

ECONOMIC GROWTH AND FORESTS A NEW PROTECTION POLICY

Dr Christos Ap. LADIAS

Forest is a natural gift of versatile importance and inestimable value not only for life in general but also for man himself.

It is a renewable natural resource with huge, inexhaustible potentials for the economic, environmental, social and cultural growth of our country and for the improvement of living conditions.

Forests and forestal areas are both very sensitive terrestrial ecosystems which provide man with different kinds of goods and services.

They give, the indispensable for life, oxygen, create healthy living conditions, they offer a chance to relax and opportunities to work.

Forests prevent soil erosion and the creation of torrents and floods and enrich the underground water with springs and rivers.

They have a beneficial influence on the environment, moderate the extremes temperatures, create a healthy and congenial climate and contribute to the conservation of the biological balance in nature.

Forests provide food, shelter and protection to the wild animals and are a great provider for the cattle - breeding.

They give many unique, precious goods, (wood, flowers, fruits, resin etc.): they offer work and contribute to the economic and social growth of our country.

In Greece, forests and the forestal environment followed a historically difficult course.

Between war and peace, wealth and poverty, according to our nation's course of history, forests became a place of worship, a place to stay, a place where you could find food, a shelter.

So they related to man in every single way.

As far as forest economy is concerned, after our country's liberation from the Ottoman yoke, from deification to unreasonable destruction and thoughtless exploitation, prevailed chaos.

Chaos, resulting from the effort some new forms of economy to be created under the pressure of survival.

Finally, whilst, after the liberation of our country from the Ottoman empire, forests covered the 48% out of Greece's total surface, today cover less than 19% out of Greece's

total surface, which means that forests cover only 24.700.000.000 M² out to total 132.700.000.000 M².

Reduction of the Forestal Areas

The main reasons which contribute to the reduction of forestal areas are the following:

- Forest destruction due to war conditions
- The unfavorable climatic and terrain environment
- The uncontrolled and at will grazing that destroys the natural regeneration of the clumps and the artificial reforestation which has as a result not to allow the forest's restoration to the area being grazed.
- The human, uncontrolled activity for land reclamation works in order to use these areas for settlement or other reasons.
- Allotment of extended forestal areas to agriculture for the settling down of the sharecroppers and the refugees.
- Insects, pollution of the environment, protracted periods of draught and other natural elements that create unfavorable conditions for the growth of the Greek forests.
- Fires which destroy huge forest areas every summer.

The increase of our forests destruction during the last years, indicates on one hand, that the reasons causing this destruction have significantly increased and on the other hand that the measures taken for the prevention and the extinguishing of the forest fires were inadequate to protect them.

Today, from a forest expanse of 25.000.000.000 M² only 10% of them are highly productive forests, whilst the rest include shrubbery and woody expanses with a smaller production of services and goods and without regular distribution.

They are restricted, strictly to mountainous regions and they are almost all under protection.

In terms of property the Greek forests are

- a) almost 64% are state - owned
- b) about 36% are not state - owned

The forests that don't belong to the state in terms of composition and production are not inferior to the other forests. On the contrary, usually they are better because of their better position at ecological regions.

The total forest production of state - owned and non state - owned forests was in 1989 2.387.000 M³ and more specifically:

Timber category	M ³
a) industrial timber	670.000 M ³
b) market's firewood	832.000 M ³
c) tax-free collected firewood	<u>886.0000</u> M ³
<u>Total</u>	<u>2.387.000</u> M ³

The production of resin in 1989 was 11.000 ton.

The exploitation of the state - owned forests is carried out with the application of two systems by lease and by self-superintendence.

The domestic production, if we include the firewood, covers the 30% of our needs in industrial timber.

So the imports of wood and its products burden significantly the Greece's balance of foreign exchanges.

It is a fact that 1992 - a turning point year for Greece's national economy and especially for the forest economy - is very close.

The developments concerning the economic and social sector are expected to be intensive and of decisive importance for the future of our country, therefore it is necessary for us to make the right decisions and realize properly planned and complete developing programs for the securing the proper investments.

The national forest Policy

The increasing social needs for wood and its products as well as for goods and services which are met by using the forest's natural resources, impose us the implementation of a proper national forest policy which will secure their effective protection and their development for the benefit of the sylvan population and society in general:

This will be consisted of:

1. Rational management of forests and increase in the forestal production and especially in the production of the industrial wood. In this way there will be an important decrease in the imports of wood and its products which burden the country's balance of foreign exchanges.

2. The inventory, chartering and classification of lands and the constitution of a definite land registry to solve once and for all the thorny problem of property and to be a rational usage of the land.

3. The intensification of the projects of reforestation in order new productive forests and parks to be created.

4. The settlement of torrents by structural and horticultural projects for the securing and the restoration of the production source of solid materials, so as the transportable imported materials which it is estimated that today amount to 86.000.000 M³, to be restricted at the minimum.

5. The establishment and management of the national parks for the protection of many endangered species of the flora and fauna of Greece and for the securing of the development of natural forests of special ecological interest, without man's interference.

6. The organization of hunting and the establishment of breeding shelters and hunting areas for the satisfaction of modern man's need to recreate and, at the same time, protection of the hunting wealth of our country.

7. The construction of projects for the improvement of the mountainous grasslands and the organization of their management.

8. The organization of forest projects, associations and the creation of infrastructure for the improvement of the working conditions in forests.

9. The revision, modernization and codification of the forest legislation.

10. The safe keeping and protection of forests from all the different kinds of danger and mainly from fires.

Measures for fire protection

The measures that should be taken for the protection of fires will be preventive and repressive.

These are some indicative preventive measures:

a) Creation of a friendly behavior towards forests with the right advertisements from the mass-media and the press. The introduction of special courses about forests from primary to higher education.

b) Exploitation of foreign experience in forests. The introduction and application of modern technology.

The exploitation of the people's factor, and the Local Government's bodies of forest economy which will be granted with all the necessary means and the corresponding resources.

c) Increase in the financing for the reinforcement of the fight for the prevention of forest fires: use of advertisement and mass media by organizing special talks in order to provide useful information to people and at the same time, sensitization of the citizens.

d) The carrying out of the necessary forest projects (fire-breaks, forest roads, rain - water tanks e.t.c.) and the supply of further means (means of communication, portable radios) to the staff.

e) Reinforcement of the observation posts with additional staff. There will be guard at every entrance to forests and parks and all the fire trucks will be in readiness patrolling constantly the forest.

f) Measures for the prevention or spread of the fire (such as coniferous together with broad-leaf trees).

Repressive measures of fire protection

As repressive measures we suggest:

1) Searching for forest fire, that is timely tracing and announcement of the fire at the nearer center.

The following means will help the tracing and immediate announcement of the fires:

a. observatory posts located at the right positions.

b. airplanes and helicopters

c. television and cameras

d. patrolling of the area.

2) Use of proper machinery and more airplanes which will be allocated to more burned areas.

3) Proper organization of the fight for fire protection and co-ordination of the bodies taking part.

At the end we must point out that it is absolutely for all of us to support government's effort for the development of forest economy.

The constant downgrading of the natural resources because of the thoughtless exploitation make us say that this is the time for a new dynamic forest economy which will reserve the danger of a destroyed natural environment with all the serious consequences.

Forests need our protection and care. Forests need social and material supplies and sacrifices if we really want our civilization to survive.