



### *Hunting rights, game management and sustainable forest management*

**In order to enable sustainable and economically viable forest management it is essential that forest owners have the full ownership right of their property, including the right to hunt and manage game and wildlife.**

**Thus, a close connection between the management of the land itself and of all the natural resources linked to this land can be established.**

In order to keep the ecological balance between game species and forests intact, a sustainable hunting management is strictly necessary. An excessive deer population for instance, will hinder the forest owners to manage their forest sustainably for a continuous and multipurpose use. Furthermore a high level of deer hinders the forest's natural regeneration, which is the most economic way for reproducing ecologically valuable, site-adapted forests. As deer to a great extent feeds on young trees, an oversized deer population in the forest make any kind of afforestation virtually impossible. Consequently, expensive planting and tree-protecting activities must take place. In addition some deer species feed on tree bark in wintertime, thus permanently devaluating the quality of the timber. Also, if there is a lot of game, it will lead to a lack of fodder, resulting in weak animal individuals, which are very easily exposed to pests.

To safeguard a sustainable forest resource it is therefore of crucial importance that the forest owners are allowed to take an active part in the management and regulation of wildlife. In the same manner, the private forest owner should also be allowed to adjust the forest practice to secure biodiversity and to promote wildlife as a resource.

Obviously all hunting and game management must be carried out in a sustainable way. That includes:

1. consideration of the dynamics of game populations
2. consideration of the framework of the ecosystem and
3. humane and efficient approaches to the killing of the animals.

All species require a certain sized area to sustain their livelihoods – that is true both for humankind and for animal species. Normally, this does not entail a problem for any of the so called “small game” species, such as e.g. hares or foxes - which are characterized by high population numbers and quick reproduction rates. On the other hand there are



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some species of “big game” (various species of deer, e.g. roe, red deer and fallow deer; and large carnivores) which require larger habitats to sustain their living. For those species control of the annual cull is required. But a strict regulation on the hunting of big game and carnivores does not contradict the right of the forest owner to hunt and manage the game on his own grounds.

In fact, property right is the only way to secure a long term sustainable management of a natural resource. This includes game population management as the forest owners are then enabled to follow the law and obliged to do what is best for their forests and game populations. As an incentive to practice sustainable forestry and game management hunting rights must be given to forest owners. CEPF recommends that wildlife management should be based on the principles laid down in the European Charter on Hunting and Biodiversity (Council of Europe T-PVS (2007)<sup>7</sup> revised). This document states principles of wildlife as a resource, carrying capacity, forest owner’s rights and hunting as an element for tourism and rural development.

CEPF also propose to significantly reduce the size of owned land that is required to maintain a private hunting ground in countries where this is a problem. Furthermore, owners of small-sized private forest should be encouraged to unite in hunting associations in order to successfully manage hunting on their grounds.

To summarise CEPF would like to safeguard the principles of sustainable forest management by ensuring the following principles when it comes to game management:

- The hunting right should be seen as a part of the individual property right.
- The management of game populations must be an integrated part of sustainable forest management activities.
- The hunting and wildlife acts must not restrict the forest owner’s possibility to control the population of game on his property.
- All types of management of game must be carried out in sustainable way that takes into account the dynamics of the population, the ecosystem which sustain the population and also ensuring that the cull is carried out humanely and efficiently.

