

The Office of the Auditor General's investigation of sustainable management of Norwegian forest resources

Summary

Background to and purpose of the audit

The purpose of the audit has been to assess to what extent the Ministry of Agriculture and Food's control and instruments ensure sustainable management and facilitate increased logging of our forest resources. The audit has mainly been based on the decade 2001–2011.

The forestry sector has historically been of great economic importance in Norway. Forestry, timber industry and wood processing are important rural industries. Forestry activities have also had a major impact on our success in achieving national environmental objectives concerning e.g. biological diversity, climate and outdoor life. Sustainable development is necessary if we are to utilise our forestry resources in the best interests of our society and is also important if we are to sell our timber products on the international market.

The forestry policy objectives for sustainable management and increased logging have been roughly the same for the decade 2001–2011, but the significance of forests for the climate has become more important in recent years.

Main findings and recommendations

The Forestry Act's requirement for satisfactory regeneration after logging is not being fully complied

The OAG recommends that the Ministry of Agriculture and Food, in its work of developing the management of forest resources, considers continuing and strengthening the implemented measures that will ensure a better control with follow-up of the regeneration duty.

There is inadequate control and follow-up of statutory environmental requirements

The OAG recommends that the Ministry of Agriculture and Food strengthens its control and follow-up of the environmental requirements in laws and regulations in order to ensure better compliance with the requirements stipulated in the Sustainability Regulations.

Forest owners need more information and guidance

The OAG recommends that the Ministry of Agriculture and Food, in its work of developing the management of forest resources:

- considers providing forest owners with more information on existing instruments and on their environmental responsibility, and giving them better access to environmental information
- conducts a more systematic compilation of information on how key environmental considerations are safeguarded in forestry

Trends in logging levels do not comply with the Storting's logging objectives

The OAG recommends that the Ministry of Agriculture and Food:

- improves access to forest resources through infrastructure measures in order to encourage increased logging and regeneration
- maps whether primary forestry, stimulation programmes, preparation of action programmes or a system to assess the overall effect of forest funds and subsidies will contribute to increased achievement of the objectives
- in cooperation with the Ministry of the Environment looks at opportunities for a better coordination of how key instruments in forestry policy are practised.