



„Forest management & protection of drinking water resources“

Workshop in the frame of the Project CC-WARE in Waidhofen/Ybbs and excursion to pilot area Schnabelberg

21.10.2014

Markus Hochleitner from the Waidhofen waterworks welcomes all participants and gives some organisational instructions.

Hubert Siegel from the Forest Department of the Austrian Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, Environment and Water Management (BMLFUW) presents the topic “Forest and its impacts on water balance” first of all by means of the experiences gained within the two projects “CC-WARE” and “CC-WaterS” – both co-funded by the South East Europe Transnational Cooperation Programme. The methodology to show up the most important strategic issues - with focus on forest related ones - to guarantee a proper water supply also for the future under climate change conditions is explained. Furthermore the cornerstones (targets and priorities) of Rural Development within the new Subsidy Programme LE 2014-2020 and the actual development respectively status in Austria are lined out. Within forest relevant issues the programme “Protection through forest” (in VOLE 07-13: ISDW) will be continued and adapted for the new programme, the existing “District framework plans” (Bezirksrahmenpläne) will be followed up and extended through the additional future programme “Forest for Water” (FWW) on the one hand to improve the forest effects on the water regime and on the other hand to clean up ditches and riverside forests.

During the discussion it is mentioned, that the actual “Protection Forest” (Schutzwald) is partially in a very bad condition mainly due to the high influence and pressure of hunting despite the EU guidelines. If the EU targets will not be achieved due to these circumstances, it could maybe cause an impact to the relevant hunters. Therefore larger projects (“flächenwirtschaftliche”) often are only realized if the game regulation is sufficient. Styria for example conducts game monitoring. The problem is, that the hunting plans are partially not fulfilled. Measures within the existing national framework have to be realized. Forest and hunting authorities have difficulties to implement legislation. Therefore the positions and functions of these authorities have to be strengthened. Another possibility to demonstrate the problems with common hunting practices is a media based preparation to raise awareness, especially regarding the importance of drinking water protection. As Austria signed the biodiversity strategy the people dealing with nature conservation will scream in the long term, if for example young firs have no chance to grow due to increased game density.

Eduard Hochbichler and Roland Köck from the University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences (BOKU) present some adaptive forest management measures in terms of drinking water resource protection. First of all the most important functions and effects of forest ecosystems in the context with water protection are explained. Furthermore the importance of an adequate forest management increasing stability and functionality of ecosystems is emphasized. The spring water protection functionality is important within all areas. Further comprehensive recommendations were developed within the project CC-WARE and summarized in a Best-Practice catalogue. They differ significantly from the conventional forest management in Austria. For example clear-cuts should be completely avoided, not more than 10-25% of an actual forest stand volume should be felled to minimize the negative impacts – even if the amount of spruce species is too high. A continuous cover forest system in line with the natural forest community should be established and the provision of stable and resilient forest ecosystems is the first priority. Autochthonous tree species are stable over thousand years and therefore also suitable under climate change conditions. Old and stable tree individuals are important for stability due to their interconnected network of mycorrhiza fungi. A prerequisite is, however, an adequate game density. Also the limitation of forest road constructions and a cautious silviculture are of crucial importance. Finally the actual situation of the planned drinking water conservation area in Waidhofen / Ybbs and the respective surveys (e.g. forest-hydrotop-model) within the two EU-projects mentioned before are illustrated. Adequate spring water protection silviculture will be promoted among others by the new subsidy programme “Forest for Water” as already explained before.

Within the discussion it is recommended to adapt the actual Austrian Federal Forest Law due to the requirements of drinking water protection, especially regarding clear-cuts. Within site protection forests clear-cuts are limited, but the delineation – especially in the ÖBf region – is sometimes very difficult. Unfortunately at the moment the respective interest groups of Waidhofen / Ybbs submitted a negative answer to the actual water conservation area due to the expected silviculture constraints and remunerations. Similar to the situation of the drinking water for Vienna also Waidhofen could consider some kind of financial compensation for adaptive forest management taking account of drinking water protection (e.g. contract for drinking water protection – for example water board in Styria with the relevant agricultural economics). Additionally the respective authorities of the states should designate potential drinking water resource areas as protection respectively conservation areas. Problems could occur due to the limitation of subsidies within a 6 year period, because measures should be realized not only within this time frame.

After the presentations a joint excursion to the pilot area “Schnabelberg” observing and discussing the actual status after some forest management measures on ÖBf area within the former project CC-WaterS is organised. Due to the bad weather a detailed observation was not possible.