Transforming public forests, empowering people

The impact of FSC® certification in Adria-Balkans:
two decades of sustainable forestry improved international trade, community relations, job security, and worker safety

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CHALLENGE

In the early 2000s, companies who own and manage the public forests in the Adria-Balkans faced challenges in accessing international markets, negative public perceptions, and worker well-being.

In Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, and Slovenia, forest companies were criticized by the public for cutting down trees and in some areas, workers lacked job security and proper safety equipment while performing one of the world's most dangerous jobs.

> *"The in law in Slovenia already requires close-to-nature forestry. With FSC certification, our customers can sell wood from our forests to more demanding international markets where FSC certification is a requirement."*
>
> – Urška Slomšek Orač. SIDG Slovenia

SOLUTIONS

FSC Forest Management Certification redefines public forestry

In 2002, Croatia got all its state forests certified with FSC and within five years, 100% of the state forests across these four countries obtained FSC certification. The companies chose FSC Forest Management Certification for its market appeal, assurance that the forests meet international standards, and its democratic influence on forestry.

In conjunction with local forestry laws, the FSC requirements helped companies better protect biodiversity and High Conservation Value areas and significantly improve working conditions, especially in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

FSC certification footprint in the Balkans

> *"Because of FSC certification, our image changed from the ones who exploit forests to the ones who protect them."*
>
> – Marija Dilber, Hercegbosanske šume, Bosnia and Herzegovina

BENEFITS

Forest companies, workers, and surrounding communities continue to benefit after 20+ of FSC certification

- 5m+ ha of certified forest
- 22,000 secure jobs
- 100,000 people supported by steady salaries
- Reliable international trade
- Protected workforce and fewer accidents
- Better relations with residents and communities

Access to international markets

Across the region, the FSC certificate – often a client requirement – opens international markets, a core benefit, given that most of these countries are outside the EU yet actively trade with it.

Improved company image

FSC certification reassures citizens and local communities that forests are properly managed. Forest companies find the statements and materials FSC provides to support their public communications useful.

Reliable employment and income

Across the region, workers enjoy reliable employment, but in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the shift from temporary contracts to the situation today, where almost all employees have permanent contracts, has been pronounced.

Receiving a permanent contract through FSC makes working in an FSC-certified forest more attractive than a non-certified forest, which is crucial in a time when forest workers are becoming hard to find.

In Serbia, FSC helped establish two full-time positions as forest beekeepers, meaning local experts receive a reliable income while helping nature thrive.

Safer workers, fewer lethal accidents

FSC's requirements for workers – which is based on the International Labour Organization's requirements – mean that today, all forest workers wear proper safety equipment, significantly reducing the number of serious and even lethal accidents in the forest.

CONCLUSION

FSC-committed for the long term

The public forests of the Adria-Balkans intend to continue their FSC certification indefinitely. While they initially sought certification to meet client demands, the benefits to the business, the loggers, the employees and their families, and wider community transformed a necessity into a non-negotiable.

"To our knowledge, when operations were inspected 20 years ago, you would see workers wearing normal boots, but because of FSC, workers now wear steel-capped boots, which is important since logging is one of the world's most dangerous jobs."

– Kenan Zahirović, JP ŠPD Zeničko-Dobojskog Kantona, Bosnia and Herzegovina.