

Forest management of the Forest Development Service under the Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources about the results of the activity evaluation

We have concluded that the legislative framework in the field of use, protection, and restoration of forests is not at a satisfactory level (in accordance with modern requirements), the administration and control activities of the leased and used forest areas for the use of forests are not properly organized, due to the low level of provision of the necessary material and technical base for the protection of forests from pests and diseases, as well as fire, the necessary measures are not taken in time and in full volume in many cases the plantings for the forest restoration are not carried out in accordance with the climatic and relief conditions and there is no necessary irrigation for the crops, agro-technical care is not provided and the statistics of recent years do not reflect reality. In this case, although a number of measures have been taken since 2018 there have been systematic deficiencies in the use, protection, preservation and restoration of forests. At the same time, the income potential for the use of forest areas has not been fully realized, drying in forests due to diseases and pests in separate areas have occurred. As well as, due to the destruction of forest plantations, there has been no significant increase in the amount of forest-covered areas in recent years. All the above mentioned, resulted in the failure to achieve the goals and indicators set by the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

The main purpose of the audit was to evaluate the activity of the service in the field of use, protection, preservation and restoration of forests, and to make suggestions and recommendations for improvement.

As part of the audit conducted by the Chamber of Accounts, the following were determined:

Non-finalization of institutional reforms, including non-determination of the charters of structural divisions and duty instructions of responsible persons, non-preparation of instructions on conducting forest pathological examinations, failure to ensure the functionality of the forest guard in an uninterrupted mode has led to the existence of risks such as division of responsibility and indiscipline in terms of responsibility for mistakes made in the process of organization and implementation of forest management activities in an efficient and effective manner.

Failure to prepare the National Forest Program that defines the objectives and directions of the activity, failure to accurately determine the boundaries and composition of forests, failure to update forest maps, and at the same time failure to digitize forest management, arbitrary and detailed identification of the areas with the main need for forest restoration, protection and maintenance directly negatively affected the efficiency and effectiveness of forest management, and made it impossible to achieve the goals of sustainable development.

Failure to update the legal framework approved in the period up to 2000 by adapting it to modern socio-economic conditions did not create fertile conditions for obtaining potential income from the use of forests and achieving better results on forest

maintenance, effective and efficient activities to reduce the damage caused to forests by illegal felling.

The lack of human resource for the implementation of functional activities and the poor material and technical supply have resulted in cases of neglect of plantations for reforestation activities, the risks related to the sinking of those crops and the decrease in the percentage of completion, at the same time, despite the large area of the forest fences, there were difficulties for the forest guards in terms of conducting effective control activities in the absence of the necessary means

In the period covered by the audit, surveillance cameras and satellite images, especially modern technologies such as drones, were not used for the application of modern information technologies in the field of forest protection, which did not allow for more effective control activities.

While the Forestry Code specifies the leasing of forest and non-forest lands not covered by forest plants to the forest user for the purpose of reforestation, there have been cases of renting out the areas covered with forest plants, cutting down the forest plants in the area during land preparation works by the lessees, renting out the forest fund areas for the planting of plants that do not meet the goals of reforestationç , which pre-conditions the risks of not achieving reforestation goals on the leased areas.

In order to combat diseases and pests in forest areas, systematic research and scientific-research works were not carried out, the supply of necessary preparations for taking measures on specific facts from regional structures was not provided in full and on time, inconsistencies between the real situation and relevant statistical data were observed, inadequate measures to combat diseases and pests have resulted in the drying of trees and the spread of diseases.

Necessary material and technical base for fire protection has not been formed at an adequate level, inter-forest roads have not been constructed in many cases in old forests, most of the old covered forest areas have not been cleared of bushes and dried and broken trees in previous periods, in a number of places, mineral strips have not been established between the old forest areas and the area where agricultural plants are planted, which increased the risk of more serious consequences in case of fires.

It was determined that there were trees (seedlings) that did not meet the standards required for planting in the nursery areas, and gradually covered forest areas appeared in those nursery areas, which led to the inefficient use of the nursery areas with the necessary infrastructure, and gave reason to say that the activity was not effective in terms of growing those seedlings created at the expense of state resources.

Actions for achieving the goals specified in the Sustainable Development Goals for Forestry have not been sufficient.

Some of SDG 15 targets were used as audit criteria by SAI Azerbaijan, particularly: 15.1 Ensure the conservation, restoration and sustainable use of terrestrial and inland freshwater ecosystems and their services, in particular forests, wetlands, mountains and drylands, in line with obligations under international agreements by 2020,

15.2 Promote the implementation of sustainable management of all types of forests, halt deforestation, restore degraded forests and substantially increase afforestation and reforestation globally by 2020,

15. B Mobilize significant resources from all sources and at all levels to finance sustainable forest management and provide adequate incentives to developing countries to advance such management, including for conservation and reforestation.

Results SAI Azerbaijan assessed forest management activity, inter alia, on the basis of indicators 15.1.1 and 15.2.1 defined for targets 15.1 and 15.2 of the SDGs 15 in Global forest resources assessment 2020: Main report of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO).

Indicator 15.1.1 (“Forest area as a proportion of total land area”) remained unchanged at 12 % during 2010–2020, while indicator 15.2.1 (“Progress towards sustainable forest management”) remained at the low level due to poor forest management.

Indicator 15.2.1 also considered the forest area under independently verified forest management certification schemes. Forest management certification in Azerbaijan was evaluated as unsatisfactory.