SibFU Researchers: Contradictions in the Official Statistics of the Russian Forest Industry

Researchers from Siberian Federal University have identified the reasons for the lag of the Russian forest industry from the world leaders and proposed a new approach to the generation, storage, and systematization of statistical data on the dynamics of Russian forests and the forest economics. The scholars believe that their research will contribute to forming a long-term strategy for the sustainable development of the domestic forest industry.

„Russian Forestry Complex is the largest part of the Russian economy. However, several structural problems trap this industry in non-leading positions in the world forest economy. A fifth of all the forests in the world is on the Russian territory. At the same time, it is significantly inferior to the leading world logging countries both in terms of gross volume indicators (primarily in terms of logging volume and gross income of the industry), and in terms of relative indicators (growth of wood per hectare) of the development of the forest sector economies. We need to conduct a comprehensive analysis of the reasons why we are lagging, and find approaches that will eliminate the lag," noted **Anton Pyzhev**, assistant professor of the Department of Social and Economic Planning, head of the Scientific and Educational Laboratory of Economics of Natural Resources and Environment, Siberian Federal University.
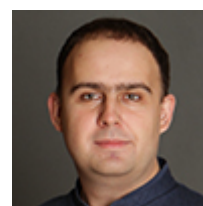
According to the scientist, a long-term sustainable development strategy should begin with a detailed analysis of its current state and characteristics of the accumulated problems. So, the first step in the conducted research was a review of the pitfalls that really impede sustainable forest management in Siberia and the Far East.

Experts usually consider various kinds of institutional traps, that make the very rules of forest use and the corresponding enforcement mechanisms ineffective, as the main problem hindering the industry development. This situation leads to a large share of the informal logging sector, a low level of processing of timber, degradation of forest villages, etc.The Siberian experts, however, suggest looking at other not so obvious, albeit destructive, obstacles, above all, the lack of adequate statistics on the forestry sector.

„We assumed that one of the key constraints for developing the Russian forestry complex is the low quality of official information on the industry development. Because of this, it is impossible neither to describe the current state of affairs adequately nor to formulate appropriate measures for long-term development. We believe that the utterly important factor for boosting the Russian forestry development is the reliable statistical data. Therefore, in our laboratory at SibFU, we performed a comprehensive analysis of the quality and availability of open information on the Russian forestry complex's activities and compiled a database," continued **Anton Pyzhev**.

The analysis showed that the Russian forest sector's official statistics provide only basic indicators for a concise period. Many indicators contain conflicting or incomplete data sets. Nevertheless, to enhance the

insight on the processes occurring in the industry and on the actual dynamics of forests as natural biogeocenosises, the scholars needed to take into account and compile other open or commercially available data sources (customs statistics, accounting and tax reports, publicly-available text information, Earth remote sensing data) to achieve new analytical data.

> „I was surprised that the indicators that have recently appeared in official statistics are almost neglected in the forest policy development. Soviet statistical data (up to 1991) are not digitized at all, but they are available in statistical journals and reports of industry research institutes that existed at that time. Why cannot we turn to them? Besides, let's talk about international trade statistics. The Russian Federal Customs Service provides a large set of data that can be used to track trade flows of forest products. Text information extracted from official press releases and other open web sources (trade journals, social media, community forums) is also a source of data with underestimated potential. In general, we argue that the most important precondition for effective forest policy implementation in Russia will be a significant expansion and improvement of the amount and quality of statistical data on the dynamics of Russian forests and the forest economics. And representatives of both academia and business should contribute," summed up **the researcher**.

> „Siberian Federal University joined the consortium of partners implementing a major scientific project of the Ministry of Education and Science. The Institute of Economics and Organization of Industrial Production (SB RAS) coordinates the consortium. The partners are the Institute for Economic Forecasting of the Russian Academy of Sciences (Moscow), Boreskov Institute of Catalysis (SB RAS), Siberian State University of Geosystems and Technologies, Federal Research Center of Information and Computational Technologies (SB RAS), Siberian Research Institute of Geology, Geophysics and Mineral Resources (Novosibirsk). This large-scale project implies developing strategic directions for the regions of the Asian Russia," said **Eugene Vaganov**, scientific adviser of Siberian Federal University, team leader of the project on behalf of the university.

The scholar clarified that, within the project, Siberian Federal University is to expand knowledge on the resource potential of the forest complex of Siberia and the Far East. The published article describes the results of the first phase of the team's contribution to the project.

> „I consider our success in compiling a huge database on the available data on the dynamics of indicators of the forestry complex important . And we will proceed further," claimed **Eugene Vaganov**.

The study was carried out within a grant for carrying out large scientific projects in priority areas of scientific and technological development within Fundamental Research for Long-Term Development and Ensuring the Competitiveness of Society and the State subprogram of the state program of the Russian Federation on Scientific and Technological Development of the Russian Federation, the Social and Economic Development of Asian Russia based on the Synergy of Transport Accessibility, Systemic Knowledge of the Natural Resource Potential, the Expanding Space of Interregional Interactions project, agreement No. 075-15-2020-804 (No. 13.1902.21.0016) with the Ministry of Science and Higher Education of the Russian Federation.

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