

MANAGEMENT TODAY In the past, forests were perceived by many as a never-ending supply of wood, considering them in economic terms, huge factories generating large profits with comparatively low operating costs. Paying attention only to the economic side of the enterprise and neglecting biological ones produced, in many cases, disastrous and far-reaching effects because ruthless exploitation of forests resulted in deforestation, drought or forest degeneration reflected in ecosystem change and the dying out of numerous species of plants or animals which lost their habitat. Nowadays, forests are no longer seen as wood factories only, but complex eco-systems performing several different tasks such as preventing soil erosion and land-slides, reducing air pollution, protecting wildlife habitats, promoting biodiversity or recreation. Forests have also positive effects on local climate and water cycle. They prevent floods, protect water resources, act as windbreakers, reduce temperature extremes. They are also a source of non-timber products, such as venison, fruit, medicinal plants or mushrooms. Although the approach to forest management has changed significantly, timber production still remains its most important component simply because it is the most profitable. However, it is worth remembering that production of timber takes a lot of time (at least 30–40 years) and therefore it ought to be carefully planned. Timber production consists of three consecutive, transitional and dynamic stages: regeneration, stand tending and harvesting. Regeneration can be artificial or natural. The latter is seldom practised in forest management because it is slow, there is no control over tree species composition and it depends heavily on other factors such as seed production and distribution. Stand tending concentrates on creating favourable conditions for tree growth ensuring at the same time a high quality of timber. Harvesting ends the production cycle and means cutting down trees. Once trees are felled the process begins again. However, it is worth remembering that nowadays wood production integrates economic aspects of forest management with social, ecological and recreational ones. It should be carried out in such a way that the number of trees harvested should be established at a level that enables the forest to regenerate and does not disturb the delicate balance of the whole ecosystem. The number of trees which are cut down in a particular forest is not the same every year because it is modified by its age, fire, outbreaks of diseases, pest attacks and other factors that influence the number or health of trees. The concept of forest management enabling their indefinite harvesting without lowering their productivity, yield quality or disturbing the additional, above-mentioned roles forests perform, is called sustained yield forestry. In sustainable forests not only economic aspects but also biological and social ones are taken into account. By implementing such an approach to forest management, forests are preserved for future generations for further, constant use and enjoyment.