

Illegal logging in Estonia

Report

Joint UNECE/FAO Workshop on Illegal Logging

The share of illegal activities within timber logging operations in Estonia has been reason for many debates on national level but has grown recently to a matter of discussions also on international level.

After regaining political independence in 1991 Estonia met drastic socio-economic changes. Exporting of roundwood and timber products became very important for Estonia because market price for timber appeared to be much higher than in previous decades and great volumes of growing stock were accumulated during soviet period, when felling amounts were rather modest and lot of agricultural lands and wetland were converted into forest land. Significant raise of revenues per cubic metre of timber intensified fellings. But the rise of timber prices together with a seriously altered forest ownership structure and bad socio-economical situation in rural areas (unemployment rate grew a lot after collapsing of collective farm system) were the reasons why the amount of illegal activities in forestry started to increase. Estonia started to build up new system to enforce principles of sustainable forest management. The first Forest Act was approved by the Parliament in 1993. The second Forest Act (1998) focused more on protection of certain forest values and forest owner was granted more privilege and freedom to manage own forests.

Institutional strengthening of public forest administration and amendment of forestry legislation were defined as two basic tools for fighting against forest crime in “Estonian Forest Development Programme until 2010”.

1. Illegal logging

- 1.1. Types of illegal logging. In your opinion do any of the following occur at a significant level in your country? If so, please describe, specifying if possible, methods used by the criminals, species affected, regions where this occurs, etc.

1.1.1. Logging without permission or concession from public forests

Almost all public forests (99%) are managed by State Forest Management Center (*RMK*) - governmental profit-making institution, one and only institution of such type in Estonia. Governmental profit-making institution means that on the one hand, RMK has to earn income for the state by logging and selling wood material. On the other hand, RMK has tasks that do not bring direct economic income, but that are useful for maintaining the unique forest nature, nature friendly forest works, creation of free recreation possibilities. All forests that are managed by RMK are also FSC certified.

RMK is selling standing forest and timber mainly by biddings (oral, written, combined), biddings with negotiations and with negotiated price. All the information about the sales and partners is published and transparent.

Logging without permission is not practiced by State Forest Management Center.

The only illegal activities that may accure in public forests are done by forest thieves. The share of forest theft in public forests in 2003 was approximately 12% of total volume of illegal fellings – about 0,1% from total volume of fellings.

1.1.2. Wood theft or illegal logging from private forests

Majority of illegal activities takes place in private forest. Illegal logging done by private forest owner in their own property in 2003 was about 0,4% from total volume of fellings. The same percentage of illegal cuttings in private forests was carried out by thieves. Altogether the share of illegal fellings in private forests in 2003 was approximately 0,8% from total volume of fellings.

1.1.3. False declaration of volumes, species, values or origins of harvested wood

Not known

1.1.4. Logging in protected areas such as national parks

Illegal logging in national parks has happened like in all types of forests, but only in a very small scale. There were 16 cases in 2003 with a total volume of 4 691 cubic meters, making it 4,2% of the volume of illegal loggings and under 0,05% from total volume of fellings

1.1.5. Logging in prohibited areas

There were four cases, when logging in prohibited areas took place, in 2003. The damage was done by forest owner because of a lack of knowledge in those cases

1.1.6. Removing oversized or undersized trees

Not practiced in forest management

1.1.7. Obtaining logging authorization through bribes

Not known

1.1.8. Killing or burning trees so that they can be logged

Killing of trees has happened in two cases during this year. Volume of damaged trees altogether was 380 m³. In previous years such practice has not been recorded.

1.2. What mechanisms are in place to monitor or estimate their importance?

Environmental monitoring in Estonia is organised by the Ministry of the Environment, mainly using the following subordinated institutions:

- County Environmental Departments (CED) conducting the daily monitoring of forest operations with field staff in the county's communities (ca 30 000 ha of forest land per staff member); administering local level applications and permits.
- Environmental Inspectorate (EI) having country wide responsibility and conducting overall enforcement of laws and regulations (ca 43 000 ha of forest land per inspector), resembling environmental police.

Intended forest management activities (planned fellings, reforestation works, road (re)construction or (re)establishment of drainage system and occurred forest damages) **have to be reported to the CED by filing the forest notification. There were 26000 notifications in 2003.** This notification contains information about the landowner, describes the area, where the activities will be conducted and the planned measures (area, method, volumes).

CEDs forestry specialist checks:

- in the office the planned activities' compliance with inventory data, data about management restrictions (conservation areas, protection areas, WKH etc) and data about former activities in relevant holding. The CED has 15 working days to ban, to ask additional information or approve the activity. The CED has the mandate to control forest management activities in private and state forests;
- in the forest the planned forest management areas to assure the legitimacy of activities with legislation and good management practice (in case of need field measurements are carried out). **40% of notified sites are field checked before and 40% after the activities have been conducted in private forests.** All reforestation areas are checked on the 4-th year after the clear cut. Monitoring is supported by remote sensing techniques (vector layer of occurred forest disturbances in certain period obtained from the comparison of two consecutive satellite images). If conducted forest management activities do not comply with the requirements of forest legislation, the Environmental Inspectorate will be informed.

The role of the Environmental Inspectorate (EI) at the MoE is to carry out environmental supervision. Currently, one of the main fields of action for the inspectorate is forestry. The EI cooperates with the CEDs, police and the Tax Office as the latter owns information about timber sales.

EI receives information in form of forest notifications and forest inventory data from CEDs. In the near future inspectors can submit queries to the National Register of Forest Resources via internet. Substantial amount of information is gathered on field trips, routes of which are planned based on earlier known information. EI also has to react to phone calls from local people noticing trucks or hearing machines working in the forest. In addition inspections are made to logging and sawmilling companies, checking documentation of timber sales, transportation etc. Origin of timber could be traced back to forest.

52 forest inspectors spend 5233 days for inspection i.e. 100 days per inspector in one year. Inspections do not always end up with the registering of violations and compilation of misdemeanor protocol or assessment of environmental loss to launch the criminal investigation.

Number of illegal fellings have decreased in recent years – from 1681 cases in year 2000 to 689 cases in 2003. The number of other forest violations (violation of rules for forest and timber transactions, timber transport, forest protection and forest notification) has shown downward trend as well.

Volume of fellings was 11,5 million m³ in 2003, making the share of illegal fellings 1%

1.3. In total, in your opinion, what is the volume of illegally logged wood in your country, as a percent of removals:

1.3.1. 1-5%

1.3.2. What is this estimate based on?

1.3.2.1. Statistics from Environmental Inspectorate

1.3.2.2. Comparison of production, import and export, and consumption data

1.3.2.3. Sample surveys

1.3.2.4. Judicial records

1.3.2.5. Expert estimates, for example from reports of forest authorities

2. Trade in products of illegal logging

2.1. Are you aware of any of the following:

2.1.1. Smuggling of roundwood or forest products (import or export)

As a member of EU Estonia is following common custom rules and necessary checks are performed. Smuggling of roundwood or forest product is not reported to take place.

2.1.2. False declaration of goods (value, species, origin)

Estonia mainly imports roundwood from temperate countries where timber prices for different species are roughly the same and false declaration does not make sense.

2.1.3. Other trade related falsification (e.g. falsification of certificates of sustainable forest management)

Not known

2.2. What mechanisms are in place to monitor discrepancies between declared imports and exports and actual imports and exports?

Co-operation and comparison of data between major trade partners. However, unification of declaration system is seen as mechanism to diminish the differences in declarations.

2.3. In your opinion what is the volume exported and imported of illegally-sourced wood as percentage of total wood exports?

2.3.1. Less than 5%, 5-25%, over 25% ?

Less than 5%

2.4. If there are significant volumes or values involved, please describe what is known about the type of fraud, its estimated volume and its causes.

No significant volumes or values involved

3. Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade policies

3.1. Is your country involved in any bilateral or multilateral initiatives on FLEGT?

Not at the moment, but like other forest administrations in EU countries, Estonian forest sector is against illegal logging in timber producing countries.

3.2. Does your country have official policies to reduce or eliminate illegal logging?

Estonian forestry development programme until 2010, as a document that defines the development priorities of forestry, names also illegal logging as one of the problem areas. Forming workgroups on the central and county level, aimed at preventing illegal forestry, launching and implementing neighbourhood watch programme and strengthening forest administration are mentioned as main actions improving that area.

As main instruments in reducing the percentage of illegal loggings Estonian Ministry of the Environment is strictening the Forest Act and helping private forest owners in managing their forests sustainably. Some of the actions to reduce illegal logging are -

- Strengthening (pre)control over intended forest management activities - making forest notification to a approvers document (cutting licence). Meaning that forest owner cannot make cuttings in his own forest unless he has been given a permisson from County Environmental Center;
- strengthening supervision over forest planning generally. New requirements are set in the forest act: 1) Companies that provide forest owners with forest management plans must gain appropriate licence. 2) Forest management plan is a required document for logging activities, excluding sanitary cuttings and cleanings.
- compensations, like training and consulting, road and drainage construction, clearing, seed and plant production and forest neighbourhood watch activities, to private forest owners have increased.

Environmental Inspectorete is strengthening it's structure to be able to monitor environmental activities and possible law violations even better.

In co-operation with EU Phare 2004 Program MoE has launched the project „Strengthening of forest management in Estonia”. The aim of the project is to strengthen the administration capacity and institutional framework for the monitoring of forestry activities. Estonia is performing regular monitoring of forest activities to prevent violation of laws of any kind.

3.3. Does your country have official policies to reduce or eliminate trade of products from illegal logging?

The role of the EI at the MoE is to carry out environmental supervision including transactions with timber. The EI has good co-operation with the CEDs, Police and the Tax Office. The latter owns information about timber sales as according to Forest Act the buyer has to inform Tax Office about the timber transactions. Besides that, all abovementioned polices are also ment to reduce trade of products from illegal logging.