

WWF Launches the First Tool to Prioritize Wood Transport Controls



Photo: WWF Romania / Mihai Constantineanu

WWF Romania created and launched the first tool which, by video monitoring the wood transports that leave the forest, can help authorities prioritize their controls efficiently and, thus, reduce illegal logging significantly. The country could then address the infringement issued by the European Commission, which accuses its lack of efficient controls on the operators that transport wood from the forest until the first deposit or household.

The first data reveal that the wood is stolen especially at sunset, when authorities no longer work, and during unreligious, legal holidays. To be statistically relevant at a national level, we hope the authorities will start a monitoring protocol using the methodology developed by WWF.

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The monitoring process took place in three different locations, for 21 continuous days, between November and December 2020. We see clearly that illegal logging activities continue and that they can be prevented only by controls focused on wood's first placement on the market – that is on its way between the forest and where it is first downloaded.

The lack of efficient wood controls at the first placement on the market encourages the people willing to break the law. We see undisturbed wood transports without permits, multiple

transports and truck overloading with more than 10 cubic meters, which is considered criminal offence.

The main illegal workflow is currently based on overloading trucks, thus bringing untaxed wood in the market. The recently introduced electronic wood tracking system SUMAL 2.0 cannot solve this problem.

*“Without an instrument to impartially show **WHERE? WHEN? and HOW?** controls must be oriented, the illegal logging controversy will go on endlessly. We will continue to witness the evolution of this phenomenon, but we won’t be able to prevent it. Without addressing its causes (**WHY?**) in an integrated manner, illegal logging will remain a reality with serious, negative effects on responsible forest management and sustainable development of the local communities.” – Serban Niculescu, forest expert at WWF Romania.*

The current reactive security and control system must be turned into a preventive one. That is why **several legal changes are necessary**:

- Around 80% of Romania’s wood is currently sold “on foot,” which generates systemic conflicts of interest. The country needs to change the legislation regarding the sale of its state-owned wood and to capitalize on the wood’s superior manufacturing on the local market.
- In most of the cases, even if illegal transports (no matter the illegal method used) were discovered, operators would risk only a contravention fine whose value is usually smaller than the prejudice itself. Romania needs to impose efficient, proportional and dissuasive penalties.
- The staff working at controlling institutions must relate to a series of performance indicators regarding unexpected, thematic controls focused on the wood’s first placement on the market.
- There is a black firewood market generated mainly by its high price, which includes VAT. For example, 1 cubic meter of firewood (if we include the VAT) counts, in many cases, for 25% of the medium income of a person living in the rural area. To discourage this black market, Romania needs to change its Fiscal Code and to lower the VAT for firewood and rural constructions.

[Download WWF Romania’s View on Fighting Illegal Logging](#)

Context:

- The current wood selling system, based on estimating the volume of the standing trees without checking on the resulting wood when it is first introduced on the market, is one of the main causes of illegal logging in Romania.
- Less than 1% of the wood transports are checked when leaving the forest. In most of the cases, controls limit to checking on the permits and don’t focus on checking on the volumes and the types of trees declared in papers.
- The few controls which check on the wood transports that leave the forest are random or even discretionary. In this context, important quantities of wood are being illegally placed on the market.

- The European Commission's decision to launch an infringement procedure against Romania emphasizes real deficiencies of the country's illegal logging combat system:
 - The authorities don't make sufficient and efficient controls when the wood is firstly introduced on the market.
 - Controls are not representative, neither geographically nor regarding the prioritization criteria used.
 - Penalties should be efficient, proportional and dissuasive.

Considering the dynamics of the illegal logging phenomenon, the methodology developed by WWF must be continuously tested and developed. In order to become statistically relevant at a national level, we hope the authorities will start a monitoring protocol that will actively involve representatives of both the academic environment, technical experts and the civil society, and of the controlling state institutions.