Sustainable forestry development in the Leningrad Region

Forestry plays a vital role in the Leningrad Region; a region, which is remarkably rich in timber resources. This is why it is critically important to actively promote the concept of responsible forest management. The region has been designated as a pilot location for the implementation of the Sustainable Forestry Model (SFM). Below we take a closer look at this program and what it means for the sustainable development of the region and the well-being of its people.

Leningrad Region’s agenda

More than 90% of forests in the region are leased¹, so the responsibility for maintaining these resources is shared between landowners (who should enable forest restoration, proper forest management) and the government (which should enable access to raw materials, transport infrastructure, etc.). SFM principles can help to substantially increase the efficiency of forest usage. This is why the implementation of SFM in Russia by 2030 is one of the country’s key policy initiatives.

These efforts are important for preserving biodiversity, the natural ecosystem of undisturbed forests and endangered species, as well as the ongoing use of forest fund lands. Social benefits that come with the transition to the new model include job creation in forest zones and rural areas, as well as the promotion of environmental responsibility. From an economic standpoint, the program can result in a 30% increase in timber supply. Improving the supply chain and applying the principles of independent certification can further enhance the development of sustainable forestry management, while increasing corporate responsibility within the forest industry.

International business experience

International Paper – a company with a 100+-year history – shares its international practices and promotes the principles of sustainable forestry all over the world in order to preserve the well-being and productivity of forest ecosystems for future generations. Sustainable forestry is an important practice that the company follows in its operations and collaborations with local authorities and other stakeholders. The company sees great potential in developing a universal approach to sustainable forestry among all key industry players in order to promote and implement sustainable forestry standards in Russia.

International Paper is a partner and active participant in the SFM program, both in the Leningrad Region as well as at the federal level where it’s focused on the “agricultural cycle” and its economic efficiency, improvement of timber structure, quality and price of growing stock, increasing economic returns per hectare of exploited forests and creation of sustainable raw materials supply to meet future needs.

International Paper is an active participant in forums and working groups that aim to improve forestry law and to tackle legislative challenges that come with the implementation of SFM, including those organized by the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, Timber Industry Union in the

¹ According to the Forestry Department of Northwestern Federal District
Leningrad Region, and the Committee for Natural Resources of the Leningrad Region. Today, the latter two organizations are actively discussing the new cleaning and reforestation standards in the Baltic-Belozersky forest region (which includes the Leningrad Region) as well as a roadmap for the region’s transition to this new model.

In March, during a major conference on sustainable forest usage and reforestation chaired by Sergey Donskoy, the Minister of Natural Resources and Environment, the results and future plans for the implementation of regional SFM were discussed. In particular, the basis for new forest management regulations was prepared, as Saint Petersburg Forestry Research Institute, financially supported by International Paper (one of the largest investors in the Leningrad Region), completed the field work in the region. In addition, test reforestation and cleaning exercises have been started on territories leased by International Paper in Tikhvin in line with the new model that other leasers will be able to use in the future. The Institute prepared new sustainable forest management regulations for Baltic-Belozersky region, which the Ministry of Natural Resources is expected to approve in 2H 2017.

After the approval of new regulations of forest management at a federal level, regional forestry rules and regulations as well as the forest plan of the Leningrad Region will be subject to renewal. Thus, leasers of forest territories will be able to make changes in the projects of forest exploitation and transition to forest management and harvesting based on the new standards. This process will start in 2018.

What is next?

The change of approach to forest management is a vital task for the forest industry of the Leningrad Region, and there are significant efforts to improve the regulatory system, including planning and budgeting resources, in order to change the forest plan of the region and forestry regulations, thereby creating new and improved rules of forest exploitation.

Effective forest management and the whole forestry cycle are, however, hard to develop without improved transport infrastructure. While the government is responsible for developing the main and secondary roads by permitting the use of new technology to build these forest roads, the forest users have to develop the local roads used in forestry. Of course, we also need to modernize the education system in order to prepare employees who will be able to utilize the principles of sustainable forestry in their work. Such modernization implies developing new standards of education that will allow us to test new education methods and technology.

Other areas where the government’s help is needed include supporting the initiative by prioritizing the allocation of resources to regions that are transitioning to SFM (by introducing new cleaning rules and forest management regulations, as in the Leningrad Region), as well as by allowing pilot sustainable forestry programs to improve technology, conduct training and update forest information within leased territories (today this costly procedure can only take place across the whole forest district).

What the stakeholders say

Fedor Grabar, Forest Department Director at International Paper Russia, commented: “Our company’s operations depend on sustainable forest management. In recent years we have been making a serious effort to change forestry rules in our area – the Leningrad Region – where we get the largest amount of timber for processing. We hope that in 2018, after the approval of new
regulations, leasers of forest territories will transition to the new model, as it will positively reflect on the variety and quality of growing stock, the balance of supply and demand for timber, processing volumes, as well as economic and social efficiency of forestry.”