FOREST RESTORATION POLICY IN CROATIA

POLICY COHERENCE ACROSS FOREST-RELATED POLICY AREAS AND POLITICAL LEVELS

SUPERB
Upscaling Forest Restoration

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Forest policy in Europe operates within a complex, multi-sectoral and multi-level policy framework. To effectively implement and scale up forest restoration efforts—such as those outlined in the EU Nature Restoration Law (EU-NRL)—achieving a certain level of coherence across forest-related policy areas (e.g., nature conservation, climate, agriculture, and rural development) and political levels (EU and national/subnational) is essential.

As part of the EU Horizon 2020 SUPERB project, Task 5.1 of Work Package 5 offers valuable insights into the issue of forest restoration policy coherence. Specifically, it examines coherence at the national level across forest-related policy areas (horizontal coherence) and across national and EU levels (vertical coherence). The analysis of horizontal coherence is based on a survey of national forest policy experts in the relevant countries, while the vertical coherence analysis involves a detailed review of EU forest restoration policies and regulations, as well as national forest regulatory frameworks.

This report provides a brief overview of the key findings for **Croatia**.

HORIZONTAL FOREST RESTORATION POLICY COHERENCE IN CROATIA

Forests and other forest land cover nearly a third (32%) of the total land area of the Republic of Croatia, and more than 50% thereof are managed as high forests. Croatian forests consist of a large variety of broadleaved species, including European beech (37%), Common oak (12%), Sessile oak (9%), and common hornbeam (8%), and a vast majority is owned by the state, which is almost entirely managed by the state forest management company – Croatian Forests Ltd. (Hrvatske šume Ltd).

The key document of forest management in Croatia is the general forest management plan, operating within a ten-year validity. Management plans, inter alia, stipulate requirements for (i) nature protection and restoration, including the preservation of forest clearing and edges in areas of endangered habitat types, (ii) the preservation of a constant number of mature habitat trees on felled sites, and (iii) the exclusive use of allochthonous species for re- and afforestation. The foundation of forest management is prescribed in the Ordinance on forest management, which relates to what is typically considered under the concept "close-to-nature" forestry. The main provisions of nature protection set by the Law on forests refer to (i) the preservation of biodiversity within sustainable forest management, (ii) the ensuring of natural regeneration and dead wood availability, and (iii) the performance of management activities with adherence to the protection of water and other ecosystem elements (Lovrić et al., 2013).

The Law on Nature Protection (NN70/05) constitutes the foundation of nature protection in natural resource management in Croatia. It requires all management plans for natural resources to provide appropriate measures and conditions of nature protection. Such measures include the protection of biological diversity and the cartographical representation of habitat types. It entitles the Minister of environment and nature protection to limit or prohibit the usage of natural resources that directly negatively influence the conservation status of a habitat or a species. Moreover, it requires forest owners or owners of forest management rights to procure conditions of nature protection from the Ministry of Environment and Nature Protection before the development of natural and forest resource

management plans, thereby integrating nature protection and restoration objectives into resource management objectives.

With its relatively young EU membership status, the Croatian government started to translate EU legislation (e.g., on nature protection) into national legislation. For example, in the year of accession, the Croatian government, represented by the Institute for Nature Protection (SINP), prepared the Ordinance on Natura 2000, according to which 37% of Croatia is encompassed in the network (Lovrić et al., 2018).

Table 1: Key forest restoration policies and legislation in Croatia.

Name	Year of adoption	Entry into force	URL
NATIONAL FORESTRY ACCOUNTING PLAN FOR THE REPUBLIC OF CROATIA		2018	https://mingor.gov.hr/UserDocsImages/KLIMA/SZKAIZOS/NFAP_Croatia.pdf
Law on Nature Protection (NN70/05)	2013		https://www.hah.hr/pdf/Nature_Protection_Act.pdf
Ordinance on the Habitat Types, Habitat Map, Endangered and Rare Habitat Types and on Measures for Conservation of Habitat Types (NN 07/06)	2014		https://faolex.fao.org/docs/pdf/cro143082.pdf
PRIORITISED ACTION FRAMEWORK (PAF) FOR NATURA 2000 in the Republic of Croatia pursuant to Article 8 of Council Directive 92/43/EEC on the conservation of natural		2022	https://mingor.gov.hr/UserDocsImages//UPRAVA%20ZA%20ZA%C5%A0TITU%20PRIRODE/PAF//Prioritised%20Action%20Frameworks.pdf

VERTICAL FOREST RESTORATION POLICY COHERENCE

The Croatian Forestry Law contains several provisions that promote forest set-asides, both explicitly and implicitly. Article 2 explicitly declares that forests and forest lands are of special interest to Croatia and enjoy special protection. Article 5 further expands on this by including

forests in protected areas, emphasizing the maintenance of balanced ecosystems. Article 9 aligns with international frameworks through the pan-European criteria for sustainable forest management, implicitly supporting the conservation of biodiversity within forest ecosystems. Article 22 explicitly classifies certain forests as protected, either prohibiting or limiting economic activities. Lastly, Article 28 outlines management plans for protected areas such as strict reserves and national parks.

The provisions in the Croatian Forestry Law that relate to deadwood management can be found implicitly in several articles. Article 38 prohibits the collection and removal of forest litter, moss, and other forest products, indirectly supporting the retention of deadwood as part of forest litter and organic matter, which could help maintain non-living woody biomass in the ecosystem. Article 41 requires forest owners to monitor and manage the health of forests, which could involve decisions about whether to retain or remove deadwood to prevent pests or diseases, although this is not explicitly mentioned. Additionally, Article 19 mandates the rehabilitation of degraded areas but focuses more on reforestation rather than on retaining deadwood. Article 39, however, permits deforestation for habitat preservation in degraded stands of garrigue and shrubland, which could implicitly include the management of deadwood or non-living woody biomass as part of efforts to preserve or restore these habitats.

The provisions in the Croatian Forestry Law that relate to uneven-aged and mixed-species forest management are found both explicitly and implicitly. Article 10 explicitly supports the management of forests by maintaining biodiversity, promoting native species, and adapting forest management to habitat characteristics, all of which are aligned with mixed-species management. The article also emphasizes the restoration of degraded stands using suitable species, particularly native ones, which reflects principles of close(r)-to-nature forest management. Article 3 implicitly supports this approach by defining sustainable forest management as maintaining biodiversity, regeneration capacity, and productivity over time, ensuring long-term forest vitality through practices that could include mixed-species and uneven-aged management. Article 40 indirectly suggest consideration of uneven-aged forest management (as it limits disruptive activities in areas where regeneration occurs), but it does not specifically address the active management of native species or age-varied structures.

The provisions in Article 10 of the Croatian Forestry Law implicitly relate to forest bird management through their broad focus on biodiversity conservation and the protection of ecosystems. The obligation for forest owners to "care for all species within the ecosystem" can be interpreted as including forest birds, especially those that rely on forest habitats for breeding and survival. Additionally, the requirement to plan forest infrastructure in a way that minimizes harm to ecologically valuable parts of the ecosystem, such as migratory corridors for rare, sensitive, or endangered species, can indirectly support the protection of forest birds, particularly migratory and endangered species.

KEY FINDINGS

Croatian forest legislation and policies are increasingly aligned with EU policies and national regulatory frameworks address a range of critical forest restoration indicators and practices.

RECOMMENDATIONS

For the successful implementation and scaling of forest restoration, it is essential to leverage synergies across forest-related policy areas while addressing key trade-offs. This can be achieved by better aligning economic interests with nature conservation goals and strengthening law enforcement.