

Lilliput forests, global certification

February 8 2013, by Sorina Buzatu



As global demand for timber certified as being sustainable is growing, European small forest owners are still reluctant to gain certification. But increasing economic advantages may shift their position.

The level of interest for the US standard Smart Logging, designed to ensure the sustainable use of the forests, has now been tested in Europe. Between 2009 and 2012, a pilot forestry certification process was developed under the EU funded project called CeFCo. In particular, the project aimed to test procedures that allow small, private forest owners to delegate [forest management](#) tasks to certified forest contractors, according to Jan Peter Feil, manager of CeFCo project , at non-profit

organisation promoting sustainable use of natural resources NEPCon, based in Århus, Denmark.

The project idea was, first, to encourage forest contractors to get certified. As a result of the pilot, five forestry contractors from among participating countries including Denmark, Portugal, Spain, Sweden and Bulgaria, were awarded a certification. Another seven received an intermediary audit report, one step short of certification. Meanwhile, flip side of this initiative would be to encourage private and state forest owners to work with certified contractors to eventually achieve certification of their forest more easily. This could become a helping hand for the 16 million small private forest owners in Europe—many of whom own less than 5 hectares—representing 55% of forests in Europe.

The existence of such a pilot may not be enough to increase certification though, particularly in countries where forestry may not represent an important sector of the economy. "So far in Bulgaria, but also in majority of European countries, certification of forest contractors is merely a vision" Antony Stefanov, Chairman of Bulgarian Forestry Contractors Association in Sofia, tells youris.com. The problem is that these private owners often perceive certification as an additional administrative and costly burden. "The reluctance comes mostly from the psychology that the contractors has somebody looking into his business, that he must follow a procedure, do something that it is not straightforward necessarily, if a client does not ask for a certificate," explains NEPCon's Feil.

Another brake to forestry owner certification could be that the annual administrative cost is rather high for a forestry holder who may not reap benefits for a long time. "Looking for higher incomes, the small forest owners chose to harvest at once the maximum volume of wood and then they wait at least 25-30 years for the forest to grow," comments Zhivko Bogdanov, a local representative of NEPCon in Sofia, Bulgaria.

To further reduce costs, the small owners taking part to the pilot project were advised to share the expenses by applying for the document in groups. "Group certification will not prevent them from independently managing their business and will help them to comply with the EU regulations and to sell their wood on the free markets, at better price." explains Bogdanov.

From March 2013, attitudes to certification may start to change. Then, the EU timber regulation, designed counters the trade in illegally harvested timber, will enter into force. "It is expected that the international clients will first consider the certified wood products," says Bogdanov. The final project report cites the example of Portugal where pulp producers pay a considerable premium for certified Eucalyptus wood.

In neighbouring Romania, the local customers are already demonstrating interest in the potential price advantage afforded by [certification](#). "Lately, the contractors have become more aware of the demands for certified wooden products of the international markets and have started to ask questions about this certificate", said Liviu Nechiforel, senior lecturer in forestry economics at Stefan cel Mare University in Suceava, Romania. This certificate, he believes, is about a common sense use of the forests by all involved in the industry.

More information: www.cefcoproject.org/

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