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Bulgarian Forest Policy – contemporary challenges

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Forest Resource Potential

In 2006 total area of the forests amounts to 4.08 million ha - 37% of the country territory. With its forested areas of 32% Bulgaria ranks 19 in Europe. The distribution by tree species is as follows: conifers – 31%, deciduous 69%. The estimated total forest stock - 598 million m³ standing timber – 31% coniferous and 69% deciduous. The estimated total average increment amounts to 14.12 million m³/year. The average yield – about 4.6 m³/ha/year. The average age - 49 years. More than 85% of water flow or 3.6 bill. m³ of fresh water.

Changes in the forestry in the period 1997-2008

∩ In 1996 Management Forest Strategy was prepared and adopted by the Ministry of Agriculture and Forests. This Strategy was revised in 2001, 2003 and 2006.

∩ The adoption at the end of 1997 of two basic acts – the **Forest and Forestland Ownership Restitution Act** (25 Nov. 1997) and the **Forest Act** (29 Dec 1997) marked the beginning of the structural reform in the forestry sector. The related legal framework of 7 regulations, 11 ordinances and 6 instructions were prepared in the period 1998-2000.

∩ In the end of 2008 the restitution of an area amounting to 25% of the forests was given back to private individuals, legal entities, municipalities and religious institution. We have more than 550 000 (in 1939 –456 000) private forest owners. In 2009 there were over 1500 private SMEs (companies) and sole traders engaged in the business activities in state forests. More than 3500 are the private SMEs (companies) in wood-processing and furniture industry. The life of more than 1 mill. people depends on forest products, goods and services.

∩ In 2007 State Forest Agency at the Council of Ministers was established. State forest units – forest and hunting ranges as a trade companies were registered.

The main goals of the NFPS (2007-2013) are:

- Sustainable development of an economically viable forest sector through multifunctional forest management in market economy conditions.
- To comply the goals and the means for the sustainable development of the forest sector with international criteria.
- To provide for national and international financial recourses and to support the development of the sector.

The main challenges to forest sector in Bulgaria

1. To protect forests, biodiversity and landscape. The forestry had to meet the challenge of regeneration as a result of the consequences of the intensive forest fires in the last 18 years. To protect forest from illegal cutting;
2. To investigate the resource capacity and needs for timber consumption, desires and expectations about all functions and services;
3. To involve the civil society in solving forest related issues at local level – multifunctional regional and local forest planning;
4. To train and consult the private forest owners about the sustainable forest management.

The main strategy management vision (2007-2013) is:

“The Bulgarian forest is a national asset. The resources of the forest ecosystems retain their ecological, social and economic functions for improving the quality of life of people. Forests are professionally managed in a stable forest sector with broad public support and mutual respect and integration of the interests of all stakeholders.”