Officials from the FFA and environmentalists discussed a draft federal law on governmental control over round-wood trade. The draft law is called to prevent illegal logging, ensure transparency and legality of trade in wood and wood products.

In particular, the draft law requires that all individual and organisational suppliers of round-wood to the domestic market and other countries should submit declarations and register their transactions, including their identifying data and supplied product volumes, in Russia’s Single Automated Information System through the Internet.

The meeting was attended by representatives from regional forest authorities, including the Arkhangelsk Oblast’s forest administration.

Upon discussion of the draft law, it was concluded that the law would really help to reduce illegal logging and trade in illegal timber, though it should be refined.

According to WWF-Russia, the proposed draft law is a needed step towards further development of the Russian legislation and its conformity with the EU’s Regulation 995/2010 and the US’s Lacey Act.

However, the draft law addresses this issue only partially. A key requirement of the US and EU legislation is legality of timber, i.e. its compliance with the Russian legislation (which means wood harvesting only within the identified cutting areas; proper payments to cover lease charges and other due taxes and fees; biodiversity conservation; respect of third party rights, including the rights of local and indigenous people; etc.). Therefore, to ensure access for Russian timber industries to the Western market, Russia should not only adopt appropriate laws, but also enforce them.

“The Law can be instrumental for combating illegal logging provided respective by-laws are in place to regulate enforcement of this Law”, said Andrey Shchegolev, Head, Arkhangelsk Office, WWF-Russia. He also deems it essential for consultations on this Law to ensure involvement of timber industries, with an emphasis on small and medium businesses. There is a concern about the risk of adverse impact of this Law on small forest business and fuel wood supply for rural communities. Nikolay Shmatko, Forest Policy Project Coordinator, WWF-Russia, also pointed to the need to test provisions of the draft law in selected Russian regions or at selected enterprises to assess and avoid potential adverse impact. In addition, in his opinion, the Law would work only if civil society organisations and individuals have free access to the database of round-wood related transactions and opportunity to check due diligence of its compilation.

The draft law has accommodated, among other things, the lessons learnt by the Arkhangelsk Oblast from its efforts to combat illegal timber trade under the FLEG and interregional cooperation program. FLEG (Forest Law Enforcement and Governance) is a program aimed at suppressing illegal forest use and implemented with contributions from the World Bank in Russian pilot regions, including Pomorye. In line with this program, a Regional Law was drafted and adopted, and has been effective since 2012 for an indefinite period. While, earlier, timber had been often transported without required documents, now, timber truck drivers always have documents specifying the origin of wood and containing data on the enterprise of its destination.
One of the most substantial results from the implementation of the rules of this Regional Law is reduction of illegal logging cases by half. Moreover, numerous routine and unscheduled inspections of private sawmills are undertaken as part of enforcing this Regional Law. In 2008, there had been over 1,000 sawmills in the Arkhangelsk Oblast, with many of them operating illegally. As of today, they are fewer, but what is important is that nearly all of them operate on a legal basis.

However, there are unresolved problems, including removal and storage of illegally cut wood: during the time of waiting for investigation of such criminal cases, the wood loses its commercial value which results into many-fold reduction in the cost.

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