

Elite Concerns in Forest Sectors of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania

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Abstract

To understand the forest policy and decision making processes and enable successful implementation of development and environmental conservation objectives, it is necessary to learn about the current issues and problems in the forest sector. This study focuses on forest sectors of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania (the Baltic States). Using the in-depth interview technique, the study learns about the opinions of leading individuals (elite) in the forest sectors of the Baltic States regarding the issues of concern in the forest management of their respective countries.

This study finds that the largest concentration of issues of concern in Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania is in an area of institutional failures. Therefore, in facilitating forest development of these countries attention should be focused on the interface between policy failures and actual resource problems. The perceptions on issues of concern were found to differ between the stakeholders in general and the elite representatives.

Key words: forestry, forest policy, Baltic States, elite, experts

Introduction

Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania are commonly known as the Baltic States. After the recent accession of these countries to the European Union (EU), governance of natural resources in the Baltic States has gained an even greater international importance. In the context of this change, additionally to the domestic priorities, the governance of natural resources must now follow the European Community development and environmental conservation objectives and commitments (European Commission 2002, Lisbon Strategy 2005). This is also largely applicable to the management of forest resources.

In order to successfully integrate national forest management objectives and principles of governance with those of the EU, comprehensive knowledge of a forest sector is necessary. However, this knowledge is not readily available. During the last 10 to 15 years Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, along with the other Eastern European nations, have undergone a number of rapid changes in the national politics and econo-

mies, which also had major implications to the forest sectors of the three countries (Naka *et al.* 2000, Nijnik and van Kooten 2000, Schmithüsen 2000, Buttoud and Yunusova 2002, Schmithüsen 2002). Ownership rights to forestland were restored and many forest-related assets were privatised, including some previously state-run activities in forest management. These changes made it difficult to understand the present challenges and problems in a dynamic policy and decision-making environment (Carlsson and Lazdinis 2004, Lazdinis *et al.* 2005).

The total forested area of the Baltic States amounts to roughly seven million hectares (FAO 2001). The three countries also represent relatively unique and well-preserved natural ecosystems with complex interface between forest environment and cultural heritage (Löhmus *et al.* 2004, Kurlavičius *et al.* 2004). However, the rapidly growing economies also depend on the use of natural resources. In this context, it is very important to ensure that intensive use of forest resources will not undermine the goals of conservation of valuable forest ecosystems.

In the framework of the European Community measures, there are possibilities of supporting the member states in establishing the balance between forest conservation and utilization. Community measures, such as those under implementation of the rural development policy, are well capable of supporting some actions in individual countries to facilitate achievement of rural development as well as nature conservation goals. In order for these and other Community measures to be well targeted, the knowledge about current issues to be addressed in the sector becomes very important.

Considering the above context, the main objective of this study is to learn about the opinion of elite (leaders/experts) on the main issues of concern in forest sectors of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. Forest sector here is understood as including the following fields: forestry, timber harvesting and related activities, timber processing, forestry-related research and activities of NGOs. In the context of an emerging practice of participation of stakeholders in forest policy formation and implementation, leaders from various segments of the sector were interviewed. Despite considering the entire forest sector, the focus throughout the study, and especially presenting and discussing results, is made on a forestry segment. The attempt is also made to map the policy and institutional failures and resource problems identified in forest policy networks of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania.

Materials and methods

Elite of policy networks

Various studies demonstrated that the characteristics of policy networks can be helpful starting-points for attempting to clarify the way in which policy instruments function (de Bruijn and Hufen 1998). The term 'policy networks' generally assumes the existence of two main features - links and actors - viewed from a horizontal rather than a vertical perspective (Carlsson 2000). Policy analyses studying such networks should concentrate on answering two crucial questions: (1) what is (are) the problem(s) to be solved? and (2) who is participating in the creation of institutional arrangements in order to solve them? (Carlsson 1996).

The elite members (or leaders and experts) in the research are typically addressed when there is little or no written information or where quantitative information is difficult to obtain (Patton and Sawicki 1993). Due to the rapid changes in forest policy and decision making environment in the Baltic States, information on current problems in the sector is difficult to obtain. Therefore, the opinions of the elite are a subject of this study in order to acquire the most re-

cent information on the state of forest sectors in individual countries. Since network approach is problem oriented it focuses on how individual actors organize in order to address particular issues (Carlsson 2000). Most of the decisions in policy formation and implementation processes are based on compromises between the leaders of individual stakeholder groups. These leaders (elite), and their perceptions of key issues, then largely determine the successful functioning of forest policy networks. Learning about the perceptions of the elite regarding the specific issues viewed as problems in policy networks may also provide an indication as to which course of action ought to or may be taken in the forthcoming policy decisions.

As elite in forest policy networks, leaders of the following stakeholder groups were considered: private forest owners, timber processing industry, top level forest authorities, operational forestry staff, forest scientists, environmental NGOs, and top level environmental protection authorities (also see Lazdinis *et al.* 2005). Individuals were selected based on the best available knowledge of the forest policy networks, supported by the snowball strategy (Patton 1987) (for information on the forest policy networks in the Baltic States see Lazdinis *et al.* 2004). Sixteen individuals from Estonia and Latvia each and 14 from Lithuania were interviewed, with, most commonly, two persons from each stakeholder group. In total, 46 representatives of forest sector elite were interviewed during this study.

Research instrument

In the interviewing procedure, standardized open-ended interview approach (Patton 1987) was combined with the questionnaire. The leaders were presented with the lists of issues of concern produced from a previous study by the same authors (Lazdinis *et al.* 2005). This study used voluntary free-response survey technique to learn about the issues of concern in the forest sectors of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. During the survey, from 70 to 80 individuals per country were contacted representing main stakeholders in the sector. As a result, lists of approximately 300-400 specific problems per country were identified. After grouping individual related issues of concern, lists of current perceived problems in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania were compiled. These lists consisted of respectively 38, 42, and 31 items each.

Then interviewees were asked to indicate whether they agree or disagree that the listed problems exist in the forest sector of a particular country. If an interviewee disagreed that a listed problem existed, then he/she was asked to explain why the particular

issue is not a concern. To demonstrate their attitude towards each individual issue of concern presented in the list, respondents were asked to select one of the choice options (YES – agree; Y/N – rather agree than disagree; “?” – uncertain (not enough information to answer); N/Y – rather disagree than agree; and NO – disagree) (Likert 1970). Then interviews were carried out. The in-depth interviewing involves asking open-ended questions, listening to and recording the answers, and then following up with additional relevant questions (Patton 1987). First, the interview covered experience/behaviour and background/demographic questions and then continued with the discussions on individual issues of concern.

Results

Due to the limited space, opinions of the elite on each individual issue of concern could not be presented in this paper. Still, to be able to demonstrate the perceptions of elite, their attitudes towards the five, highest-ranked issues of concern from the stakeholder survey, are presented for each of the three countries in Table 1. Age of individuals contacted during the in-depth interviews ranged from 30 to 65 years. Both in Estonia and Lithuania all of them were male; some females were interviewed in Latvia. Experience in the forest sector ranged from several to 45 years.

Estonia

In addition to the five issues of concern perceived as the most important by the stakeholders (for reference see results of the stakeholder survey in Lazdinis *et al.* 2005), the presence of three of the issues, not listed among the five, was confirmed by 14 of the 16 interviewed experts. These were:

- Forest policy implementation is problematic and does not correspond to objectives and goals set in the policy documents. The above especially concerns management of private forests;
- Lack of management in young forests;
- Lack of information on forest resources in general. Lack of centralized and reliable database covering forest resources, ownership, management details and use.

As Table 1 shows, the elite confirmed not all of the five most urgent issues of concern perceived by the stakeholders in Estonia. Only eight individuals agreed that there is a “lack of funding and staff in relevant state institutions to carry out supervision of forest management and other administration activities as charged by the legislation”. Six of the interviewed leaders negatively reacted to this statement. Some of the respondents argued that institutions charged with supervisory tasks have adequate means to complete

their duties. However, it was seen that the problem lays in the approach – currently the decision-makers deal with consequences of violations rather than causes. Therefore, more emphasis should be placed on a preventive work. Another possible explanation of the issue was that the root of the problem might be in a low position in administrative hierarchy of those responsible for supervision of forest management.

The statement that “forest legislation is too liberal, weak and inapplicable, which disables effective supervision of forestry activities and law enforcement” was disagreed with by nine and supported only by six individuals. Some argued that the law is not too liberal, claiming rather that the focus on implementation has been too weak. Opinions were expressed that ineffective supervision and law enforcement exist not because of the liberal legislation, but due to badly defined roles and responsibilities in state forest sector.

Latvia

The presence of four additional issues of concern, not listed among the five highest ranking problems, was confirmed by 14 of the 16 interviewed experts. These were:

- Fine system is ineffective - sometimes it pays better to break the law and be penalized than to follow certain regulations. The financial constraints, besides above, also quite commonly result in lack of technical equipment to carry out control functions of forest management;
- Need for subsidies for afforestation of marginal or abandoned agricultural land;
- Lack of qualified staff in general and particularly in forest research. Young individuals after graduation of university are not ready to take on responsibilities;
- Forest research plays a minor role in forest sector decision-making process.

In Latvia, the presence of three issues of concern (Table 1) was confirmed only by half or less than a half of leaders in the sector. The statement that there is a “lack of clarity and transparency in existing legislation allows for different interpretation of legal acts” was supported by eight participants of the study. Three individuals objected to the presence of this issue and three could not provide any certain answer. Some respondents argued that it is not possible to describe every detail in the law. It was seen that the problem rests not in the documents itself, but in people dealing with the law, who are not used to such types of legal documents. There is still a need in society for the soviet-type regulations, which reminded handbooks or manuals rather than laws. Others argued that misinterpretation of laws is common; however,

Table 1. Issues of concern in forest sectors of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania

Issue of concern	YES	Y/N	?	N/Y	NO
Estonia					
Lack of forestry experience among private forest owners. Knowledge of private forest owners on requirements and principles of forest management is very poor	11	3			1
Lack of funding and staff in relevant state institutions to carry out supervision of forest management and other administration activities as charged by the legislation	8	2			6
Forest legislation is too liberal, weak and inapplicable, which disables effective supervision of forestry activities and law enforcement	6			1	9
Illegal logging and excessive felling in private forests. Besides single individuals, organised criminal activities are also sometimes focused on illegal felling and theft of roundwood	11	4			1
Holdings of forest owners are scattered and private forest owners are not sufficiently well organised in co-operative bodies	12	1	1		2
Latvia					
The lack of clarity and transparency in existing legislation allows for different interpretation of legal acts	8	1	3	1	3
Lack of compensation mechanism for environmental requirements	16				
Frequent changes in the forest sector and overall dynamic situation on the national scale. Changing rules and regulations negatively effect forest management planning process, which makes long-term planning and sustainable forest management close to impossible, both for the state and private managers	9	2	1		4
Lack of organizational structures to carry out forestry in private forest holdings and lack of information on legal requirements and recommended forestry activities	8		1		7
It is very difficult according to the currently valid legislation to plan harvesting amounts, since cutting limits are being announced very late and there is a very short time period for private harvesting companies to prepare for future activities	2		8	1	5
Lithuania					
Dual responsibilities at the top level of forestry decision-making	4	2			8
Long-lasting and improperly carried out land reform process, which creates many problems	12	1		1	
In general, forest resource administrative system is poor – large political influence to the forest sector, big administrative apparatus, lack of common strategy for timber trade	7	2	1		4
In general, inflexible and continually changing forest legislation does not correspond to current changes in international forestry	6	3			5
Forests after final cutting are not always reforested. Private forest owners lack information on afforestation	5	2	1		6

forest owners and managers still must be given some flexibility to act due to the complex nature of forestry. Therefore, the responsibility for activities should rest upon the owner, but not in a detail legal document.

Only half of those interviewed agreed that the “lack of organizational structures to carry out forestry in private forest holdings and lack of information on legal requirements and recommended forestry activities” pose a problem in Latvia. Some leaders argued that there is a sufficient consultation service available provided both by the state and private companies. Also it was seen that there are many institutional structures, which could be used in managing private forests.

Only two individuals agreed that “it is very difficult according to the currently valid legislation to plan harvesting amounts, since cutting limits are being announced very late and there is a very short time period for private harvesting companies to prepare for future activities”. The above may be an indication that there could have been some misunderstanding in formulat-

ing the issue of concern, since half of the respondents were uncertain on the definition of this issue.

Lithuania

The presence of three other issues of concern, not listed among the five highest ranking problems (Table 1) was confirmed by 11 and more of the 14 interviewed experts. These were:

- Processing of small-sized timber and trading issues are unsolved;
- Poor local timber processing – more and better (value-added) processed timber would create additional employment and income to the state;
- Relations of foresters and representatives of timber processing industry are problematic – companies buying timber are not making timely payments.

In Lithuania, three of the five most-highly ranked issues of concern were supported by half or less than half of the leaders. Only four individuals considered the issue of “dual responsibilities at the top level of

forestry decision-making" as a concern in Lithuanian forest sector, eight - objected the presence of this problem. This, most likely, could be explained by the changes in Forest Law, which have supposedly eliminated the problem. Department of Forests and Protected Areas was divided into the Service of Protected Areas and Forestry Department. The latter has been moved into the Ministry of Environment, leaving General Forest Enterprise as a sole leading institution in state forestry.

Only six individuals supported the statement that "inflexible and continually changing forest legislation does not correspond to the current changes in international forestry". Five participants of the survey objected the presence of this problem in Lithuanian forest sector. Some argued that the fact that the legislation is continually changing already shows that it is flexible; some stressed that Lithuanian forest legislation corresponds to the current trends in international legal and regulatory environment.

Only five leaders recognised that reforestation in Lithuania poses a problem and that "forests after final cutting are not always reforested; private forest owners lack information on afforestation". Six individuals disagreed that this problem exists in the country. Some argued that this issue only applies to private sector. It was also pointed out that the information available often does not reach private forest owners.

Discussion

Limitations of the study

In the interviewing the role of the interviewers is very important. The interviewer guides the dialogue and clarifies the respondent's answers (Reviere *et al.* 1996). This potentially can cause errors of purposive or unwilling actions by the interviewer, leading the respondent to an expected answer. In this study, attempting to present the questions to all respondents in similar tone of voice, also reducing to a minimum the number of additional questions minimized this risk of error. Another potential limitation to the methodology applied in this study is that respondents, and especially leaders, may be reluctant and cautious to provide information, which they perceive as confidential or politically sensitive. To minimize this risk, during each interview respondents were assured of confidentiality. The same individual, who had a good knowledge of the forest sectors in three countries, completed all interviews. This also minimized the errors, which could have occurred due to misunderstanding and misinterpretation of responses to the open-ended questions. On the other hand, participation of researchers from each of the three countries allowed

a better appreciation of the national sectors as well as of the information provided by the leaders.

The sample selected for the study is critical to the results. As the forest sectors of the three countries are relatively small (Lazdinis *et al.* 2004), the number of leaders potentially to be interviewed is also rather limited. Therefore, based on the in-depth knowledge of the sector by the authors as well as considering the outcomes of the use of a snowball technique, it may be considered that the number of individuals interviewed sufficiently well covers all relevant interest groups in the sectors of the three countries and the results of this study are representative of the opinions of elite.

Similarities with other studies

Not all the issues of concern identified in the stakeholder survey (Lazdinis *et al.* 2005) were also seen as important by the elite. There might be various reasons for the differences in opinions. It is very likely that it may be due to a better access to information by the leaders and more active involvement in policy and decision-making processes, as compared to other representatives of stakeholders. This finding only confirms that elite may be considered almost as a separate segment of professional society, opinion of which may be expected to be different of the remaining group of stakeholders. Therefore, the results from the in-depth interviews of elite cannot be used as a representative sample of the sector stakeholders and must be treated in comparison with results from studies on the sector in general.

Results of this study confirm the situation as found by the other studies. Herbst (2002) showed that the participants of two international meetings on "Experiences with new forest and environmental laws in European countries with economies in transition" held in 1998 and 1999, addressed issues, which could be ranked in the following order: (1) harmonization of forest and environmental legislation (18.6%), (2) private forests (17.8%), (3) financing (17.1%), (4) protected areas (12.4%), (5) governance and participation (forest policy) (9.3%), (6) public forest administration and management (8.5%), (7) forests functions (6.2%), (8) privatization of forests (5.4%), (9) sustainable forest management and planning (3.1%), (10) definition of "forests" (1.6%). Pivoriūnas and Lazdinis (2004), investigating the needs of private forest owners in Lithuania found that the main problems faced by the private sector are: bureaucracy (22%), illegal logging (16%), difficulties to access information (15%), felling and timber trade (12%), difficulties in getting harvesting permissions (11%), difficulties in forest management (10%), no-one to trust (9%), and the lack of time (5%).

Mapping policy and institutional failures, and resource problems

Mayers and Bass (1998) suggested dividing issues of concern into resource problems and policy and institutional failures. Issues listed in Table 1 as well as those additionally identified by a number of leaders were attributed to one of the three groups. Some issues, similar for all three countries, were merged and placed under the common title.

Policy and institutional failures typically are at the root of many forest problems (Mayers and Bass 1998). In order to learn about the possible causality and interlinkages of the problems and failures, issues of concern in Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania were graphically mapped (Figure 1). Distribution of the issues of concern along the axis of "policy failures - institutional failures - resource problems" indicates a likely causality. Issues in the group of policy and institutional failures represent problems related to the mismanagement and failures in governance, which may be seen as causes to the resource problems.

Six clusters were distinguished encompassing the issues relevant to: 1) resources; 2) private forestry; 3) state forestry; 4) institutional failures directly related to private forest sector; 5) knowledge and human capacities; and 6) policy failures. Some issues of concern seen by the stakeholders were directly unrelated to any of the above clusters. Issues of concern, marked in **Bold** font are those considered as important both by the stakeholders and the elite. The leaders, however, given little importance by the sector stakeholders, almost unanimously agreed upon problems in regular font. Issues marked in *Italic* were seen as important by the stakeholders, but given little importance by the leaders.

The figure visually demonstrates that the largest concentration of issues of concern is in the area of institutional failures. Only a small part of the issues of concern reported by the stakeholders may be considered as problems directly related to the forest resources. Policy failures in general are the least common. Therefore, applying European Community measures available to the forest sectors of these countries as well as in national forest policy and decision making, the most attention should be paid to the operational interface between policy related issues and actual resource problems. Among the institutional failures, the large amount of problems seen by the elite was related to the private forest sector.

It is important to note that the leaders confirmed the presence of only one of the three policy failures rejecting the remaining two. Among the institutional failures, several general issues, largely related to the administrative matters, were rejected during the in-depth interviews.

Conclusions

The ongoing changes in the forest sector are a consequence of the border restructuring of fundamental concepts of state and governance, which has been taking place in the Baltic States during the last fifteen years. On the one hand, these changes have led to the increasing complexity of the policy and decision making process. On the other hand, society also increasingly requires policy process to be transparent and responsive to their needs. They demand more information on economic and environmental issues and active participation in transparent policy formulation and implementation processes. With an increasing number of stakeholders involved in forest policy and decision-making, there is also a shift in expectations from forest management. Joining the EU by the three Baltic States, has added even more to the complexity of these processes by increasing a significance of an international dimension in forest governance.

In learning about the opinion of elite on the main issues of concern and mapping the policy and institutional failures and resource problems, this study attempted to introduce more clarity and transparency in policy and decision-making processes of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. It is anticipated that the results would be used in facilitating the governance of the forest sectors in the context of European integration as well as establishing a balance between development and environmental conservation objectives in the forest sector. However, it must also be considered that in the face of rapidly changing societies, this study represents only a snap-shot in the history, and new issues to be addressed might have arisen by now.

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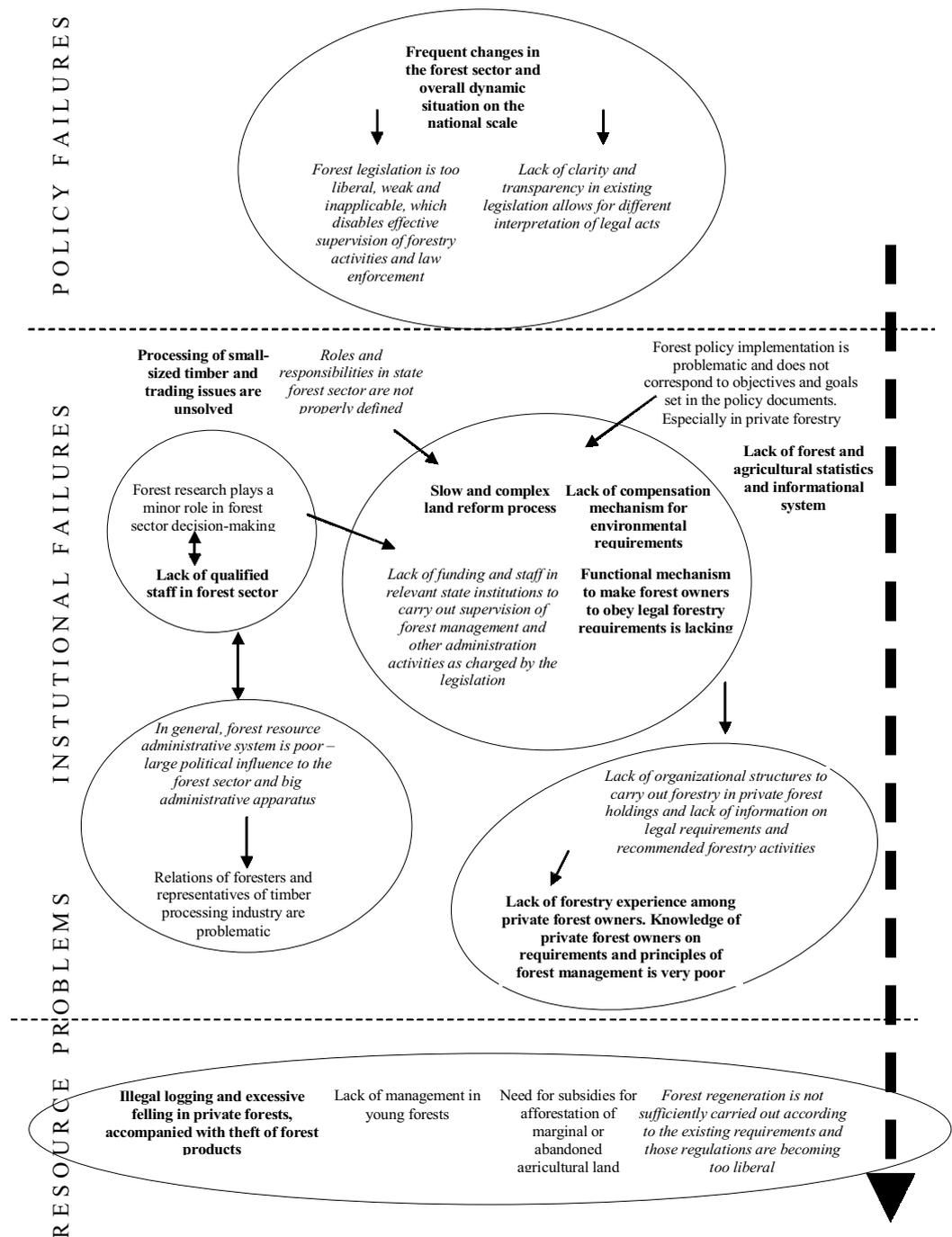


Figure 1. Mapped policy and institutional failures and resource problems in Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania

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ПРОБЛЕМЫ В ЛЕСНОМ СЕКТОРЕ ЭСТОНИИ, ЛАТВИИ И ЛИТВЫ

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Резюме

Для понятия правильности проводимой лесохозяйственной политики и принимаемых решений, их обоснованность и влияние на окружающую среду, необходимо изучить проблемы и вопросы, в настоящее время существующие в лесном секторе. Целью нашей работы было изучение развития лесных секторов Балтийских стран: Эстонии, Латвии и Литвы происходившее в течении периода после восстановления независимости.

Используя метод детального опроса и анализ мнений ведущих специалистов (элиты) в лесных секторах Балтийских стран, изучался вопрос динамики развития управления лесного хозяйства в ими представляемых странах.

Установлено, что основные проблемы в лесном секторе Балтийских стран возникают из-за ошибочных решений, принимаемых управляющими институтами отрасли. Следовательно, для успешного развития лесного хозяйства в данных странах основное внимание должно быть сосредоточено на улучшение содействия между принимаемыми политическими решениями и существующими природными ресурсами. Установлены явные разногласия между потребителями и владельцами ресурсов.

Ключевые слова: лесное хозяйство, лесохозяйственная политика, Балтийские страны, элита