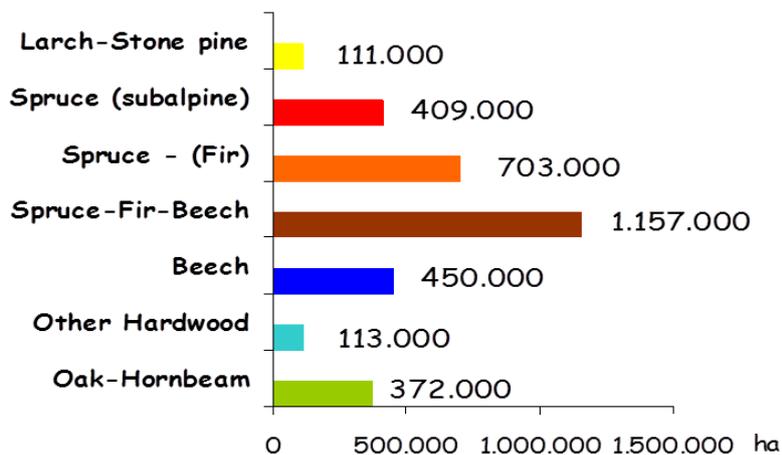


## Facts and figures on forests and forestry in Austria

Markus Neumann, Federal Forest Research Centre, Vienna  
Meeting at Teheran, Iran 2016

The forest covers nearly 4 Million hectare or 47% of Austria. Over the last decades this area increased by 2000 ha per year on an average. Within Austria the forest is not evenly distributed, slopes in highlands and in alpine areas are more densely covered, while the areas in the East, more favourable for agriculture, are often poor in forests. Within forest area there is a large range of ecological parameters: elevation ranging from 200 to 2100 m a.s.l. causes large differences in temperature as well as in the length of vegetation period from 120 up to 250 days per year. Also the variation in precipitation is quite remarkable: On the driest sites less than 500 mm, while some westerly exposed areas may receive more than 2800 mm per year. This range in combination with soils on acidic bedrock in the Central Alps, on limestone or on alluvials provides a great variety of growing conditions.



Not less than 60 tree species occur in Austria, the most common twelve species amount to 95% of standing volume. While the lowlands forests are dominated by broadleaved species, in the mountainous regions the share of conifers increases lastly resulting in pure coniferous stands at timberline. The upper limit of closed forests lies

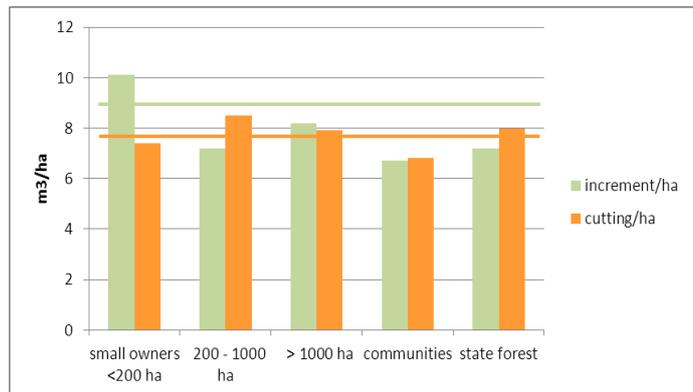
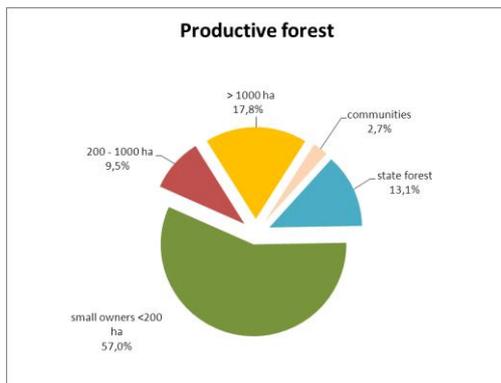
at 1900 m above sea level in the Central Alps and some 200 m lower in the limestones Alps, in former times regionally lowered for grazing of livestock, mainly cattle.

The Austrian Forest Act (adopted in 1975 and amended several times) is scoping to four forest functions which have to be guaranteed by forest management in a sustainable way: utilisation, protection, human welfare and recreation. About 8 % of the forest have general protective character but are managed for timber production, while on 12% or 470.000 ha no commercial motivated harvesting is carried out but even there management interventions are needed to enable regeneration and to provide continuous protection.

The Austrian forest is mainly private owned, there are more than 200.000 forest owners, and nearly 50% of forest area belongs to owners with less than 200 ha of property. Only 16% of the forest area is owned by the state. Regardless the size of forests the way of forest management is decided by the owner independently, only restricted by the regulations of forest law but not planned or guided by public administration. Furthermore the great proportion of private interest pronounces the economical function of forests. Since 1961 the Austrian National Forest Inventory provides information on forest area, growing stock and increment but also representative figures on species distribution and major forest damages. Regionally the age structure and regeneration is not satisfying, especially in high altitude protection forests. In some parts the constraints to use forest biomass to feed

livestock especially during winter have influenced the ecosystem negatively in the past; also today grazing within forests by game and/or livestock is causing more or less severe problems on about 10% of the forest area.

The increment amounts to 8 m<sup>3</sup>/ha or in total about 27 Mio m<sup>3</sup>/year while the annual harvest is not more than 20 Mio m<sup>3</sup> per year at average but rose to 25 Mio m<sup>3</sup> because some damage events within the last period. According to ownership small private owners harvest much less than the increment is. Only state forest harvested more within the last period until 2009 but nowadays they are reducing the amount again. To keep sustainability it is very essential to distribute the harvest all over the area and not to concentrate it on the easier reachable or better growing sites. One should be aware that timber harvest in mountain regions is more costly and need more expertise than in flat lowlands.



Forestry and timber processing as well as pulp and paper industry is an important branch in the national economy of Austria:

- About 300.000 are employed especially in remote rural areas,
- More than 172.000 large and small companies are earning about 12 billion Euros
- About 2% of total economic performance of Austria is realized by forestry and timber industry
- 70% of production is exported, mainly to neighbouring countries (Italy, Germany and Slovenia) but also to Asia
- the value chain of forestry-timber and paper industry contributes more than 3,4 billion Euro to foreign trade balance of Austria.

