



Protected Forest Areas in Europe as a Contribution to Sustainable Forest Management

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I. Introduction

The conservation and appropriate enhancement of biodiversity is an essential operational element in sustainable forest management. One means to maintain, conserve, restore and enhance forest biological diversity is the development of protected forest networks. By establishing the ecological network Natura 2000 from 1992 onwards and again by adopting the Vienna Resolution 4 at the Fourth Ministerial Conference on the Protection of Forests in Europe (MCPFE) in 2004 most European countries committed themselves to build up such protected forest networks. Additionally, in the course of the MCPFE process the area of forest and other wooded land protected to conserve biodiversity, landscapes and specific natural elements was accepted as a pan-European indicator for sustainable forest management. Considering this situation, knowledge about the many different protected forest areas (PFAs) already existing throughout Europe becomes more and more important.

II. The COST Action E27 - a research project on protected forest areas in Europe

With regard to this need for information, in 2002 the COST Action E27 "Protected Forest Areas in Europe - Analysis and Harmonisation (PROFOR)" was launched to provide a better understanding of national and international distinctions of protected forest areas (PFAs) and to explain the reasons for this diversity.

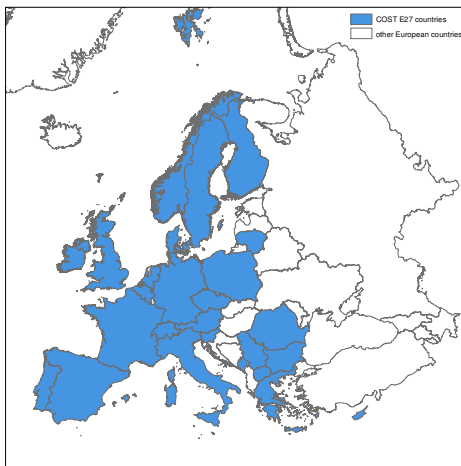


Figure 1: The COST Action E27 countries

Until 2006 about 100 researchers and experts from multiple disciplines, representing 25 European countries (Figure 1), worked together with the aim to analyse and harmonise the wide range of PFA categories used in European countries within the context of existing international systems of protected areas. COST is a research programme of the European Union and stands for 'Cooperation in the field of Scientific and Technical Research'. One goal of the COST Action E27 was to identify the commonalities of and differences between the various PFA categories throughout Europe. In this context, a look at the motivations for protection and the restrictions to general forest management was essential.

References:

LATHAM, J., FRANK, G., FAHY, O., KIRBY, K., MILLER, H. & STIVEN, R. (Editors) (2005): COST Action E27 Protected Forest Areas in Europe - Analysis and Harmonisation (PROFOR): Reports of Signatory States. Federal Research and Training Centre for Forests, Natural Hazards and Landscape (BFW), Vienna, Austria.

FRANK, G., PARVIAINEN, J., VANDERKERKHOVE, K., LATHAM, J., SCHUCK, A., LITTLE, D. (Editors) (2007): COST Action E27 Protected Forest Areas in Europe - Analysis and Harmonisation (PROFOR): Results, Conclusions and Recommendations. Federal Research and Training Centre for Forests, Natural Hazards and Landscape (BFW), Vienna, Austria.

Homepages:

COST E27 homepage at the Federal Office and Research Centre for Forests BFW, Vienna, Austria: <http://bfw.ac.at/020/profor/>

COST E27 clearinghouse at the European Forest Institute, Joensuu, Finland: <http://www.efi.int/projects/coste27>

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III. Common characteristics of protected forest areas in Europe

From the 25 European countries participating in the COST Action E27 nearly 300 PFA types were reported. Most countries can designate protected forest areas according to up to ten different PFA categories. In three countries, however, more than 20 PFA types are available for forest area protection.

Several common motivations for the protection of forest areas can be found throughout Europe. The frequency of the prime motivations for protection in the reported PFA types are shown in Figure 2.

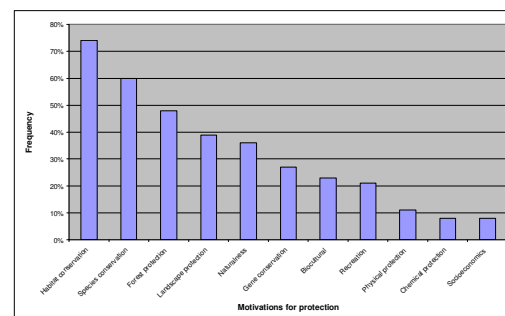


Figure 2: The relative importance of the different motivations for forest area protection linked to PFA types

In the past also other motivations played an important role for forest area protection (Figure 3). Today two main groups of motivations can be identified. The first group is linked to biodiversity conservation issues, including naturalness and forest protection in a general way. The second group refers to the protection of soil, water and landscapes as well as to socio-economic functions of forests.

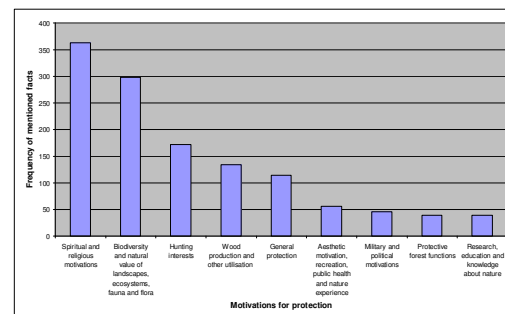


Figure 3: The importance of different motivations for forest area protection in Europe from the 15th century B.C. until today

IV. Future benefit of protected forest areas to sustainable forest management

Several protected forest areas are reserved exclusively for biodiversity protection but other ones also allow landuse activities. The latter are protected by means of integrated, sustainable management of land, water and biodiversity. There are a lot of similarities regarding protection purpose, management methods and history of PFAs throughout Europe that can be used as a common basis for an all-European sustainable forest management strategy.