relation to increasing frequency of their occurrence in the forests of Central Europe with a special emphasis on nationally protected areas and the territories of international importance.

I would like to thank the organizers of this meeting and especially representatives of FAO Subregional Office for Central and Eastern Europe for the support of our activities and for active participation in organizing this international workshop.

I would like to thank also all experts, including foreign ones, who participate in this workshop and who are willing to share with own experiences with after calamity forest management as well as to search for solutions in the future.

I wish you successful work and many good suggestions in formulating workshop conclusions.