Russia

Background

Russia hosts a significant share of the planet’s forest resources (ca 80.5 billion cubic meters equaling to 21% of the world timber stock). Russian forests are one of the four remaining mega-areas of intact forests in the world.

The current level of illegal logging is estimated at the level of 15%, however in some areas this percentage can reach up to 80% being one of the world’s highest ratios. There is a strong preference especially among illegal loggers to cut trees of high value or endangered species (Korean Pine, Far Eastern Linden, other deciduous trees). At the same time Russia hosts the greatest area of certified forest stands (Forest Stewardship Council -FSC) in the world.

The recent reform of the forest legislation and the introduction of the new Forest Code in 2007 led to a significant restructuring of forest management and governance systems. This has resulted in a drastic decrease of illegal logging controls, forest law enforcement, safeguard of honest competition of small and large businesses, and forest resource use by local citizens. Forest management responsibilities have been transferred from the Federal authorities to regional administrations which caused unbalances in forest protection and sustainability across the different regions of Russia. The long distances among regions and recent economic difficulties have complicated timber trade control. Recent catastrophic forest fires revealed an overall disintegration of the forest management system and an urgent need for the optimization of forest governance in the country.

The Program

The major priority areas for the ENPI FLEG Program in Russia are the following:

- Increasing efficiency of the forest legislation system;
- Increasing transparency in forest logging, processing and trade chains;
- Improving coordination among forest governance governmental agencies;
- Supporting rural livelihoods in forests and securing their rights for access to forest timber and non-timber products;
- Safeguarding access of citizens and stakeholders to information on forest management and timber trade.

Priority is given to those activities which can provide immediate results to bring relief to current tensions in the forestry sphere and provide practical tools for forest law enforcement and governance. Recent consultations with stakeholders revealed an extreme interest in rapid response and resolution of the existing legal and organizational contradictions in the Russian forest sector. The ENPI FLEG team has already achieved significant results by cooperating with all stakeholders and at all administrative levels.
A series of amendments to Russian Federal forest legislation have been submitted to the Federal authorities. The ENPI FLEG Program team initiated and coordinated the submission to the State Duma (the Russian Parliament) of a series of amendments which are aimed at improving forest law enforcement and governance and solving issues of illegal logging, enhancing effective timber origin tracking, increasing transparency in the forest sector, more effectively controlling sustainable forest use, improving fire prevention and access of local citizens to forest resources. These amendments are under consideration.

One such amendment is refining training modules (including distance learning modules) on forest law enforcement as part of continuous education programs for managers and specialists from forest management authorities. The ENPI FLEG team has drafted the training modules whose aim is to increase capacities of the forestry sector specialists and decision-makers to more effectively manage forest resources. The training modules were tested during two back-to-back 10-day courses with participation of forest businesses and high school representatives (40 specialists from 18 Russian regions). This testing demonstrated the high value of the product for representatives of administrations of all levels (federal, regional and local), forestry management enterprises, forest sector businesses and NGO representatives. The modules are designed to provide knowledge in such areas as forest legislation, law enforcement and governance, forest certification, and transparency in the forest sector.

In fall 2010 an environmental trail was started in Polistovsky Nature Reserve (Pskovskaya oblast) to demonstrate the potential of utilizing non-timber forest resources as an important component of local economic development. The work was done in close cooperation with the local administration, local forestry department, and Reserve staff with support from the ENPI FLEG experts. The local administration plans to use this as an example of development of ecotourism. Information about this positive experience was broadly disseminated across Russia through a press tour organized by ENPI FLEG which resulted in over 15 publications.