



Research note on the proposal for structural simplification of state forestry units and subunits in Romania

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Abstract. State forestry administration is currently characterized by excessive bureaucracy, caused by complex legislation, hierarchical decision-making processes, and overlap with other natural resource management systems. Although the new procedural methods have become standards in forestry jurisprudence, they have not simplified the activity but have amplified the bureaucratic volume. The computerization of the information system, meant to streamline processes, creates difficulties for the field staff, who are insufficiently trained and motivated. The shortage of human resources accentuates the pressure on existing employees through multiple duties and tasks. The study aimed to analyze the possibility of structural simplification of the state forestry units and subunits in Romania by merging two compartments located on the same level of importance in the current form of organization. To carry out this analysis, the questionnaire method was used, distributed online to forestry specialists in the field. The results and conclusions summarize the idea of merging as a possible solution to reduce the bureaucracy of the state forestry system.

Key Words: forestry bureaucracy, compartments, unification, debureaucratization.

Introduction. In Romania, the forests under the public property of the state are managed by a national authority established in 1990. At national level, this institution is structured in 41 county forestry directorates, with its headquarters in Bucharest. As it manages about 48% of the total forests in the country, it is considered to be the main administrator of the national forest fund. The territorial structure of the institution includes, in addition to the 41 county forestry directorates, a number of 313 forest units (subunits) subordinated to them. At the level of a state forest district, there are currently about 9 independent compartments in the organizational chart, to which are added other compartments of reduced complexity. Among these, it can be mentioned Forest Regeneration; Forest Fund, Private Forests; Forest Guard and Protection; Hunting and salmon farming; Procurement; Financial accounting; Human resources, organization, and programming; and Occupational safety and health (Bostan & Grosu 2010). Developing management strategies at the subunit level to avoid and manage certain risks should be a priority for every head of forestry unit (Lăzăreanu 2023), and a well-thought-out strategy can make the difference between bankruptcy and economic recovery (Petrișor & Bănică 2021).

When it comes to forest management, resilience (Stoican 2015) refers both to the forest ecosystem and to the organizational system, the forest administration that assumes the good management of the forest, successfully overcoming the various pressures: economic, legislative, or environmental (Frâncu & Hociung 2012; Krkač 2023). A synonym for 'resilience' may be 'adaptability,' with the caveat that this term does not imply a certain amount of time to return to the baseline situation. Falk et al (2022) decomposed ecological resilience into three components: persistence, recovery, and reorganization, each with its own self-regulatory mechanism. Persistence is the ability of individual trees to withstand stressors. Once persistence is overcome, trees of a particular species start to disappear due to abnormal drying, with that species recovering lost ground simply by abundant fruiting (Leipold 2017). If recovery is not possible, the ecosystem reorganizes: the specific form of forest ecosystem reorganization is forest succession, more precisely, the successional process (Crick et al 2020).

The appearance of the Emergency Ordinance no. 156/2024 on fiscal measures in the field of public expenditure (Romanian Government 2024) is an eloquent example of the application of a drastic economic measure administered to a significant number of state institutions, which,

in order to fit within certain economic parameters, either took the measure of reducing the bureaucratic apparatus or maintained the number of employees but reduced salary expenses in various forms.

The main objective of this research was to identify the possibility of reducing the bureaucratic and reporting process by merging two compartments in the current structure of the main forest administration in Romania.

Material and Method. In order to achieve the established objective and to analyze the possibility of streamlining the bureaucratic process in the state forestry sector by merging the activities of two compartments, a research tool was designed in the form of a questionnaire. The respondents were asked to express their opinion on the possibility of merging the Forest Fund and Forest Culture departments. The selection for merging only the two compartments was based on the degree of involvement and importance in terms of forest care works.

The target group of respondents consisted mainly of department heads, district chiefs, forestry technicians, and foresters employed by the state forestry administration. The questionnaire was distributed exclusively online to the staff employed within two forestry departments, Botoșani and Suceava. This method of distribution was used because the completion could be carried out easily and quickly from the mobile phone. The form was open for 30 consecutive days, during which 47 responses were recorded out of 63 initial distributions. To limit the number of responses to a single respondent, the completion could be done using a single Google user account.

Results and Discussion. The results of the entire questionnaire are summarized in Table 1. The questionnaire consists of 7 questions. The following aspects were considered when formulating the questionnaire (Hințea & Mora 2003; Băraian & Arghir 2013):

- A specialized language dedicated to people with experience in the field was used, because by using such language more information is gained;
- The questions were formulated in such a way as to arouse the respondent's curiosity to continue, and towards the end of the questionnaire we integrate the more awkward or more personal questions;
- Confidentiality has been taken into account to ensure honest answers;
- Completion times are very important, especially if we refer to the location where the respondent completes it, i.e., at work, where he/she is constrained by the work schedule and the achievement of certain indicators, or at home in a private environment, in a space free from external disturbances (Colibaba 2001; Luisa et al 2004).

In order to observe the respondent's experience in the field, as well as a possible current age class structure, each respondent was asked to fall into one of the three seniority classes.

From the analysis, it can be noted that the state system is relatively balanced (regarding the current case study) in terms of personnel employed; there is an interest in maintaining positions and filling vacancies with newly qualified personnel. State forestry provides some stability, as shows a percentage of approximately 30% of employees with more than 20 years of seniority (Table 1 - Crt. no. 1). For the surveys carried out, the responses of those with 10-20 years and more than 20 years of seniority are fundamental, and this is because they have experience in the field, having witnessed the various changes in the sector over time.

In the present questionnaire, only personnel classified as engineers (mostly) and foresters participated (Table 1 - Crt. no. 2). The non-participation of the category of technicians denotes the increasingly rare occupation of this function; although it appears in the nomenclature of functions of the national forest manager, it is increasingly occupied by forestry personnel with higher education (engineers). The rationale behind this approach is to promptly address staffing needs for personnel with advanced forestry qualifications in cases of unforeseen or scheduled absences. This strategy facilitates adaptation and reassignment, owing to their comprehensive understanding of local issues. Protected by anonymity, the foresters interviewed (Table 1 - Crt. no. 3) consider that the total drift of stands (by tearing, charpinization, etc.) is mainly due to the lack of professionalism of the field forestry staff (foresters, district chiefs, or logging units) who manage the stands, especially in the young stage, by the care work carried out. Some of the respondents are of the opinion that this process of standard drift is also due to social pressure, which they are either unable to cope with or are legally caught in.

Analyzing the results obtained for the fourth question, it can be observed that in the view of many foresters, the Forest Culture and Regeneration department is only concerned with tracing and securing genetic material for future stands, an activity that stops at the time of stand condition. For many respondents, however, care work carried out after stand condition is an integral part of forest husbandry and should not be carried out by the forest fund. The emergence, in the last decade, of the Production department has placed a heavy burden on the forest estate in terms of the management of the timber resulting from logging. The part of the management and valorization of these assets thus falls within the remit of this department.

According to about 43% of the respondents, the tracking and production of genetic material is not a sufficient argument for maintaining a separate department (Table 1 - Crt. no. 4), although it is particularly important for the realization of multi-stemmed stands by producing good quality reproductive material. The mutual monitoring of tree growing and regeneration activities versus timber harvesting activities is both economically and ecologically important and can be achieved by cross-delegation of the actual field acceptance (Table 1 - Crt. no. 5). The supervision of an exploitation work by the person responsible for regeneration can be an advantage, because a properly completed exploitation work can simplify the subsequent afforestation activity. Compliance with all forestry regulations ultimately helps the forest to regenerate naturally through more abundant fruiting. As a rule, the interaction between the forest fund and the forest culture is carried out at the time of taking over the surface for regeneration and ends with the reaching of the massif stage (when tree seedlings reach certain heights). A close collaboration and a joint reception between the two sectors could have a beneficial impact on the development of the future stand, this synergy being achievable under well-defined conditions and within the limits of the available time resources.

The prevention of illegal logging or illegal forest activities has been a long-standing issue in the forestry sector. This activity, for some, has long ceased to be a social action for survival by warming homes in the cold season but has become a for profit activity that threatens the integrity of the whole society (Bălăcescu 2020).

The presence of the Forest Guard compartment or the Forest Guard Corps, which patrol in the forests, seems inefficient in the face of this phenomenon. In some areas, even with the support of forest guards or police forces, this practice could not be eliminated. Cooperation between departments, between authorities, and between different state entities, each one assuming their responsibilities, could reduce this phenomenon. Collaboration and cooperation between the two compartments as a unitary whole and unconditional support of the guarding compartment can reduce damage to the forest and reduce material and economic costs (Table 1 – Crt. no. 6).

The answers to the last question (Table 1 - Crt. no. 7) leave room for interpretation, as 15 respondents found it possible to merge the forest fund and forest culture departments, while 15 others considered that this merger is not possible (most likely the occupants of these functions, who see this merger as a new task to be performed in the same timeframe). If we also take into account the response of the five people who consider that merging the two would be very beneficial and feasible, we could conclude that the premises for a merger of the two compartments on a stand-alone basis, at least experimentally, are in place. This would only be possible under the same heading, as the current volume of tasks, according to a job description, would be impossible to achieve by reducing the number of staff. Unfortunately, the motives of the people who are totally against the merger is unknown, most probably people who find it difficult to adapt to possible changes, possibly coming from the category of respondents with more than 20 years of experience in forestry.

Table 1

Questionnaire results expressed in percentages

No.	Quiz question	Selection options/Selection response percentages					
		1-10 years	10 - 20 years	Over 20 years			
1	Please specify your seniority in the forestry field.	36.20%	34.0%	29.80%			
2	Please specify the position held within the unit/subunit (at the current date).	Forestry Engineer	Forestry Technician	Ranger			
		68.10%	0.0%	31.90%			
3	How do you assess, from a silvicultural point of view, a relatively high share of totally derived stands?	The direct consequence of the deprofessionalization of field forestry personnel	The consequence of climate change	Sign of slow succession processes	It is an irrelevant indicator, which we should give up	Proof of a social pressure on the forest that foresters are not aware of or in front of which they are exposed	It is not always an objective indicator; it is related to the experience and professional responsibility of the interior designer
		38.30%	12.8%	2.50%	3.80%	27.70%	14.90%
4	Is tracking the circulation of reproductive material a strong enough argument for maintaining the current structure? (Stand-alone Regeneration compartment)	I disagree	Partially disagree	Apathetic	Partially agree	Strongly agree	
		42.6%	4.3%	19.1%	23.4%	10.6%	
5	Will joint planning and mutual delegation of the acceptance of logging works allow for a better assessment of the impact of logging works on the forest ecosystem as a whole?	Not possible	Partially disagree	I do not pronounce	It could be feasible, under certain conditions	It would be very beneficial and feasible	
		14.9%	38.3%	8.5%	29.8%	8.5%	
6	The prevention of illegal logging will cost less in terms of the effort of the forestry units if the 2 departments cooperate in law enforcement.	I disagree	Partially disagree	Apathetic	Partially agree	Strongly agree	
		14.9%	34.0%	12.8%	25.5%	12.8%	
7	Do you find it feasible to unify the attributions and merge the 2 compartments given the purpose, periodicity, and similarity of the processed data?	Not possible	Partially disagree	I do not pronounce	It could be feasible under certain conditions	It would be very beneficial and feasible	
		34.0%	6.5%	14.9%	34.0%	10.6%	

Conclusions. This research note presents a solution regarding the debureaucratization of the state forestry administration by unifying two independent compartments. The study shows that this process, although difficult at first, could be implemented at least in the case of small and medium-sized forestry departments, where the local specificity allows it. In this context, it is recommended to carry out punctual simulations and comparative analyses. At the same time, it is proposed to carry out impact studies and risk assessments applied to representative samples of personnel in order to substantiate decisions in a rigorous and objective way. Achieving such a merger involves reducing the number of reports and modifying or even giving up certain computer programs, the final goal being to fit the activities into a work schedule that can be managed by a single employee. Opinions on the unification of the two departments are divided among employees. The anonymity of the respondents prevents the identification of the attributions and field of activity of those totally against this vision, but we tend to believe that a significant percentage of them is represented by the occupants of the Forest Fund and Forest Culture departments, who see in this unification the supplementation with new attributions. In addition to debureaucratizing the forestry system, the merger proposal would increase productivity in units, both in terms of economic efficiency (by lowering costs) and labor efficiency (by making more efficient use of working hours). The final conclusions support the idea of merging two or more compartments with the ultimate objective of debureaucratizing the state forestry administration, currently bureaucratically suffocated.

Conflict of interest. The author declares no conflict of interest.

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Received: 03 July 2025. Accepted: 01 August 2025. Published online: 16 August 2025.

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How to cite this article:

Mititelu C., 2025 Research note on the proposal for structural simplification of state forestry units and subunits in Romania. AAB Bioflux 17(1):10-15.