

SUSTAINABLE FORESTRY 1st Workshop 2016

March 17 - 20 2016 - Milverton - UK

SUMMARY REPORT



Participants in the workshop at Milverton Sawmill, with the owner Philip Chambers (third from left)



This workshop was conceived as the first of a planned series of workshops which together will address, in different locations in Europe, the issue of Sustainable Forest Management. The aim of the first event was to raise awareness of the different services provided by sustainable forest management, and to understand what sustainable forestry means in practice.

This was a two and a half day event, based in Somerset, southwest England. It included a half-day visit to a large private woodland in Exmoor National Park, in the company of officials from the National Park Authority and the Forestry Commission, followed by one and a half days of discussion. Of the 30 participants, just over half were from the United Kingdom, and the remainder from Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Hungary, Latvia, Serbia, Slovakia and Sweden.

Geographic scope. Participants agreed that the workshop series should focus on the whole of Europe, within and beyond the EU; and upon all manner of woodlands and forests, both rural and urban, including hedgerows which are seen as linear woodlands. We recognised the wide variation between different regions of Europe in terms of climate, geomorphology, soils and other underlying factors; in national cultures, traditions, and patterns of land ownership and administration; and thus in the character of woodlands and forests, and in the challenge of achieving sustainability.

Principles. Having discussed many different aspects and definitions of forest management, we resolved not to strive for any standard definitions of sustainable forest management, but rather to focus on the values and principles which may guide the efforts to achieve sustainability, which we see as a process rather than a static measurable condition. We agreed upon four key principles :

- Holistic respect for the health of woodlands and forests as natural organisms and systems, which have a validity and even sanctity in their own right, regardless of human intervention
- A sense of stewardship of forests on behalf of humankind now and in the future, rather than selfish or short-term exploitative use of forests
- A sense of communal responsibility for, and pride in, the forests; and of fairness in the provision and allocation of forest-based benefits and resources
- A global perspective, based on care for all the world's forests and on awareness of the fragility of global ecosystems and climate.

Stakeholders. We recognised the wide range of stakeholders whose interests should be considered and fairly balanced in the processes of use and management of woodlands and forests - including the owners of land; those who work in the forests; those who live in or near the forests and may thus most directly benefit from them; those who work in supply chains based on forest products; those who represent different interest groups; local, regional and national governments; international institutions; and the wider world population, now and in the future.

Dialogue. The range and complexity of stakeholders, and all the benefits which can arise from forests and woodlands, point to the need for dialogue between all relevant interests when preparing and implementing plans for forest management. We place high importance upon a pan-European exchange of good practice, peer-to-peer learning, and the assembly and dissemination of case studies. Our network, which already has roots in many European countries, can play a significant role in this field.

Drivers and levers. We need more debate about the major global forces or drivers which affect the management of forests and woodlands. This will inject a hard reality into our discussion, and will also point to the levers which can be used to move towards greater sustainability in forest management. These levers, working from global through European and national to regional and local level, may include trade deals, forest product standards, legislative controls, fiscal and financial incentives, information and advisory systems, demonstrations and site visits etc.

International standards and local guidance. We recognize the usefulness, for many who trade in or use timber or related products, of the definitions and assessment systems for sustainable forest management used by the Forest Stewardship Council and the Programme of Endorsement of Forest Certification, and those developed by some national governments. We welcome the efforts to express the principles in these systems in clear and user-friendly ways. But these broad systems, which are applied particularly to the products of major commercial forests, do not provide a meaningful guide to the day by day management of many of the world's woodlands. Those who manage woodland need more direct, localised and face-to-face guidance, advice and training.

Forest regimes. Our network needs more time, more information, and more opportunities for field visits and discussions, before we can offer well-based conclusions related to the sustainability of

different forest regimes. However, we have serious doubts about the true social, economic and environmental sustainability of regimes based on large-scale clear-felling and replanting. We believe that there is increasing merit in regimes based on diversity of woodland species, diversity in the age of trees, and continuous woodland cover, particularly in the present era of growing threats from pests and diseases and of rapid climate change.

Multinational workshops. We confirm the high value of multi-national workshops like the one that we have enjoyed. We wish to see such workshops held in different regions in Europe, in order to explore how the values and principles articulated at this first workshop can be applied and flexed to the circumstances of the other regions.

Building the network. Participants in this first workshop will be the starting point for a continuing network, which we hope will grow to embrace people throughout Europe and become authoritative. We will assemble information about the state of Europe's forests, with help from relevant experts and organisations; and will gather and publicise case studies which illustrate good practice. We will enrich our debate on issues related to sustainable forest management, so that we may progressively improve our collective understanding.

Michael Dower, April 2016