

Scientific Summary No 129 related to IUFRO News 4, 2015



Coppice Forests: Past, Present and Future

By Alex Mosseler, Coordinator of IUFRO Research Group 8.02.00 Forest Biodiversity
(<http://www.iufro.org/science/divisions/division-8/80000/80200/>)

From 9-11 April 2015, the “International Conference on Coppice Forests: Past Present and Future” took place at Mendel University in Brno, Czech Republic. The purpose of the meeting was to assess aspects of coppice forest management systems including silviculture and regeneration, ecology and biodiversity, ecophysiology and tree ecology, socio-economics, production, history and dendrochronology.

The meeting was organized as a joint initiative of the projects Coppice (<http://www.coppice.eu>) and LONGWOOD (www.longwood.cz) and co-sponsored by IUFRO 8.02.00. It was attended by 130 participants from 23 countries including Australia, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Canada, Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Hungary, Iran, Italy, Japan, Latvia, Romania, Russia, Serbia, Slovakia, Spain, South Africa, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, and the United Kingdom.

One of the central aims of this meeting was to look at the possibility of a renaissance in coppicing as a forest management system in light of renewed interest in local biomass production for bio-energy, especially in rural communities, and for biodiversity conservation. Much of the discussion centered on coppicing in the more conventional, longer-lived tree species and forest communities such as oaks, beech, Castanea, Tilia, and Carpinus. However, there were also presentations on shorter-lived, short-rotation coppice species such as willows, birches, alder and Eucalyptus.

Several presentations made it clear that coppicing may present a useful alternative forest management system especially in less fertile, drought-stressed environments, and in places where it is important to protect sites, wildlife habitat, and biodiversity by maintaining continuous forest cover.

Unfortunately, the forestry profession itself may have created a hostile regulatory and policy environment for coppicing as a management system because of perceptions within the professional community that coppicing produces lower quality timber products.



Field visit, photo provided by Tomas Vrska, Mendel University

However, rural communities have long depended on coppicing systems to produce fuelwood to supply their energy needs, as well as nutritional needs for both domestic and wild animals used for human consumption. After many centuries of coppice management, such forest ecosystems may have become adapted to coppicing, and conservation of their biodiversity and ecological functions may best be served by continuing this form of management.

The meeting was followed by four excellent field excursions demonstrating various aspects of coppice management. Special recognition goes to Tomas Vrska, Matjaz Cater, Radim Hedl, Jana Mullerova, and Peter Szabo for their efforts in organizing a very interesting and informative meeting on a subject that may deserve more recognition in future forest management regimes and forest policy development.

Meeting website:
http://coppice.eu/conference-2_en.html