



Developing sustainable intensive forestry in Russia's boreal forest

Russia's boreal forests contain some of the most pristine places on the planet – but they're also under increasing pressure from the global demand for timber and forest products. Is it possible to conserve these landscapes, while simultaneously increasing production and prosperity? A new initiative launched by WWF and Mondi aims to find out.

The largest forest on Earth encircles the top of the globe through the far north of Eurasia and North America. This boreal forest, or taiga, makes up almost a third of the world's remaining forest cover. Most is found in Russia, which has more than 800 million hectares of boreal forest – equivalent to the area of the 48 contiguous United States.

The boreal forest may not get as much publicity as the tropical forests of the Amazon or Indonesia, but it's hugely important. Massive stores of carbon are locked up in its trees, soils and peat lands – more carbon than in all tropical and temperate forests combined. And while a relatively narrow range of species can survive in this harsh climate, it's one of the last places where vast herds of herbivores including reindeer and large predators like bears, wolves, lynx and the Amur tiger range free in their natural state. Indigenous people, with unique customs and traditions, also depend upon these forests.

More than three-quarters of Russia's boreal forest remains in a more or less pristine state – but it's coming under increasing pressure. A recent survey by WWF-Russia showed that 21 million hectares of intact forest (or 7.5% of the total area) was lost to fragmentation caused by fires, logging and mining between 2000 and 2013 – ancient forest that would take centuries to return to its natural state. And as demand for timber continues to rise, logging companies are moving further into pristine forests.

But it doesn't have to be this way. WWF-Russia and Mondi, the international packaging and paper group, with additional support from IKEA and local NGO Silver Taiga, recently launched the "Boreal Forest Platform" (BFP). This new initiative will explore how timber production can be intensified sustainably, without loss of important intact forest landscapes or biodiversity, or affecting the important services that forest ecosystems provide.

"Over the coming decades we will see an increase in the amount of timber being harvested from Russia's forests," says Nikolay Shmatkov, Head of WWF-Russia's Forest Programme.

"The current mainstream approach to forest management in Russia is not efficient: many forest sector companies rely mostly to pioneer logging in intact forest landscapes rather than on management of secondary growth forests. This leads to slow forest regeneration, undesirable transformation of timber species composition and need to invest more continuously into building of new roads into virgin forests. The need for more intensive forest management with effective regeneration, proper and timely thinning and prevention of devastating forest fires and illegal logging in industrial forests is needed. At the same time, these intensive forest management practices should be well balanced with preservation of high conservation values".

"Mondi has been working with WWF and Silver Taiga for over 10 years to identify and protect important boreal forest areas in the regions where we operate, and to ensure our forest management is environmentally and socially responsible while improving yields in commercial areas," says Peter Gardiner, Mondi Group Natural Resources Manager. "The Boreal Forest Platform provides an opportunity to share ideas, experiences and best practices, and develop solutions that will accelerate the transition to sustainable forestry in Russia."

The BFP is loosely modelled on WWF's New Generation Plantations (NGP) platform, which focuses mainly on plantations in tropical regions. Set up in 2007, NGP brings together forestry businesses, forest authorities, NGOs and research institutions to exchange knowledge and experiences. It provides many examples of sustainable landscape management, where intensive production is combined with nature conservation and socio-economic development.

At the first BFP meeting in April this year, representatives from Russian and international forest businesses, federal-level forest management authorities, scientists and environmental organizations discussed the barriers to sustainable forestry intensification in Russia, and possible market, policy and technical options for overcoming them. Above all, participants recognized the need for businesses to work together with government and civil society in order to balance social, environmental and economic priorities.

"Our goal is to provide a safe space where government representatives, companies, NGOs and scientists can share knowledge and develop approaches that increase forest productivity while protecting old-growth forest and benefiting local people," says Nikolay. "We are looking for solutions. With a focus on Russia and drawing on expertise and experience from Canada and Scandinavia, we are calling on interested parties to join the platform and help build a sustainable future for the Russian forests".

Next steps for the BFP include organizing roundtables and study tours to discuss barriers and seek solutions to intensifying production in secondary forests, including improved legislation; launching a website in Russian and in English on various aspects of intensive forest management and sustainability; and holding a study tour to the Republic of Komi in Russia to explore Mondi's landscape planning approaches for harvesting and conservation.

GET INVOLVED: Forestry companies, businesses that use forest products, NGOs, government authorities and research institutions with an interest in responsible forest management are all invited to participate in the Boreal Forest Platform. Please contact Alexander Kostenko at akostenko@wwf.ru to find out more.

FURTHER INFORMATION:

- **New Generation Plantations** – www.newgenerationplantations.org
- **WWF-Russia** – wwf.ru
- **WWF-Mondi Partnership** - http://wwf.panda.org/what_we_do/how_we_work/businesses/business_partnerships/mondi.cfm
- **Mondi** – www.mondigroup.com/sustainability