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# Federal government forest condition survey: Condition of Germany's forests cause for concern

## Further reduction of pollutant inputs necessary

The Federal Government published the results of its forest condition survey on 10 June 2009. The report identifies the causes for what continues to be the poor condition of forests and also identifies countermeasures. The survey of the condition of forests in Germany demonstrates that two thirds of all forest trees remain damaged, of which 26 percent are 'severely damaged'. More than half of all oaks show evidence of crown defoliation, a record high. The roots of this poor condition in forests are traceable to a number of factors, of which anthropogenically produced air pollution-- particularly nitrogen compounds- is largely responsible. The integrated strategy to control nitrogen emissions introduced by the Federal Environment Agency (UBA) suggests that measures to reduce nitrogen emissions produced in the agricultural sector, which include sparing use of nitrogen-based commercial fertiliser and using feed that has been optimised with regard to nitrogen, are especially effective and cost-efficient. They also produce synergy effects as both waters and the climate also benefit from them.

The government's forest report illustrates the need to reduce air pollution, particularly nitrogen compounds which have a negative impact on forests. Nitrogen compounds introduced as a result of over-fertilisation produce acidity, which disrupts the nutrient balance in plants and soils. Forest trees thus become more susceptible to other stress factors such as climate or pest infestation. Furthermore, nitrous oxides from industry and the transport sector are precursors of ground-level ozone that are the direct cause of leaf or needle damage and decimated vitality in forest trees and wild plants.

Forests cover about one third of the Germany's land area. They provide functions that are indispensable to human life, some of which include the production of wood, water storage and filtration, flood and soil erosion protection, climate balance, providing a habitat for plants and animals as well as a space for man to seek rest and recreation. There is a real danger that forests may no longer be able to fulfil these important diverse tasks in the long term because of their pollution.

Germany committed to making big cuts in pollutant emissions by 2010 as part of the protection of ecosystems laid down in the Geneva Convention on Long-Range Transboundary Air Pollution and the EU directive on national emissions ceiling. The measures related to nitrogen

compounds taken up to present are not expected to achieve their aim. As a result, UBA has drawn up an integrated strategy to control nitrogen emissions. It demonstrates clear synergy effects and multiple benefits for other ecosystems as well.

The agricultural sector shows signs of particularly great potential to reduce emissions that is also cost-effective. Agriculture is responsible for more than half of all nitrogen emissions. The following measures in the transport sector will help to reduce the release of gaseous and dissolved nitrogen compounds into ecosystems: an extension of the truck toll to include all commercial vehicles over 3.5 tonnes on all roads; speedy introduction of heavy commercial vehicles that comply with the EURO VI standard; and continued emissions reductions in the electricity production process at large firing installations. Not only will Germany's forests benefit from such measures, so will inland and coastal bodies of waters and the climate.

**The federal government forest condition survey 2009 is available here:** [Complete version](#)

**The Federal Environment Agency's nitrogen emissions reduction strategy is here:**

<http://www.umweltbundesamt.de/luft/downloads/emissionen/stickstoffemissionsminderungsstrategie.pdf>

**Further information on the effects of air pollution is here:**

<http://www.umweltbundesamt.de/luft/eintraege-wirkungen/effekt.htm>

Dessau-Roßlau, 16 June 2009