



Press release

Clearcuttings against sustainability

Study: FSC certification has no positive ecological effects on forest management in Northwest Russia

Berlin/Eberswalde, 21 June 2019: The seal of the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) is considered by environmental organisations to be the most ambitious international certificate for responsible forest management. A study commissioned by the WWF on the situation in Russia shows that a positive ecological effect can not be detected everywhere: In the areas investigated in the northwest of the country, no significant difference could be found between FSC-certified forests and those without a certificate. "In the forests investigated, we have to deal with large-scale clearcutting, from which nature finds it difficult to recover, irrespective of certification. This is a worrying finding," criticises Dr. Susanne Winter, Forest Programme Manager at WWF Germany.

The results of the study indicate that there is no real change in Russia towards more ecologically responsible forest management through the FSC label. Clear-cuts of up to 50 hectares (about 70 football grounds) accept the decline in the ecological functionality of forests, for example as climate protectors or habitats for animals and plants. "In the course of FSC certification, forest protected areas are being established in Russia. This is undoubtedly a positive effect. However, the study shows that the Russian FSC standard ignores important criteria for sustainable forest management. This must change quickly, otherwise the certificate threatens to lose its credibility. The FSC must use the current revision of the Russian standard as a matter of urgency in order to achieve a turn away from massive clearcutting", Dr. Susanne Winter continues.

The present study is one of the first studies to systematically compare FSC-certified and non-certified logging areas in the boreal forest. The Centre for Ecomics and Ecosystem Management at the Eberswalde University for Sustainable Development was responsible. In addition, the WWF as contracting partner, the Northern Arctic Federal University in Archangelsk, the State University Petrozavodsk (both in Russia), the Nicolaus Copernicus University in Torun (Poland) and the Writtle University College (Great Britain) were involved.

"We have examined in detail the clearcuts of two representative companies, each managed with or without FSC certification, as well as a primary forest, and recorded a large number of ecological indicators," reports Jeanette Blumröder, a scientist at Eberswalde University for Sustainable Development, who led the field work and the analysis. "There are no significant ecological differences, because even under the FSC label virtually all the wood biomass is harvested and transported away on the clearcuts. The number and size of clearcuts would not be affected by the certification either. The consequences for the microclimate of the forests are particularly critical. The large clearcuts heated up very strongly in summer. Especially in times of increasing heat and drought periods, the ecosystem is strongly affected by large-scale clearcutting.

Pierre Ibisch, Nature Conservation Professor at Eberswalde and responsible for the study, says: "The FSC-certified areas have spread rapidly in Russia. The reason is that the companies want to gain access to the European market. Consumers in Europe buy the wood with the FSC label and believe they are doing something good for the Russian forests. Unfortunately, we cannot confirm this with our case study. I think it is irresponsible that the destruction of Russia's last great primeval forests is progressing under the guise of sustainability".

Further information:

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Original study:

Ecological effects of clearcutting practices in a boreal forest (Arkhangelsk Region, Russian Federation) both with and without FSC certification, *Ecological Indicators* Vol. 106 (November 2019; Online publication: 20 June 2019)

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