



THE VOICE OF EUROPEAN HUNTERS

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The importance of hunters for Europe's future-fit forests

In light of the accelerating climate and biodiversity crisis, the EU Forest Strategy for 2030 aims at shaping resilient, diverse and healthy forests, while respecting their multifunctional role. This is to be achieved through the following measures (1) protect and restore forests, (2) ensure that forests are managed sustainably, and (3) understand what is happening in European forests. These three general measures, which are in line with sustainable forest management, are further specified by concrete actions.

Policy relevance

Forests and other wooded land cover over 43.5 % of the EU's land and they are essential for the health and wellbeing of people. The six Member States with the largest forest areas in the EU are Sweden, Finland, Spain, France, Germany and Poland. As hunters know, forests have long held a hugely important role in our society, not only by creating jobs but also by providing food, medicines, materials, clean water and more.

Hunters play a key role in guaranteeing healthy forest ecosystems via ungulate management. Ungulate management is even more crucial for primary and old growth forests. Despite representing only 3% of the EU's forest area, primary and old growth forests are among the richest EU forest ecosystems, store significant carbon stocks and remove carbon from the atmosphere.

Because of the significant role they play, all primary and old growth forests will be put under strict protection following EU criteria. Nevertheless, strict protection does not equate to non-human intervention. Forest habitats require human intervention, such as ungulate management, to ensure their favourable status.

The important role of hunters for Europe's forests

Nowadays, about 90% of Europe is home to at least one wild ungulate species dominated by roe deer and wild boar (Linnell et al. 2020).

Hunting and forestry are two land-use activities that overlap in most European landscapes. Relevant stakeholders can have divergent and sometimes conflicting perspectives on the management of wild ungulates. However, a lack of collaboration and communication between these two disciplines usually leads to actions in the field that are not beneficial for productive forest ecosystems (Champagne et al. 2021).

Local initiatives that integrate ungulate and forest management need to be developed in order to agree on management prioritizations and to ensure future-fit and resilient forest ecosystems (Neumann et al. 2022).

Hunting is the only effective and readily available tool for influencing and managing wild ungulates on large scales and is essential to influence their demography, density, and distribution (Linnell et al. 2020). To reduce ungulate densities and browsing pressure when necessary, hunting often provides the best trade-off among economic returns, efficiency, and social acceptance (Beguin et al. 2016). Different forms of hunting can be used depending on management goals, which allow flexibility to other stakeholders and decision-makers.

Best practice examples

There's no one size fits all formula for success but hunting and forestry objectives should not be in contradiction. All measures will depend on the local landscape and social-ecological situation. The practical

examples below show how forestry and hunting can be reconciled through partnership and actions tailored to local conditions.

Sweden

The current Swedish moose management system promotes decentralized decision-making while including relevant stakeholders in objective formulation and considering the ecosystem as a key management level. The system acknowledges that the moose management in Sweden is characterized by complexity, uncertainties, and changes in forestry and ecosystems. It therefore relies on adaptive management, monitoring and systematic learning. To enable this ecosystem-based and decentralized moose management, Sweden created the Moose Management Areas (MMA) as a new governance level in 2012. Each MMA is managed by a Moose Management Group which consists out of three members representing landowners and three hunters. Together goals and moose management plans for the respective MMA are created. Moose hunting is thus steered by goals set at the local level with the consensus of relevant stakeholders.

Success factors:

- Decentralized and inclusive decision-making processes are key factors in the Swedish moose management. The more data on the moose population and the more time invested the more successful the MMA was in fulfilling the set quota and ensuring a balanced forest ecosystem.

Odenwald – Germany

The entire Odenwald red deer area covers an area of around 46,600 hectares. The core area consists of large connected forested areas. The main tree species are spruce, oak, and beech. Douglas fir, red oak and chestnut are also planted as part of the forest conversion. The main game species is red deer, which is also the focus of the implemented hunting strategies. Many valuable species can be found in the area such as the black stork, kingfisher, or woodcock. The main hunting strategies are interval hunting, hunting in focus areas and driven hunts. There is no noteworthy conflict between the forest and hunting sector. Ongoing dialogue with forestry and landowners helps to identify problematic areas with increased browsing pressure, which are then prioritized.

Success factors:

- Close cooperation with the forest/landowner, collegial and respectful dialogue, regular exchange and, if necessary, adjustment of the hunting and forestry concepts.
- Large-scale red deer management in good agreement with the neighbouring hunting areas.
- Focus on "intelligent" hunting strategies such as interval hunting and hunting in focus areas.
- Ecological spatial planning with strictly maintained rest zones for ungulates.
- Consultation between hunting and forestry already in the afforestation phase: definition and creation of hunting corridors.
- Habitat improvement measures for alternative grazing opportunities, creation, establishment and maintenance of wild meadows, structured forest edges, green strips along forest roads, etc.
- Individual protection measures for sensitive, allochthonous tree species.

More information on this case study and other best practice examples from Germany can be found [here](#).

Austria

Especially in winter, disturbances to wild ungulates result in stress and additional energy requirements. Particularly critical for native species are cold temperatures, prolonged snowfall and reduced food supply from January to spring. Every small disturbance can increase energy consumption by up to 30 percent which significantly reduces the natural reserves of ungulates, impacts animal health and damage to trees becomes more likely.

The unusually high snow levels of 2021 in Austria caused some wild ungulates to move into inhabited areas in search of food. In line with the intention of the forest-hunting dialogue, the Federal Forests of Austria have used the situation to draw more attention to the increased need for wildlife to rest in winter times.

Success factors:

- Raising awareness among the general public about the habits and resting needs of ungulates and other wildlife in winter via:
 - Separate website on the topic of ungulates in winter.
 - More information boards in the field calling for the use of marked trails, ski slopes and cross-country ski tracks only to not disturb retreat areas of wildlife.
- Clearly defined principles for the emergency feeding of red deer.

Recommendations

Hunters provide important services to forestry and society by managing ungulates. Future forest planning must therefore address the integration of wildlife management, the development of adaptive management plans with hunters, and the participation of all other relevant stakeholders. Such actions should occur on a local or regional level while considering the landscape and social-ecological context. Hunting is and will be key to ensure multi-functional, resilient and valuable forest ecosystems in Europe.

FACE looks forward to engaging in the ongoing dialogue at the international level on future-fit forests.

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