

## **Minutes of 4<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Forum Forestier Lémanique**

29 September, 2000, Divonne-les-Bains - France

Rodolphe Schlaepfer was elected chair of the meeting.

The agenda was accepted and the minutes of the 3<sup>rd</sup> meeting were adopted.

### Discussion on private forests in the Pays de Gex and Canton de Vaud.

Mme Sylvie Perret (Office National des Forêts) explained that although private forests represented 70% of the area of forests in France, they were a minority in the Pays de Gex. In the Haut Jura most forests are communally owned, and the private forests are found in the plain (bassin Lémanique) where forest cover is low. Oaks are the dominant species. Ownership is fragmented and there is little collaboration between private forest owners. Under 25 ha in size there are no particular legal restrictions (apart from limitations on clearcuts in areas adjacent to larger forest stands) on environmental practices of private forest owners. Above this limit, owners are asked to develop a management plan. Forests are generally underexploited and there is a lack of loggers and sawmill operators in the region.

M. Turin (Inspecteur des forêts, Nyon). As in France, private forests in Switzerland are fragmented but the proportion of private forest ownership is much lower than France (approx 30%). The proportion is higher (approx 40%) in the Nyon arrondissement. As in Gex, the forests are underexploited and the age-class distribution is increasingly unbalanced, with a predominance of older stands. Despite the lack of management (78% of forests have not been managed at all in the last 15 year period), forests have important environmental functions as the non-forested land is either under intensive agriculture or densely populated. In Swiss law all forests are treated equally irrespective of ownership, and the inspector issues permits for felling, infrastructure development. Management plans are established by the inspector in consultation with owners for forests above 40 ha. in size. This limit may be reduced to 10 ha in future. Legislation is in place at both cantonal and federal levels. Free access to private forests including for hunting and gathering is guaranteed by the "Code des Obligations". As in Gex, private forest owners do not collaborate with each other, nor are they organized in associations. Regional masterplans are currently being developed through consultative processes (plans directeurs forestiers) as required by new federal and cantonal forest legislation.

## Discussion

C. Heimo: What are the incentives for private forest owners to manage their forests? Are they too regulated?

Mme. Perret: Many forest owners are now urban dwellers and do not live near their forests. Some do not even know that they own forests. In this situation, economic incentives have only been effective with the larger forest owners who are interested in managing their forests. Information and education of the public may be more effective than economic incentives.

M. Turin: Competition for land use especially for construction is high in the Lemanic region, so the effectiveness of incentives can be questioned. Currently the management (or lack of management) of private forests is not considered to pose a problem for security, erosion etc except in exceptional cases. Forest management has been a money-losing proposition since the 1950s for private forest owners.

S. Meyer Could forest strips on borders of streams which have important environmental functions not be subtracted from sales of land when private houses are being built? Future owners often do not want to be responsible for these forests which shade houses etc.

In Vaud, buildings have to be a minimum of 10m away from the forest (which is probably insufficient). This is an attempt to address this problem but a greater distance would be better: the Confederation suggested 10 to 30 m. The high value of private lands zoned for building should be noted, compared to land zoned as forests.

## Covalbois

Eric Treboux, inspecteur forestier à Rolle, explained the functioning of this cooperative which operates in Vaud. After Hurricane Lothar in December 1999, damage was unevenly spread across the canton, with a focus on the Pays d'Enhaut and the plateau above Lausanne towards Bern. The immediate response was to cease all normal forestry operations and focus efforts on the areas which were most severely affected. Safety measures and a general framework for wood prices were rapidly established to allow operations to be executed efficiently. The top priorities were public security and minimising waste of the wood affected by the hurricane. It required a certain amount of coordination and solidarity among forest owners to focus forest exploitation after Lothar on the most severely affected areas. Covalbois was a response to this situation: a cooperative established with financial support from the Canton de Vaud which private and public forest owners could join. It was established on March 10, to organise the harvest, transportation, storage and sale of wood affected by Lothar on behalf of its members. To date, there are over 500 members including the canton,

communes and groups of forest owners. Currently this represents 70-80% of the wood entering the market. 300,000 cubic metres of wood have been handled by the cooperative, of which about half have been sold at a price about 30% below market rates before the hurricane, mostly to sawmills in France and Italy. Market demand is surprisingly high, and the cooperative experience has been a positive one for private forest owners which could be applied in other areas in future. This has led to a situation where forest owners have felt relatively relaxed about the exploitation of their forests affected by the hurricane. The success of the cooperative is in contrast to the situation in France.

### FFL organizational matters

#### Value and future of the forum

Jean Combe proposed a number of ideas on this issue. He noted that over 30 individuals and 12 organizations had been involved in one or more meetings of the forum. It is open to any individual from the Lemanic region interested in forest issues.

For the future he suggested that we could move from "descriptive" themes to more "prospective" issues such as workshops concerning the future such as fresh water, global change etc. This could lead to a number of specific projects such as a UNECE case study on forestry in a commune, a WWF project in collaboration with private forest owners in La Cote region.

Kit Prins noted that one of the objectives of the forum was to encourage exchanges between people working on local and international issues and that this had only been partly successful as the international participants had probably learned more than local participants. One interesting idea would be to have a discussion on what forests in the region might be like in 2050 or a later date in the future.

Andrea Finger proposed that debates be opened to a broader audience than technical specialists. It would be useful to identify themes in advance of the meetings so that participants can prepare themselves better. Bernt Strehlke supported the idea of FFL working on a project with WWF in collaboration with local forest owners. Yves Kazemi said that the FFL should not just become a club for local foresters and that we should do something more innovative and concrete.

Sylvain Meyer noted that the issue of labour costs on both sides of the border would be an interesting one, and be relevant in a globalised economy. Sylvie Perret noted that in both France and Switzerland it was increasingly difficult to attract people to work in the forest sector at the level of loggers, sawmill operators, etc. and that forestry was considered to be a "profession sinistrée". From the French perspective there was a problem of training workers in

forestry and then seeing them move over the border to work in Switzerland, where salaries are higher.

The Chairman took note of these constructive suggestions and suggested that the steering group should come back to the members with some concrete proposals for future FFL activities, for their consideration. It was agreed that Yves Kazemi should join the steering group, to help with deliberations on this subject. All participants felt that the FFL should continue, albeit in a modified form with more focussed and "prospective" activities.

#### FFL web site

UNECE Timber Section could host a FFL web site with links to other sites and updates on meetings, on its own web site. However if we want to do something more ambitious, this would require additional resources. This kind offer was accepted and it was agreed that the web site should stay simple. A working group made up of Claude Heimo, Kit Prins, Jorge Najera and Jean Rosset agreed to work together on the site.

#### Date and location of next meeting

It was agreed to hold the next meeting in April or May 2001. The steering group will come up with specific proposals for the future of the Forum for submission to members.

#### Field trip:

See attached field trip sheet. Bernt was thanked for organising the field trip.

Minutes: Chris Elliott

Number of participants: 24