

14th November 2017

To Cabinet of Ministers of Latvia,

It has come to our knowledge that new amendments have been proposed for Latvian forest regulations that would affect huge areas of forest by allowing clear-cuts in coastal area where formerly forbidden and allowing final cutting of smaller diameter trees. The example of Estonia has been used as a positive justification of these changes.

It is true that Estonia has loosened its forestry environmental requirements substantially over the last 10 years. The minimum cutting age and diameter has been decreased and the restrictions to maximum clearcut area size scrapped, but from the environmental perspective, there is nothing positive to be learned from these examples. The environmental core value of forest - hosting the vast majority of biodiversity typical for the bioregion as well as storing and continuously absorbing carbon only suffers from that.

The last round of change that lowered the minimum cutting age spruce trees in Estonia for most fertile soil types was met with a compensation demand from main environmental NGOs of more strictly protected forest on these soil types. The ignorance to accept this lead to a major unease within general public about forestry developments in general. Although the changes came to force and compensation claim was finally met with 30000 ha of new reserves, the reputation of forestry has suffered badly and has lead to a widespread opposition to unsustainable forestry activities in all possible forms. Estonian environmental NGOs, multiple scientists and a vast number of citizens would like to have forestry that truly takes into consideration the ecological, social and economic benefits of forests and is not mainly driven from the latter.

As representatives of NGOs of Estonia - country culturally, historically and naturally so similar to Latvia, we urge you not to repeat the mistakes done in our country, but learn from them and seek for options that a truly sustainable and inclusive. We are in contact with several Latvian organisations and sure of their capacity in helping you on the way.

Kind regards

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