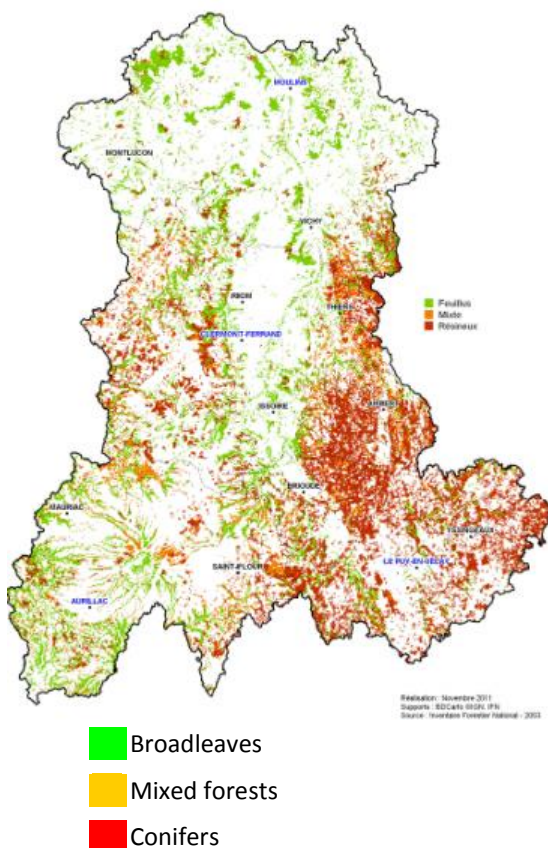


Focus on Auvergne (France)

Background

The Auvergne is one of the former 22 administrative regions of France (metropolitan area). It is located in the central part of the country and it is known for its mountain ranges and dormant volcanoes. An agricultural and stockbreeding region, Auvergne is also a place for forest operations with 720,000 ha of forest.



National Forest Inventory 2003

The forest coverage in Auvergne includes broadleaves, conifers and mixed forests. The main species are fir, spruce, douglas-fir, pine, oak and beech. Since the 19th century the region's forest cover has increased quite strongly, especially during the second half of the 20th century (from 1960) thanks to national incentives in favour of forest plantations (usually coniferous ones, spruce especially).

Over 600,000 ha (85%) of forests are privately owned, in the hands of over 210,000 individuals.

About 2.1 million m³ are harvested and put on the market annually, with conifer representing 85% of this volume. The forest-based industry (from forest management to wood processing) is dense in the region with over 10,000 jobs in about 2,500 companies, all committed to boost wood mobilisation in order to reach the regional 2020 target: an annual harvest of 3 million m³. Local authorities strongly support initiatives aiming at stimulating forest management and wood mobilisation in private forests.

Diverse forest types can be found in the region including some in which delivering wood products demanded by the market is difficult. Reasons for such differences between available resources (in theory) and market demand can be inherited from different barriers:

- Vast old softwood areas (fir and pine) are now overgrown and became too large to be processed by the sawing industry in usual conditions
- Part of the hardwood resource has low market value which can not balance costs associated with wood mobilization
- Challenges can sometimes be combined when difficult terrain adds up to low market value.

In addition, the usual barrier of fragmented ownership is an issue. The average size of private properties is below 3 ha. This results in forest owners being mostly non-professional forest managers. In such a context, small private owners sometimes feel lost and mistrustful confronted with the large number of local forest management companies and timber buyers with whom they may be in contact only once or twice in their lifetime as an owner.

SIMWOOD's work in the region

The current challenges and barriers limiting wood mobilization with regard to actual forest production and industrial demand for wood

material were already well known in the Auvergne, and were being addressed by regional sectorial governance before the SIMWOOD project started.

In 2010, two national institutions (ADEME and Ministry for Agriculture & Forests) decided to test, in a given perimeter and in respect to sustainable management principles, measures to increase the supply of wood to the different value chains. The chosen target of this PPMB programme was innovative organizations and tools within the chain of actors, namely owners of small and fragmented forests, industries and local publicly-funded forest councillors who act as an interface between the former populations.

In 2015, new methods, tools or reports were made available to the stakeholders, such as:

- A tool kit for the agents of the extension program, including a report on consolidated methods to activate forest owners (best practices handbook for the councillor/extension agent) and a technical report on property exchange service and the dedicated software used by the councillor;
- Cost-effective and trustworthy method to evaluate the impact of forest owner activation by the forest councillor;
- Experimental protocol to test alternate organization schemes in the chain of actors: Forest Owners – Extension agent - Forest companies;
- Detailed specifications of an IT-platform to support information exchange between the regional forest-stakeholders.

But one specific resource still remains almost untapped for now in Auvergne: forest growing in steep terrain.

The forests which currently stand on such terrain are a critical mass (over 150,000 ha stocked with usually over 200m²/ha) as a resource for additional wood which could potentially be put on the market in a short and mid-term future provided that professional practitioners would

know how to actively deal with them. Steep slopes require specific working methods (and equipment), for harvesting to be carried out in an effective manner (in terms of cost, health and security, environment).

SIMWOOD's work in the region has involved the development of a pilot project.

Pilot project

This aims to increase professional know-how in steep-terrain conditions, building capacity about sustainable logging practices and related forest management requirements.

The stakeholders in the group are forest companies (SME or larger) who already mobilize wood in steep terrain or who wish to broaden their activity towards these specific areas. For some stakeholders, logging operations are the core activity, while for the others it is part of the service-mix which also includes forest management. The aim is to:

- share current knowledge about what works and what are the limits
- improve stakeholders' confidence in what can be done (working methods, operational conditions)
- turn this knowledge into a capacity to launch more logging operations in steep terrain.

The choice of target group and respective objectives was motivated by the recent and positive conclusion of the former regional initiative EXPLOIT'MC in Massif Central (Auvergne plus neighbouring regions). Participants were very satisfied with the collective deliverables, some of which motivated changes of practices in local forest-based companies, but underlined that specificities of steep terrain conditions remained a grey area. Based on these expectations and while taking into account the status of other – less logging operation focused (such as PPMB mentioned earlier) – initiatives in Auvergne, FCBA decided to channel SIMWOOD efforts in the region towards this target.

The first meeting of the Regional Learning Lab (RLL) in September 2014 enabled the local stakeholders to share their understanding of the status quo, confirm the relevance of the chosen target and discuss the priorities for the next steps. The event was also the official launch of the working group “GT Pentes” (*Groupe Technique Pente* in French).

Discussions continued outdoors with a visit to a logging site of interest of the group: a team of three working with a cable-yarder on steep (> 70%) terrain.



Photo: FCBA

After the meeting, participating companies identified logging operations, which fitted the pilot project 'specifications', to be monitored, analysed and discussed within the working group. Over 2014 and 2015, 8 logging operations were monitored and analysed by FCBA for that purpose.

The second RLL meeting was held in September 2015, with indoor discussions focusing on pilot project outputs, and adjusting the implementation plan. Several options were proposed for the stakeholders to choose: i) initiation of a collaborative observatory of logging interruptions in steep terrain (human safety and prevention of machine breakdown); ii) training session on tools available to plan a cable yarding operation (How to use decision-support system such as SIMULCABLE or CARTOMOB).



Onsite discussions with the logging company experimenting with a new organisation. 2nd RLL, September 2015. Photo: FCBA

Dialogue continued outdoors on a logging site: a team of 4 working with harvester and forwarder equipped with synchro-winch on 50 to 70% steep terrain.

An open event about forest operations in mountain and steep terrain areas was held in November 2015 in Grenoble. More than 90 local and national stakeholders came together to hear presentations on logging technics, mountain-specific logistics and collaborative innovation.

Experiences from diverse contexts (e.g., the French Alps, Italy as well as the Massif Central) and different stakeholder perspectives were shared and discussed during the afternoon roundtable.

In May 2016, members of the Regional Learning Lab met again to share the progress made. A visit was organised to one of the companies' logging site where the use of a new material was being tested and analysed for the pilot project.

Who to contact in the region

The SIMWOOD local team is led by FCBA: Paul Magaud and Morgan Vuillermoz

To get involved in SIMWOOD's activities, please contact: Morgan Vuillermoz (morgan.vuillermoz@fcba.fr)