

A Complaint About Forest Mismanagement in Latvia

(Letter to the Editor)

In recent years people have frequently asked how it is that the forests in Latvia are so cluttered and in some places, are even turning into swampland. Why are the local inhabitants not permitted to harvest timber for their own needs?

Recently, L. Vitols, the director of the "Latvijas Mezhs" Association, assured the public over the radio that the forest is not being overharvested and that the average growing stock in the republic is increasing every year and has reached 236 cubic metres per hectare.

What does this mean in practice? To me, after working for 23 years on forest resource inventories in an area of 210,000 hectares, and having covered on foot a distance equal to three and a half times around the globe at the equator, the answer is clear: we are not managing things in the best way possible. In pre-war days in Latvia, when horses were used, between six and eight million cubic metres of timber were harvested annually. Today, the total has shrunk to 3.2 million cu. m., and this with the aid of the most powerful tractors available. Every year the republic is importing 200,000 cubic metres of timber, mainly for the Sloka Pulp and Paper Mill, even though the Mazsalace logging enterprise is at a loss to know where to put the spruce pulpwood. How much valuable marketable timber is being left to rot, how many plantations have been damaged by elk and deer, and how many hectares of plantings have been spoiled and have withered up!