

Swiss forests are healthy but need better management

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To support biodiversity, forests need dead trees as well. Though it has more than it used to, Switzerland could use more deadwood. Urs-Beat Brändli, WSL

There's also more diversity in terms of the types of trees found in Swiss woodlands, according to the forest inventory report presented on Wednesday.

Detailed monitoring since 1983 has helped the Swiss authorities evaluate the condition and development of the nation's forests, which cover about a third of the country. The latest inventory, the fourth of its kind, is based on research conducted from 2009-2017. It's the joint effort of the federal environment office (FOEN) and the Swiss Federal Institute for Forest, Snow and Landscape Research (WSL).

"The development of Swiss forests since the first inventory is generally a success story, despite major damage due to natural events," noted Urs-Beat Brändli, senior scientist at WSL. "Over the past eight years, forest management has become more sustainable in many areas. But there are some problematic issues like intense wildlife browsing and the partial inaccessibility of mountain woodlands."

More trees

The inventory, completed via samples across the country, registered growth in terms of the variety of tree species as well as the overall area of Swiss forests. Between 2009 and 2017, Switzerland gained 15 football pitches' worth of forest per day, thanks mainly to alpine meadows returning to their original forest state.

Yet fewer than half of the mountain forests are easily accessible for wood harvesting. This makes it difficult and expensive to maintain them, and as their trees grow taller and thicker, young trees struggle to establish themselves.

At the same time, deer and other animals feast on young oaks and white fir trees, both valuable species in forests that protect roads and settlements from landslides and avalanches. According to the inventory, some 42% of Swiss forest land plays this protective role.

Source: <https://www.swissinfo.ch/eng/forests-switzerland-sustainability/45826920>