

## Nature-based Tourism - From Timber Production to New Products

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Traditionally the main function of forests world wide has been wood production. Over the last decades, however, there have been changes in many countries, especially in Japan and Europe, where management for nature and ecological functions of forests as well as the social functions of forests, like recreation and tourism have become more important.

With the decline in the importance of wood production and major structural changes in the agricultural economy, nature-based tourism is often looked upon as a means for rural development. Nature and ecotourism offers new opportunities for a sustainable regional development under consideration of nature conservation or extensive forms of land use. It is therefore important to assess the economic and social impacts of recreation and tourism developments on rural communities. In many regions of developing countries, but also in peripheral areas in developed countries, for example, the possible income from nature based tourism is often higher than the direct income from forestry or agricultural land use.

However, nature based tourism strongly depends on the quality of the environment. There are severe pressures on many forest areas and they are in danger of being ecologically and physically degraded. The exploitation of forests for timber production may in some cases also have negative effects on the qualities of the landscapes in which recreation takes place. In such cases, the forests may lose their possible relevance for tourism. Ecotourism could be one strong argument to protect these endangered forests and their biodiversity. Consequently, this means that adjustments to present forest management practices that aim primarily at timber production are needed. For example, the provision of commercial services such as the establishment of recreational routes and other facilities or guidance to nature areas is not a part of regular forest management. In addition, close co-operation with private landowners is needed when new tourism services are developed.

While there has been considerable research into forest recreation over the years, there is a lack concerning its role in tourism. What is needed,



*Photo by Ulrike Pröbstl:  
Tourists in the Black Forest (Centre/North)  
Nature Park in Germany*

therefore, is a focus on forest related nature tourism, bringing together the best minds and the best research approaches, reflecting not only the general aspects of these functions of forests, but also the regional and local differences in different continents. The demands for research and planning in the field of forest-related tourism offers and recreation have been increasing in volume and have become more diverse. Due to its increased importance and complexity, as well as the potential conflicts with other functions, this additional function of forests has to be dealt with much more explicitly than in the past. This increased attention and awareness is required at different levels, from policy-making, spatial planning, and designing to the management of a specific area.

The author therefore proposes the establishment of an IUFRO Task Force with the help of which the current relevance of ecotourism, as well as its future potential and requirements shall be evaluated and discussed.

A [draft proposal](#) was published in the IUFRO Research Group [6.01.00](#) Newsletter 2006: