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Action for Sustainable Forestry Management – from Coordination to Education

Education of forest owners in the EU

Typically, European forest holdings are small and the forest owners should have long-term perspective having a strong attachment to their forests - ownership and investments for several, future generations. European forestry is based on small scale forest management. European forest owners have a variety of ownership goals and face a variety of rapidly changing circumstances. In recent years e.g. forest privatisation and restitution has increased considerably the number of small forest owners especially in Eastern Europe.

European, mainly family forest owners recognise the global importance of sustainable forest management and respect the need to balance economic, social, ecological and cultural aspects of forestry.

European forest owners want to provide information and recommendations to international forest policy processes and be recognised as important stakeholder and be consulted by forest policy-making bodies. Because of the increased public expectations of higher standards in the quality of forest management, forest owners in Europe need a forum for the exchange of guidance, experience, ideas and information. On the forum forests can be highlighted as a natural, renewable and sustainable resource with significant contribution to the environment, quality of life and employment.

We all know, that the forest management is becoming more complicated and will probably require a wider range of knowledge and skills in the future. The training and advising of forest owners holds a key position in terms of forest management, social sustainability and the smooth functioning of timber market. Many countries have maintained their systems of forest extension services to provide support and guidance to the new forest owners.

However, resources for training, education and advisory services on sustainable forest management should be considerably increased in all EU countries. These activities will strengthen the competitiveness of the forest sector and contribute to the improvement in the quality of life of European citizens. With the support of forest training and advice, the new forest owners can base their forest decisions on high class knowledge and skills.

The commitment of the national and local organisations, such as ministries of education, educational institutions, forest owners associations, forest industry etc. as a crucial element of the success of above mentioned training activities. Coordination between the European educational authorities responsible for forest education and training, is also essential.

It is clear that only through open partnership and networking in the sector of forestry we can make our common goals more concrete, as is the case with the forest owners' education and training programs.

A wide range of forest-related courses and training packages should be provided for the new forest owners. Competence-based vocational qualifications in forest entrepreneurship, which are tailored for forest owners, should be taken in practise in Europe.

Also the different virtual European forestry study programmes support the developing of distance learning and a virtual forestry studies in Europe. It aims also to produce through discussion a project definition document for the specification, design, delivery and evaluation of forestry courses by distance learning using ICT. The aims will be achieved by gaining experience of managing curricula developments and delivery using ICT in forestry education. This will ensure that forest owners can participate, for instance in regional planning, and contribute to the broader forestry dialogue within the society.

The aim of the workshop is to discuss how the EU member states should develop formal education, non-formal education and informal education for forest owners. Education should be aimed at short courses related to forestry education and training, and also study programmes leading to vocational qualifications in forestry, e.g. to forest machine operator and forest ecosystem worker occupations.

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