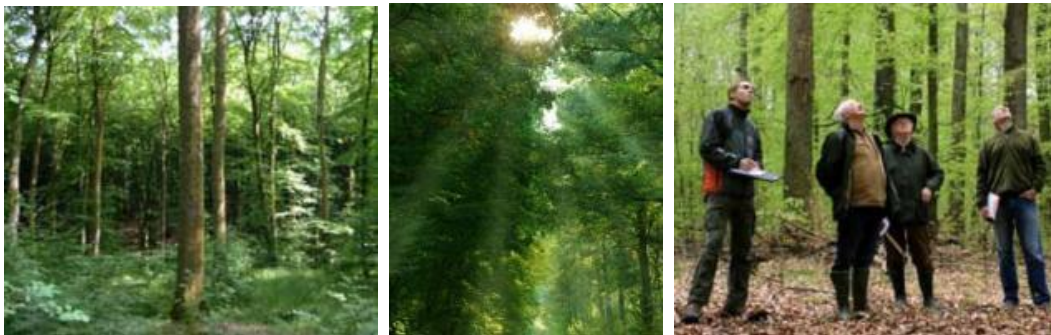


Forest characteristics and forest types - Belgium

The forest is an essential element of our land, fulfilling four major dynamic functions at the service of society:

- Economic: wood production site. The forest creates many jobs on the land and downstream of the sector (sawmills, paper, panels, etc.);
- Environmental: major centre of biodiversity. The forest protects the soil against erosion and has a positive impact on water and air cycles by producing oxygen and absorbing carbon;
- Social: place of welcome for those in search of pure air and open spaces. The forest has something to offer everyone: walkers, fishermen, hunters, etc.;
- Important for the landscape: the forest provides structure for our landscape.



Typical and exceptional fauna and flora species in forests - Belgium

Breakdown of species in the forests of Belgium

Broad-leaved 47 %

- Oaks 13 %
- Beech 7 %
- Poplar 5 %
- Other 22 %

Coniferous 41 %

- Common spruce 25 %
- Pine trees 9 %
- Larch 2 %
- Douglas 3 %
- Other 2 %



Forest species and silviculture

Given the diversity of soil types (sand, silt, clay) and climates (from 0 to 700 m above sea level, from 700 to 1 400 mm of rainfall), a great many species have adapted to our country.

The total volume of standing trees amounts to 140 million m³ or an average volume of 225 m³/ha. With an average annual increase of 6.5 m³/ha/year, and annual removal of 4 million m³, exploitation is slightly lower than biological production. Among the various uses to which wood produced in Belgium is put, it is worth noting the increase in the volume of wood used for heating, estimated at 700 000 m³.

Fauna

Of the large wildlife living in the forests of Belgium, only the roe deer is found throughout the land. Stag and wild boars are confined to the south of the country, where some areas are also home to mountain sheep and fallow deer. These populations have been increasing sharply over the past few years and now amount to:

- 54 000 roe deer (20 000 of which are in Flanders)
- 25 000 wild boars
- 11 000 stags, does and fawns.

The roe deer and stag populations have doubled in 30 years, while the wild boar population has tripled!

This abundance of wildlife can cause damage in the forest (by stags) and on farmland (by wild boars) in some places.

Forms of nature protection such as national parks and Natura 2000 sites - Belgium

Preserving nature

In Belgium, the European Natura 2000 network covers 221 000 ha in Wallonia and 136 000 ha in Flanders, accounting for a total of 384 500 ha or 13 % of the national territory.

Integral or managed nature reserves are scattered across the country. In the Walloon Region these reserves cover around 10 000 ha.

Forestry Certification

The SRFB, the Royal Forestry Society of Belgium, supports PEFC certification. This refers to the Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification and is the world's largest forest certification system, covering 221 600 000 ha at the start of 2010, or 70 % of the certified surface area in the world. In Wallonia, this covers 51 % of the forest surface, or 281 000 ha, and 260 Belgian companies have already had their chain of control certified by the PEFC. The FSC, the Forestry Stewardship Council, is also present, covering 15 000 ha in the Flemish Region.



Forest and CO₂

The Belgian forest stocks around 480 million tonnes equivalent of CO₂ (woody biomass, forest litter, dead wood and surface layer of soil). In addition, thanks to the removal of wood and its long-term use, the forest offsets the annual CO₂ emission of 800 000 cars! However, the most attractive feature of wood when it comes to CO₂ is in fact substitution. The wood used in construction, furnishing, etc. replaces other materials, such as PVC, concrete or aluminium, which consume far more energy in terms of production. The same applies for wood used as energy, which is replacing fossil fuels.

Organization of Forestry - Belgium

Surface area:

Today the forest in Belgium accounts for 22 % of the national territory, or 700 000 hectares divided among the three regions of the country:

- 78 % in Wallonia, in the south of the country
- 21 % in the Flemish Region, to the north
- 1 % in the Brussels-Capital Region in the centre.

The area covered by forest has increased by 25 % in 150 years!



Owners and managers

(1) Private forests

Most of the forests in Belgium belong to private individuals: 58 %. With an average surface area of 2.5 hectares per owner and over 100,000 owners, the private forest is characterised by

a relatively high level of parcelling and a wide range of owners. These private forests are run directly by their owners either through a manager or by a cooperative selected by the owners.

Forest management is governed by specific legislation:

- the Code forestier or Forestry Code in the Walloon Region
- the Bosdecreet or Forest Decree in the Flemish Region.

(2) Public forests

Forty-two per cent of the forest is divided among public owners. This includes the national forests belonging to the Regions (11 %), the communes (28 %) and the provinces, public social welfare centres and church councils (3 %). These forests are subject to the forestry system and run by the forestry authorities:

- the DNF or Department of Nature and Forests in the Walloon Region
- the ANB or Nature and Forest Agency in the Flemish Region
- and the IBGE or Brussels Institute for Environmental Management in the Brussels-Capital Region.

On the ground, the forestry authorities are divided into:

- regional directorates, (each covers approximately 30 000 ha) and
- forest ranges (approximately 9 000 ha) and forest districts (approximately 750 ha).

Taxation and aid for the forest

Silviculture is taxed by means of a flat-rate property tax, whether or not wood is sold. This tax is levied at two levels, on the basis of the cadastral revenue:

- the withholding tax on real estate,
- the tax on natural persons.

In Wallonia, since 2008 and further to the publication of a new forestry code, inheritance tax and taxes on donations are no longer payable on forest stands, but only on forestland value.

In Flanders, inheritance tax and taxes on donations on both land value and forest stands have been abolished for woods and forests managed in accordance with the criteria applicable to sustainable forest management or which are part of the “*Vlaamse Ecologisch Netwerk*”, the Flemish ecological network. The Flemish Region also offers specific aid for certain plantations, the preparation of expanded management plans and the opening up of paths to the general public.