

FOREST RESOURCES

Covering almost a third of the territory, forest formations are a major component of rural areas and landscapes in Wallonia. The choices made by the forester in terms of preferred species and forestry systems determine the evolution of the physiognomy of forests and their ability to fulfil the various functions assigned to them.

Increase in forest area

In 2011¹, forests covered just over 556,000 ha, 85% of which were productive stands² (475,200 ha). Since the end of the 19th century, heaths and uncultivated land have been planted with woodland, resulting in an increase in productive forest area of about 80,000 ha, or 20%. At the same time, many coppices and coppices with standards were converted into conifer seedling forests or deciduous seedling forests. Between 1981³ and 2011, the total forest area increased by 18,500 ha (mainly for non-productive uses), while the area of productive stands decreased by 18,800 ha.

The changing productive forest

Between 1981 and 2011, the composition of productive forests⁴ changed. The area of deciduous stands increased by 23,200 ha and accounted for 57% of the productive area in 2011, while coniferous stands decreased by 42,000 ha (43% of the productive area in 2011). This decline in coniferous species was particularly marked for spruce, which lost 60,050 ha in part to other species (Douglas fir, etc.) but still covered 133,800 ha (28% of the productive area) in 2011. Among the causes of this decline are the exploitation of mature spruce stands in particular and, to a lesser extent, the elimination of stands as part of the European LIFE projects to improve biodiversity. According to the Decree of 15/07/2008 on the Forestry Code, the sustainable development of woods and forests entails keeping a balance between conifer stands and deciduous stands. In 1981, this balance was 50% deciduous and 50% coniferous.

Relatively varied stands

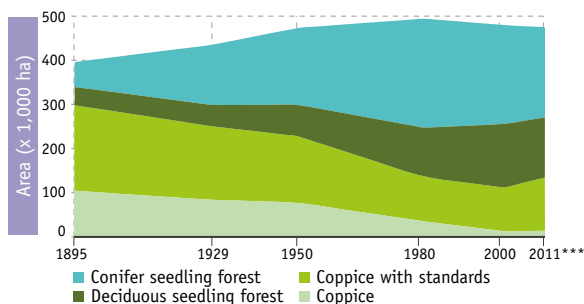
In 2011, there were 273,700 ha of public forest⁵ and 282,500 ha of private forest. In public forests, spruce, oak and noble deciduous stands⁶ represented the most extensive stands: they covered 58,000 ha (21% of public forest area), 48,400 ha (18%) and 36,500 ha (13%) respectively. In private forests, these were spruce (75,800 ha, or 27% of private forest area), other non-productive uses (46,900 ha, or 17%) and noble deciduous stands (33,600 ha, or 12%).

A changing structure

The structure of the Walloon forest seems to be undergoing significant changes. Between 1981 and 2011, the surface area of regular woodland cover increased (+25,000 ha) as did the area of forest with coppice (+20,750 ha) while that of coppice declined (-21,950 ha). With the increase and diversification of non-productive uses, the trend therefore seems to be towards irregularisation.

^[1] Data from the first 5 measuring campaigns (2008-2015) of the 2nd cycle of the Walloon Permanent Forest Resources Inventory (*Inventaire permanent des ressources forestières de Wallonie - IPRFW*) (2008-2028), for which 2011 is the central year. | ^[2] → Map 12 | ^[3] Central year of the 1st Walloon Temporary Forest Resources Inventory (1980-1983) | ^[4] Including areas that have been cleared (recently exploited) | ^[5] Forests owned by a public owner and therefore subject to the forest regime and managed by the Nature and Forests Department (DNF) | ^[6] Ash, sycamore maple, elm, cherrywood, etc.

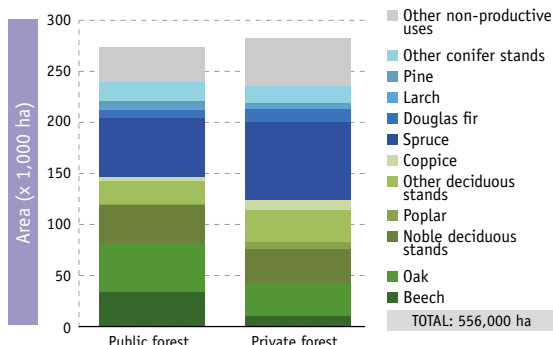
Fig. RES 4-1 Area* of the different forestry regimes** of the productive forests in Wallonia



* An increase of about 33,500 ha between 1895 and 1929 following the integration of the German-speaking cantons in 1918 | ** All types of owners | *** The year 2011 is the central year of the first 5 measurement campaigns (2008 - 2015) of the 2nd cycle of the Walloon Permanent Forest Resources Inventory (IPRFW) (2008 - 2028).

SOERW 2017 - Source: SPW - DGO3 - DNF (IPRFW)

Fig. RES 4-2 Forest area of the various stands* in Wallonia, by type of owner (2011**)



* Including cleared areas | ** The year 2011 is the central year of the first 5 measurement campaigns (2008 - 2015) of the 2nd cycle of the Walloon Permanent Forest Resources Inventory (IPRFW) (2008 - 2028).

SOERW 2017 - Source: SPW - DGO3 - DNF (IPRFW)