

Is the management of European forests sustainable from a biodiversity perspective?

Bogdan Jaroszewicz

Białowieża Geobotanical Station, Faculty of Biology, University of Warsaw, Poland

Professional forestry was established in Europe nearly two hundred and fifty years ago in response to increasing timber shortages. At the time, maximization of production of raw timber, with the constantly shrinking forest acreage, became the main goal of forest management. Admittedly, forestry achieved considerable success in this mission. While modern forestry also takes into account other functions of the forest, the fundamental core of forest management principles has remained unchanged: interventions are carried out with the explicit aim of growing or “producing” healthy, properly-formed trees which provide good-quality raw material.

Over the past few decades, new challenges have emerged for forest management: climate change, loss of biodiversity and the societal need for a healthy environment for mental and physical restoration due to exhaustion in modern societies. A business-as-usual scenario in forest management cannot continue, and is also incompatible with strategic documents of the European Union: the EU Strategy for Biodiversity 2030, which proposes protection of 30% of land and sea, including 10% strict protection, and the new EU Forest Strategy, where protection of all pristine and old-growth forests is envisaged. These strategies are in conflict with traditional forestry and growing demand for timber, and have been criticised for the outsourcing of environment costs to regions beyond EU boundaries. In my presentation, I intend to 1) discuss arguments in support of EU strategies for Biodiversity and Forest, and 2) suggest potential ways for conflict mitigation. I will also emphasize that forest ecosystems can no longer be seen as merely a source of timber production or a place for recreation, as they play vital roles in maintaining the health of people, wildlife and the environment - otherwise known as “One Health”.