Rewilding in Romania

Forest and Woodland Management

Mixed common beech and spruce forests in the autum, Southern Carpathians, Munții Țarcu, Caraș-Severin. Florian Möllers / Rewilding Europe

Core topics

- Main planning regulations for forest management
- Legal definition of forests and categories of forests
- Forest management plans
- Forestry activities
- Forest management in protected areas

Key takeaways

1. There is a complex legal framework of forest management and practitioners are advised to check which planning and management regulations apply to their specific factual scenario.
2. All activities must follow the measures set out in the forest management plan.
3. There are specific obligations regarding forest regeneration, reforestation and afforestation, which are laid down in technical norms.
4. Rewilding practitioners must conclude service agreements with the competent public authorities or with private certified entities.
5. There are specific rules for forests management in protected areas.

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1. Overview and scope of forest and woodland management regulation in Romania

The care, conservation, and regeneration of forests in Romania are governed by a comprehensive body of legislation, at the centre of which lies the Forest Code.[1] The Forest Code sets out the overarching framework, covering key aspects such as forest classification, regulation through forest management plans and restrictions on forestry works.

This Code is further supplemented by a range of laws and technical standards that set out detailed rules concerning forest development, exploitation, and protection – collectively aimed at ensuring sustainable forest management.[2]

In this note, this broader set of legal instruments, including the Forest Code, is referred to as the "**Forest Regime**". A list of the relevant laws and technical standards is provided in the Annex. Compliance with the Forest Regime is monitored and enforced by the Forest Guard (*Garda Forestiera*). Within the Ministry of Environment, Water and Forests, the Forest Guard plays an important role, particularly in relation to the prevention and control of forest diseases and pests.

1.1 The scope of the Forest Regime: forests and the National Forest Fund

The Forest Regime applies to the National Forest Fund of Romania ("**FFN**"), constituted by forest land.[3] "**Forest**" is defined as any land in the FFN with an area of at least 0.5 hectares and covered with trees that reach a minimum height of 5 meters at maturity under normal growing conditions; note changes below to the Forest Code, which update this standard definition.[4]

The latest changes to the Forest Code provide that the following are also considered forests:

- Land classified in the FFN until 12 January 2025, as forests or as protective forest, even if they do not meet the area criteria (i.e. 0.5 hectares); and
- Land classified in the FFN until 12 January 2025, on which juniper forests are planted, even if they do not meet the minimum height criterion (i.e. 5 meters).[5]

Land that meets the legal definition of forest is included in the FFN, regardless of ownership status or whether the land is public or private.

The National Forest Fund includes not only all forests, but also land designated for afforestation, cultivation, production, or forestry-related infrastructure, as well as ponds and streambeds. It can also include other types of forest land, such as land deemed to be non-productive.[6]

1.2 Categories of forests

The Forest Code classifies all forests into two main categories, based on their primary function.[7] The management of each forest depends on the group it belongs to and the provisions of its forest management plan (see subsection 1.3).[8]

Group I – Forests with special protection functions[9]

Group I forests include forests designated for conservation, environmental protection, and other non-productive functions. These include:[10]Forests with special functions for the conservation and protection of biodiversity (e.g. forests within UNESCO World Heritage natural sites).

- Forests of scientific interest, including those designated for the protection of genetic resources and valuable forest ecosystems (e.g. virgin forests or forests important for the safety of protected animal species).
- Forests with water protection or predominantly hydrological functions (e.g. forests near reservoirs, natural lakes, or within protected perimeters around springs, and mineral and drinking water sources).
- Forests that protect land and soil (e.g. forests on degraded or unstable land, or on land subject to ongoing erosion or sedimentation).
- Forests with protective functions against natural or human-induced climatic factors (e.g. forests in areas with severe atmospheric pollution or near tailing ponds, ash deposits, or other industrial waste).
- Forests with social protection functions (e.g. forests located in recreational parks, near urban areas or in suburban zones).

Group II – Forests with protection and production functions[11]

Group II comprises productive forest stands managed for both protective and economic purposes. These forests are primarily intended for the production of high-quality timber – thick and very thick trees suitable for lumber – as well as medium and thin trees used in construction and for other wood-based products.

1.3 Forest management plans

All publicly owned forests, as well as privately owned forests larger than 10 hectares, must have a forest management plan in place. Where such a plan does not exist, one must be prepared.

Privately owned forests smaller than 10 hectares are not required to have a forest management plan.[12] Although not legally required, entering into a service agreement with a certified operator is strongly recommended to ensure compliance with the applicable legal framework and technical requirements.

A forest management plan includes a description of the forest - covering geographical, climatic, and land-type characteristics – and sets out how the forest will be managed. This includes, for example, the measures to be taken for forest protection, permitted logging volumes, and any plans for afforestation.

Plans are typically commissioned by forest owners, often with the support of third-party specialists. Once prepared, each plan must be approved by the Ministry of Environment, Water and Forests, which act as the central public authority in charge of forestry.

Some forest management plans are publicly available and can be found online under the Romanian term *amenajamente silvice*.

As of 2025, forest management plans are generally valid for a period of 20 years.[13] During the plan's validity, a new plan for the same forest or any part of it may not be developed, unless one of the following exceptions applies:[14]

- A change in forest management is necessary (e.g. a different species composition is needed for regeneration);
- The volume of wood harvested during conservation work (e.g. sanitary felling to prevent disease) exceeds the planned amount by more than 50%. This ensures that forest management remains sustainable and adapts to any changes in the forest ecosystem;[15]and

- Tree removal due to destabilising factors leads to the forest being classified as requiring "*emergency regeneration*".[16]

In addition, private forest owners may request a new plan before the expiry of the current one to synchronise plans across multiple forests they own, provided that the different forests are adjacent to each other. This ensures that all forest stands are managed under the same plan. Owners may also apply to change the forest's designated use category, which would trigger an adjustment of the forest management plan to reflect the new use category of the forest.

1.4 Wood exploitation authorisations

The exploitation of wood under a forest management plan requires a wood exploitation authorisation, issued by the head of the authorised forestry office. The authorisation specifies environmental conditions for harvesting, as well as the monitoring measures to be observed.[17]

Further rules governing wood exploitation - including cutting methods, conditions for clear-cutting, and restrictions - are set out in the Forest Code and in the accompanying Technical Norms.[18]

Clear-cutting is permitted only in specific cases, including pure stands of spruce, pine, larch, acacia, selected Eurasian poplars and willows, or in stands severely affected by biotic (e.g. pest outbreaks) or abiotic (e.g. storms) factors. Clear-cutting may also be used in restoration or substitution of poorly productive stands, especially where regeneration under shelter is not feasible.

2. What are the general obligations under the Forest Regime?

Under the Forest Regime, forest owners are subject to the following obligations:

- **Compliance with forest management plans and prevention of unauthorised logging**: forest owners must comply with the provisions of the applicable forest management plan. Logging or other forestry activities that fall outside the approved plan – such as unauthorised breaking, destruction, degradation, or uprooting of trees, saplings, or roots – are prohibited and considered forest offences, which may result in fines or criminal penalties, including imprisonment.[19]

A range of public authorities are empowered to take enforcement action against such offences. These include: the criminal investigation authorities; forestry staff within the central public authority for forestry; the National Forestry Authority (*Romsilva*); authorised forestry offices; and officers and non-commissioned officers of the Romanian Gendarmerie.[20]

- **Execution of forest services and management**: private forest owners are required to delegate forest management responsibilities to a forestry district or authorised legal entity using either a *forest management contract* or a *forest service contract*, depending on the scope of activities.
  - A forest management contract involves the full oversight of forest land, including the development and implementation of forest management plans, forest protection, regeneration, stand management, pest and disease control, fire prevention and suppression, timber harvesting, and maintenance of forest roads.
  - A forest service contract covers specific forestry tasks, such as forest guarding, monitoring forest health, determining annual forestry works in line with the applicable forest management plan, and carrying out those works.

These contracts must be concluded either with: (i) a forestry district under *Romsilva* or (ii) a legal entity authorised to perform such activities. Private forest owners are not permitted to manage the forest directly without entering one of these contractual arrangements.

In theory, a rewilding NGO could act as the contracting party, provided it is a legal person[21] and holds the relevant environmental authorisations. However, in practice, the involvement of conservation organisations, particularly in roles traditionally held by actors within the existing logging–guarding system, can be met with resistance.

- **Maintaining the integrity of the forest land**: forest land must remain undeveloped, with certain exceptions provided by law (e.g. the construction of a dwelling or holiday home).[22]
- **Forest regeneration, maintenance, and pest control**: owners are responsible for carrying out regeneration works, ongoing forest maintenance, and measures to prevent or control disease and pest outbreaks.
- **Compliance with fire prevention measures**,[23] which may include:
  - Constructing a water source or artificial reservoir for fire-fighting;
  - Providing fire-fighting equipment (e.g. shovels, fire beaters);
  - Removing plant debris in the months preceding wildfire season (typically February-March and September-October); and
  - Planting mixed stands to create a mosaic of resinous and deciduous species (e.g. combining pine, spruce, or fir with willow, poplar, or chestnut).
- **Maintenance of forest roads**: forest owners must ensure that forest roads are kept in good condition.
- **Marking forest boundaries**: the boundaries of the forest land must be clearly marked based on property boundary documentation, e.g. using physical border signs, which must be kept in proper condition.
- **Notification of ownership transfer**: the Forest Guard (*Garda Forestieră*) must be notified within 60 days of any transfer of ownership of forest land.
- **Wood cutting, clear-cutting, and authorisation requirements**: as a general rule, forest owners are allowed to extract up to 20m^3 of wood per year from their property without requiring a wood exploitation authorisation (see subsection 1.4).

Cut common beech logs, Southern Carpathians. Florian Möllers / Rewilding Europe

Otherwise, cutting of trees is strictly regulated under the Forest Regime. Forest owners must comply with the provisions of the applicable forest management plan and may only engage in harvesting activities in accordance with the legal framework. Cutting, breaking, or uprooting trees beyond this amount, or outside of specific sanitary or disease-prevention circumstances, is prohibited without authorisation.

Any cutting beyond this annual threshold, or cutting for commercial purposes, requires formal authorisation. The following table outlines the main categories of permitted and unauthorised cutting:

Type of cutting	Purpose	Authorisation required	Notes
Sanitary cutting	Forest health & safety	Sometimes	May involve removal of dead, diseased, or damaged trees. Scope and thresholds may vary.
Clear-cutting (sanitary)	Forest regeneration or pest control	Yes	Used when regeneration under shelter is not feasible. Strictly regulated.
Clear-cutting (commercial)	Timber harvesting	Yes	Permitted in specific forest types or degraded stands under defined conditions.
Selective cutting for personal use	Owner's personal use	No (up to 20m^3/year)	Forest owners may extract up to 20 m^3/year without authorisation.
Any cutting beyond 20m^3/year	Commercial or larger-use scale	Yes	Requires a wood exploitation authorisation issued by the forestry office.[24/ 25]
Unauthorised cutting, uprooting, or breaking	-	Illegal	Considered a forest offence; subject to fines or imprisonment.

All cutting activities, regardless of scale or purpose must follow the forest management plan and are subject to monitoring. Sanctions may apply for any deviation.

3. Ecological restoration and forest care[26]

This section outlines forestry activities that may be relevant within a rewilded landscape. Under the Forest Regime, these activities are governed by specific technical rules relating to forest regeneration and the afforestation of degraded land, along with a guide to good practices.[27/28]

Responsibility for carrying out these activities rests with the forest owner or, where applicable, the legal entity responsible for forest management.[29] In the case of privately owned forest land larger than 10 hectares, this responsibility lies with the owner or, if one exists, the legal entity with a contractual management obligation.[30] All such activities must be undertaken either by the forestry districts (*ocolul silvic*) or by legal entities certified to perform them, and always in line with the forest management plan.[31]

What is "forest regeneration" under Romanian Law?

Whilst Romanian law does not provide a single legal definition of forest regeneration, the concept is understood through the types of forestry works listed in the Forest Code[32] and further detailed in the Guide of Good Practices for Forest Regeneration.[33]

The Guide outlines the following types of activities that fall under the broader notion of regeneration:[34]

Afforestation: the establishment of forest cover on land where forest has not previously existed or where it was removed a long time ago (typically over the course of a management period of 5/10 years). This includes glades, gaps, eroded land, shifting sands, and non-forested land designated for protective shelterbelts.

Reforestation: the re-establishment of forest vegetation on recently deforested land, including:

- Areas subject to clear-cutting (especially in spruce, pine, or Euroamerican poplar stands);
- Areas cleared due to natural disasters (e.g. fires, windthrow, mass dieback); and
- Land temporarily removed from the forest stock (e.g. decommissioned roads, land under overhead powerlines, or constructions sites).

Substitution, restoration, or improvement: afforestation efforts aimed at replacing or improving unsuitable stands.

Completion of natural regeneration: supplementary works such as planting or direct seeding under existing stands after logging, carried out to:

- Fill in gaps where natural regeneration has not occurred;
- Replace damaged or undesirable seedlings; and

Promote valuable species that are under-represented in the parent stand.

Regeneration works, maintenance of seeds sources and plantations, and stand care must be carried out in a way that achieves the ideal target composition (*compoziția-țel optimă*) of the forest, as established in the forest management plan.[35] This target composition refers to the association and proportion of tree species within a stand that best corresponds to the fundamental natural forest type, combining species with the most compatible ecological requirements.

Where regeneration is based on specialised studies, such as technical reports prepared by an authorised public authority or a certified legal entity responsible for forest regeneration, these studies must also align with the ideal target composition outlined in the plan. The reference sample to be followed is the one appropriate to the specific ecological group of the site.[36]

Similarly, the forest management plan must specific both the target composition – that is, the ideal mix and proportion of tree species for the site – and the appropriate afforestation technologies to be used.[37]

All these requirements ensure that forest regeneration efforts are tailored to the natural characteristics of the area and support the long-term health of the forest.

Regeneration is considered complete when the new forest stand is dense enough to grow and develop independently, without requiring further interventions. In other words, once the young trees have successfully taken root and formed a thicket that can grow on its own, the regeneration works are deemed successful. At this point, no further works, such as replanting or gap filling, are needed, and the trees are on a path to maturity, eventually able to produce their own fruit, seeds, or flowers.

Before undertaking any reforestation or regeneration efforts, it is essential to either consult the existing forest management plan or request the issuance of one. These plans provide both general and site-specific measures, including the species authorised for planting in the area.

3.1 Regeneration of forests

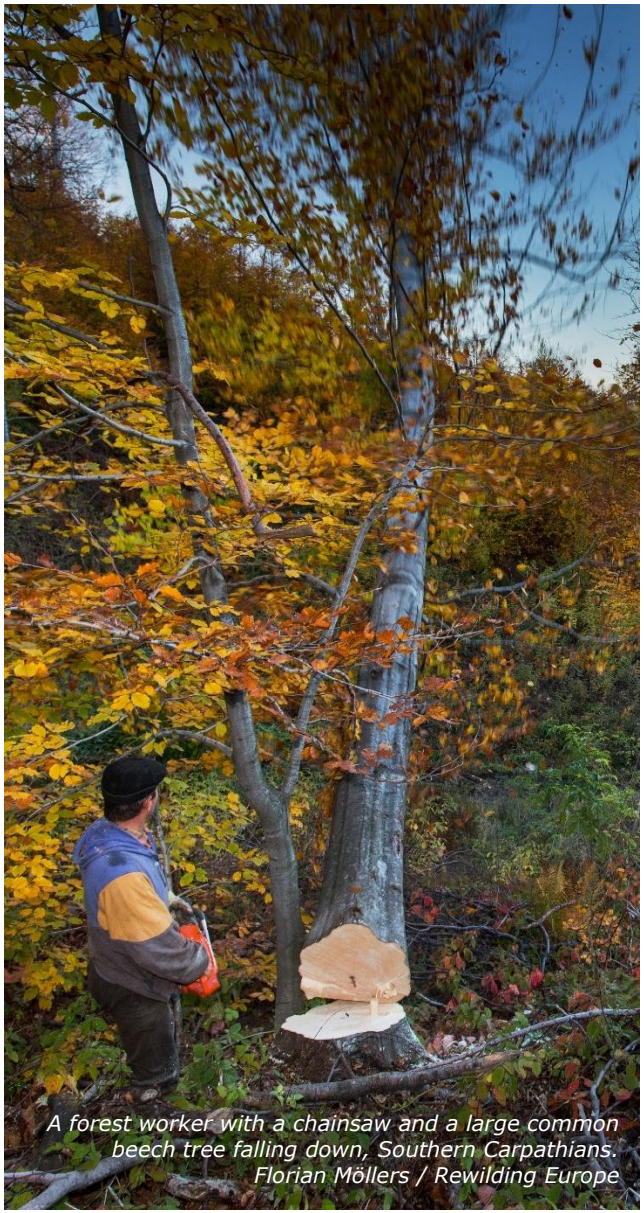
Forest regeneration refers to the renewal of tree cover by establishing young trees, either through natural processes or artificial means (such as planting or direct seeding[38]).[39] It is a long-term process that begins once the previous forest stand has been removed, whether through harvesting, natural disturbance, or other causes. The method of regeneration, the choice of species, and planting density must all align with the objectives set out in the forest management plan.

Natural regeneration may occur spontaneously or be facilitated through specific practices such as reduced or controlled grazing. In some contexts, this may include the use of natural grazing (see *Rewilding in Romania: Developing Land*), where herbivores contribute to regeneration by opening seedbeds, spreading seeds, or reducing competition from dense ground vegetation.

Regeneration plays a key role in producing high-quality stands capable of fulfilling both productive and protective functions. These may include supporting timber production, conservation of ecosystem, regulating water flows, and enhance climate resilience.

Practitioners must note that even in Group I forests, which are excluded from productive use, regeneration must serve socioeconomic objectives such as biodiversity conservation, restoration of degraded ecosystems, or the provision of public environmental goods.[40]

There are a number of specific rules that must be followed when carrying out regeneration works. These rules are designed to ensure that the



A forest worker with a chainsaw and a large common beech tree falling down, Southern Carpathians. Florian Möllers / Rewilding Europe

regenerated forest is ecologically appropriate and supports its assigned socio-economic function, as detailed above.

Some of the key rules include:

- In resinous mixture areas,[41] it is recommended the promotion of species such as spruce and larch, which are well-adapted to the ecological conditions of these zones.[42] However, this is not a rigid requirement: the guide does not prohibit the promotion of other native species, especially in forests designated for conservation or other protective purposes (e.g. Group I forests). The choice of species must ultimately reflect the ecological potential of the site and the objectives of the forest management plan.
- In foothills and hilly regions, it is recommended to use resinous species (such as spruce or pine) for regeneration.[43] Whilst the underlying rationale for this guidance lies with the Ministry of Environment, which issued the Technical Norms, it appears to be based on the ecological significance of these species in these particular zones. This recommendation is relevant where the goal is to maintain or restore forest stands composed of species considered ecologically important within their native context. In a rewilding setting, such provisions can help inform decisions about the natural potential of the site and its long-term forest dynamics.
- Native meadow sedges communities must be protected where they are present and ecologically significant.[44] It does not prohibit the planting of Euromerican poplars but rather discourages the complete replacement of valuable native vegetation—such as sedges—with poplar plantations. This rule is intended to safeguard forest species of special interest and applies only in cases where meadow sedges play a relevant ecological role. It is not a general requirement for all regeneration works and should be interpreted considering the specific ecological context of the site. The creation of pure stands (particularly of species such as oak and ash tree) should be avoided.[45] This is due to concerns about their long-term viability and manageability at advances ages. However, this is not a strict prohibition: in cases where the objective is to preserve or restore an existing old-growth native forest composed primarily of these species, such an approach may still be appropriate. This would need to be aligned with the forest's ecological characteristics and be supported by the forest management plan.

3.2 Reforestation and afforestation

In addition to natural or assisted regeneration, reforestation and afforestation are two other key methods used in forest restoration, as defined in the beginning of this section.[46]

Carrying out afforestation or reforestation activities is subject to several legal and technical obligations.[47] These include requirements concerning species selection, land suitability, and climate resilience, which aim to ensure that such works support biodiversity and ecosystem stability.

Key principles include:

- Species and ecotypes used for afforestation must be climate-resilient and must not adversely affect biodiversity.[48] This means that species introduced into an ecosystem must not disrupt its ecological balance, for example, by reducing native species diversity or by becoming invasive and outcompeting local species. To prevent such impacts, afforestation activities should comply with applicable international and national biodiversity standards, including:
  - Environmental impact assessment ("**EIA**") requirements;
  - Rules protecting natural habitats and species (e.g. under EU directives);

- Mitigation or compensation measures where impacts cannot be avoided; and
- Consistency with broader principles of sustainable development and biodiversity planning.

- Tree species and ecotypes selected for afforestation should be suitable for Romania's projected future climate conditions. This principle reflects a long-term approach to forest resilience, encouraging the use of species that can adapt to anticipated changes in temperature, precipitation patterns, and extreme weather events. Whilst the specific climatic projections and species recommendations are outside the scope of this legal note, reference can be made to national policy documents such as Romania's *National Strategy on Climate Change Adaptation*, which outlines strategic priorities for building ecological and landscape-level resilience.[49]

- Afforestation and reforestation are **prohibited on agricultural lands of high value, grassland or wetland.** Whilst the term *"agricultural lands of high value"* is not explicitly defined in the Guide of Good Practices,[50] it is understood to include ecosystems of high conservation value, particularly when such lands are identified as sensitive areas within the management plans of protected natural areas. These may include natural clearings, rocky outcrops, marshes, screes, thickets, alluvial forests, and herbaceous plant ecosystems. The aim of this provision is to avoid afforestation in ecologically sensitive open habitats where tree planting could cause long-term ecological disruption.
  - However, this prohibition does not apply when the works are carried out for habitat restoration, biodiversity conservation, water management, or and soil protection. In such cases, afforestation and reforestation are permitted on the above land types.

- Special requirements apply to afforestation and reforestation projects in areas exposed to climate-related hazards, such as drought, flooding, landslides, or soil instability.[51] These provisions are intended to ensure that planting efforts are ecologically viable and not undermined by adverse environmental conditions. For example, afforestation is not recommended on landslides in active phases of movement.[52] Given the cyclical nature of these hazards, often linked to hydrometeorological conditions, such land should only be afforested after stabilisation works have been completed. Similar caution applies to recent deposits formed by mudflows, plastic flows, or collapses, where afforestation should follow geotechnical interventions that restore a stable soil structure. These measures are intended to avoid failed or counterproductive regeneration efforts in highly vulnerable zones.

3.3 Conservation of forests

Forest management plans often include a range of general measures aimed at biodiversity conservation.[53] These are typically informed by silvicultural practices, ecological principles, and site-specific considerations. Examples of such measures include:[54]

Regeneration practices

- Promoting natural regeneration of stands whenever silvicultural treatments are applied. These treatments refer to the full range of forest management interventions carried out over a stand's lifespan, aimed at maintaining the ecological, structural, and functional integrity of the forest. As a foundation for planting, silvicultural treatments help determine the stand's structure, including the size distribution and spatial arrangements of trees – according to its designated ecological, social, or economic roles.

- Where artificial regeneration is used, sourcing genetic material locally for each species to

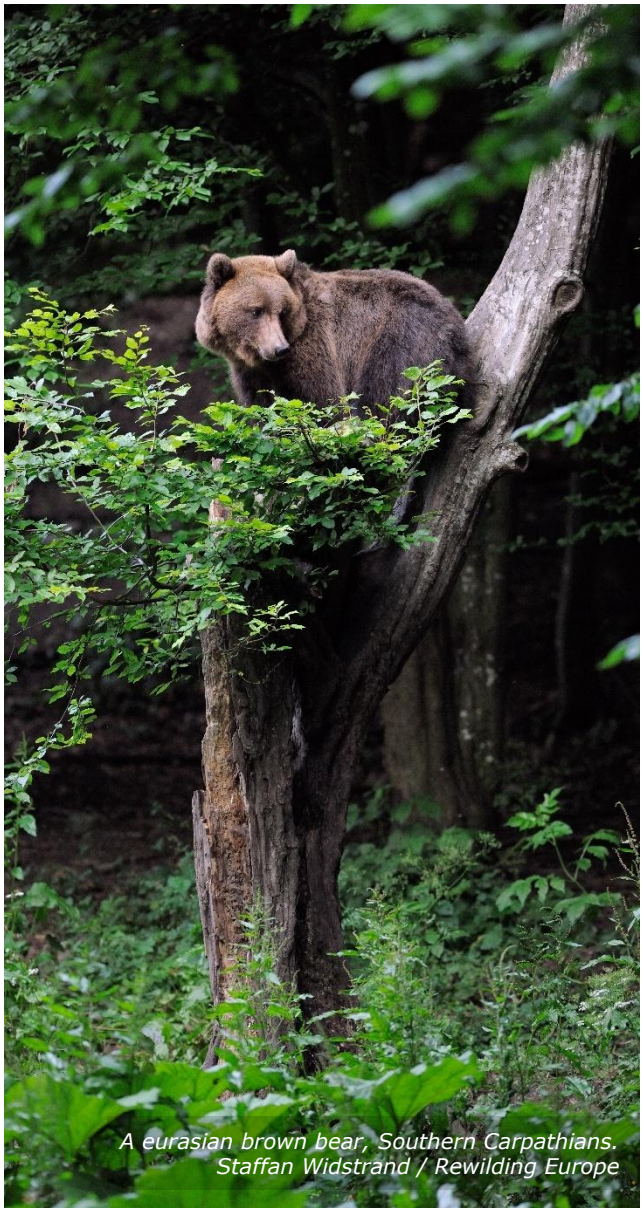
maintain genetic diversity and local adaptation.

Stand composition and structure

- Forest management plans may include provisions for creating sub-plots with as large an area as possible, consisting of trees of the same species, population, and age (or similar age). This approach appears intended to facilitate certain silvicultural treatments or timber production goals. However, from an ecological perspective, such uniform structures may increase vulnerability to pests, disease, and climate stress. Rewilding approaches often favour mixed-age, mixed-species stands, which are typically more resilient and better reflect natural forest dynamics.
- Maintaining a rich mixture within each forest stand by promoting all species that are ecologically adapted to the site. Forest management plans may include an obligation to ensure that this mix reflects the fundamental natural type of forest, i.e. the ideal species composition for a particular ecological site, based on factors such as soil type, climate, altitude, and natural forest dynamics. The plan may also require the species be present in appropriate ecological and economic proportions, meaning that the composition should support both the ecological integrity of the forest and its sustainable use.
- Promoting balanced age class structures, as biodiversity levels often correlate with forest age distribution.
- Allowing stands to reach older ages classes, which typically support a higher degree, of biodiversity.

Habitat and landscape features

- Preserving clearings, glades, and feeding grounds for wild fauna to maintain habitat heterogeneity and a mosaic landscape structure.
- Protecting shrubs in degraded lands, along edges, as these provide important food and shelter for wildlife.
- Retaining deadwood, both standing and lying on the ground, during regeneration, pruning, and other forest management works. This includes trees that have naturally fallen, not only those felled or left deliberately. Preserving deadwood supports biological diversity by providing habitat for insects, fungi, birds, and mammals, and contributes to the ecoprotective function of the forest. It also plays a role in maintaining genetic diversity, nutrient cycling, and overall ecosystem resilience.



A eurasian brown bear, Southern Carpathians. Staffan Widstrand / Rewilding Europe

Preserving 'trees for biodiversity', which may include individual trees, small groups (bouquets), or even larger sections of forest that are representative of local biodiversity. These areas can be formally designated as separate sub-plots within the forest management plan. They are typically managed with conservation objectives in mind and should be maintained up to the limit of their biological longevity. Once they reach this limit, they should be gradually replaced during the implementation of regeneration cuts, ensuring the continued presence of habitat features that support biodiversity.

Species management

- Extracting non-native species when they become invasive, as required under certain approved forest management plans. This obligation applies once non-native species exhibit invasive behaviour, such as rapid spread, displacement of native species, or disruption of ecosystem functions.
- Protecting marginal or fragile habitats, such as forests located on grottoes, rocky outcrops, cliffs, screes, forest edges, riparian zones, and wetlands. These areas support unique ecological communities and are particularly sensitive to disturbance. Their conservation contributes to overall biodiversity, habitat connectivity, and ecological resilience within the forest landscape.

3.4 Clear-cutting

Clear-cutting (in Romanian, "*tratamente cu taieri rase*") refers to the complete removal of all exploitable trees from a designated area in a single harvesting operation.[55] Under Romanian forestry law, this method is considered exceptional and may be used only when no other regeneration treatment is feasible.[56]

Clear-cutting is permitted under the following circumstances:[57]

- For sanitary reasons, such as pests, outbreaks, windthrow, or other events that significantly damage forest stands and require urgent intervention.
- In forest stands dominated by fast-growing species intended for production, such as spruce, pine, Euromerican poplar, and selected willow, but only where natural regeneration under shelter is not technically viable.
- In cases of stand replacement or ecological restoration, where the existing forest is severely degraded, unproductive, or structurally unsuitable, and no other silvicultural treatment can be effectively applied.

In all such cases, clear-cutting must be explicitly authorised in the forest management plan. The decision must be formally assessed and approved by the head of the specialised territorial structure of the central public authority responsible for forestry. Forest owners are entitled to receive specialised technical assistance from these territorial structures to ensure compliance with ecological and regulatory requirements.[58]

Clear-cutting is strictly prohibited in protected natural areas (including national parks, nature reserves, natural parks), except for stands with short production cycles.[59] The only exception applies where natural regeneration cannot be achieved by any other authorised silvicultural method, such as regeneration under shelter (*tăieri de regenerare sub masiv*), group selection, or progressive cutting. In such cases, a formal ecological assessment is required to confirm that clear-cutting is the only feasible solution.

Limitations and safeguards

Where permitted, clear-cutting is subject to the following legal restrictions:

- The maximum area that may be clear-cut in a single operation is 3 hectares, except in stands of Euramerican poplar and selected willow within dammed enclosures, where mechanised land preparation is necessary; in these cases, the limit is 5 hectares.[60]

- A minimum separation distance equivalent to two tree heights must be maintained between adjacent clear-cut areas to reduce ecological disruption and facilitate regeneration.[61]
- Clear-cutting is not permitted in Group I forests, which are designated for protection and conservation functions.

When conducted for sanitary reasons, the resulting wood may be sold commercially, provided that all applicable sanitary and harvesting regulations are followed and the operation is documented within the forest management plan.

Due to its high ecological impact, such as increased soil erosion, habitat fragmentation, and loss of structural complexity, clear-cutting is regarded as a **last-resort intervention** and should only be used where justified by site-specific conditions and supported by appropriate oversight.

3.5 Measures to prevent and combat diseases and pests

The responsibility for promoting the health of forests lies with the Forest Guard, the national authority tasked with monitoring and enforcing forest protection. All landowners whose property is included in the national forest fund are required to comply with measures imposed by the Forest Guard relating to the prevention and control of forests diseases and pests. These control measures are typically implemented by forestry districts and financed by the forest owner.

In certain cases, aerial methods, such as spraying from aircraft, may be used to combat large-scale infestations and outbreaks. These operations typically involve the use of pesticides and are therefore subject to stricter control. Such aerial interventions must be coordinated directly by the Forest Guard and are carried out in a uniform and centralised manner, due to their broad environmental impact. This is distinct from other forms of disease and pest control, which are imposed by the Forest Guard but carried out by third parties.

Practitioners should note, however, that whilst aerial pesticide use remains a legally recognised tool under Romanian forestry law, it is not consistent with rewilding principles, which prioritise minimal intervention, ecological balance, and the natural regulation of pest populations. In rewilding contexts, alternative, non-chemical methods of pest control, such as enhancing forest resilience through species diversity and structural complexity, are generally preferred.

4. Forest management in protected natural areas

The legal regime governing protected natural areas in Romania, including required conservation measures and permissible activities, is set out in the management plans of the protected natural areas. These are approved by the National Agency for Protected Natural Areas ("**ANANP**") or, where applicable, by designated protected areas administrations operating under its coordination. The plans cover all categories of protected areas, including national and natural parks, nature reserves, and Sites of Community Importance ("**SCIs**"). A full inventory of Romania's protected areas and their management plans is available here. Also, practitioners can find more information about protected areas in *Rewilding in Romania: Obtaining and Protecting Wild Land*, Section 5.

In addition, forest management plans are required for forests located within protected natural areas. These plans must be prepared in compliance with the conservation objectives of the area and are typically subject to Strategic Environmental Assessment ("**SEA**")[62] (see subsection 4.1). SEA procedures can be complex and time-consuming and may significantly delay the approval of forest management plans. Once adopted, these plans are binding on all forest uses, whether public or private.

Forest management plans for protected areas must be aligned with the designation and conservation objectives of the protected area. This means that where a forest management plan was already in place prior to the designation of a protected area, the plan must be revised accordingly. These revisions are typically carried out by a private company engaged by the landowner and must be approved by the competent ministry. This process may involve both administrative and financial burdens for the landowner.

Forest management plans in protected areas are subject to annual review, during which local or national authorities, together with protected area administrators and, where applicable, the central public authorities for environment and forestry, must establish or update specific measures for the conservation or sustainable use of natural resources. These measures are further detailed in the protected area management plans and are binding on forest landowners and managers.

In addition, if the state seeks to designate new protected areas on privately owned land, it must either obtain the landowner's consent or offer compensation.[63] Where protection is established with the owner's consent, no compensation is granted. This legal structure may discourage the voluntary inclusion of forests in protected areas.

In the areas under integral protection (*zone de protecție integrală)* within national and natural parks, certain conservation and restoration interventions are permitted. This is not limited to forest ecosystems. These interventions include activities aimed at the ecological reconstruction of natural ecosystems and the rehabilitation of inadequate or degraded ecosystems. Such interventions require prior approval by the administration of the protected area, based on a decision issued by the scientific council, and must also be authorised by the competent environmental authority.

4.1 Strategic Environmental Assessment ("**SEA**") and forest planning

As mentioned, the adoption of forest management plans, particularly those applying to protected natural areas, may be subject to SEA. SEA is required for plans and programmes that set the framework for future developments consent of projects listed under national EIA legislation (see *Rewilding in Romania: Developing Land*, section 5). It ensures that environmental considerations are integrated into strategic-level planning decisions from the outset.

The SEA procedure is distinct from, but often conducted in parallel with, EIA and Appropriate Assessment ("**AA**") processes (see *Rewilding in Romania: Developing Land*, sections 5 and 6, respectively). Whilst EIA and AA apply to individual projects (such as land development, reintroductions), SEA applies at the level of plans

Mother with calf.
Daniel Mirlea / Rewilding Europe

and programmes, such as forest management plans or protected area management plans. In practice, a forest management plan that may affect a Natura 2000 site will usually require both an SEA and an AA, and may inform subsequent EIA procedures for specific operations authorised under the plan.

When SEA applies

SEA is mandatory for plans in sectors such as forestry, land use planning, regional development, and protected area management, particularly where they may impact Natura 2000 sites or have cumulative environmental effects.

Key features of the SEA process

The SEA procedure involves the following phases:

- Screening phase, to determine whether SEA is required;[64]
- Scoping phase, to define the scope and content of the environmental report;
- Assessment of alternatives phase, including the "no action" scenario;
- Preparation of an environmental report assessing likely significant environmental effects and proposing mitigation measures;
- Public consultation phase, which includes publishing the draft plan, collecting feedback, and potentially holding a public debate;[65]
- Final decision and plan adoption, taking into account the environmental report and public input; and
- Monitoring the environmental effects of the adopted plan.

SEA procedures are overseen by the Ministry of Environment, Waters and Forests or delegated to the National Environmental Protection Agency ("**ANPM**") and local environmental protection agencies. Other relevant institutions, such as the Forestry Inspectorate and County Councils, may be involved as consultees.

What is the relevance of SEA to rewilding practitioners?

Although initiated at the level of public authorities, SEA is highly relevant for rewilding practitioners for the following reasons:

- Forest management plans shaped by SEA often define what types of restoration or species-related interventions are permitted in a landscape;
- SEA is one of the few strategic-level procedures that includes formal public consultation, offering a window for rewilding organisations to submit proposals or influence planning outcomes;
- Once adopted, these plans can be difficult and costly to amend; and
- SEA may incorporate the results of Appropriate Assessment ("**AA**") if the plan affects a Natura 2000 site.

Example:

Landowner A purchased a 13-hectare forest land in the Southern Carpathians, currently dominated by Norway spruce (Picea abies), a non-native species likely introduced several decades ago. It is now showing signs of degradation, including susceptibility to windthrow, increased pest outbreaks, and soil degradation. In fact, this stand appears to also be degrading the local ecosystem. Several native trees are showing signs of disease or stress. Landowner A aims to:

- *Fell the existing spruce stand, sell the timber, and restore the land with native species more suitable to the region's natural forest type, such as hornbeam (Carpinus betulus), sessile oak (Quercus petraea), and European beech (Fagus sylvatica);*
- *Designate part of the land as a protected area and allow for natural regeneration and to safeguard long-term ecological recovery;*
- *Address areas where native trees have been weakened by disease or competition*

with the spruce monoculture.

What are the steps that Landowner A must take to accomplish their aims?

1 Confirm land status and applicable forest management plan

Landowner A must first confirm whether the land in included in the national forest fund and what category of use it falls under (see subsection 1.2). Because the land exceeds 10 hectares, a forest management plan is required.

If a plan is already in place, it must be revised to reflect the clear-cutting of Norway spruce, the restoration with native species, the designation of areas for passive restoration, and, if applicable, the change of category.

If no plan is in place, Landowner A must commission a certified expert to prepare one and submit it for approval (see subsection 1.3).

2 Felling of Norway spruce (clear-cutting), timber sale, and authorisations

Norway spruce is listed among the species that may be clear-cut, provided no other regeneration treatment is feasible (see subsection 3.4).

In this case, Landowner may apply for clear-cutting based on (i) the degraded condition of the stand; (ii) its ecological mismatch with the site; (ii) restoration goals outlined in the forest management plan; (iii) as a standard silvicultural treatment for fast-growing species under current norms.

The requirements to execute the clear-cutting are the following:

- It must need to be included in the forest management plan;
- The operation must be authorised through a wood exploitation permit justified by forest management plan (stand replacement/restoration goal), issued by the territorial forestry office (see subsection 1.5); and
- It must be carried out by a certified forestry company, as Landowner A cannot legally perform these works themselves.

The sale of the resulting spruce timber is covered by the wood exploitation permit, providing the cut was lawfully justified and authorised. To sell wood-based materials (NACE code 4683), an operating permit from the city hall is necessary. However, for the authorisation of certain activities, some city halls might require additional approvals or permits.

3 Reforestation with native species

After harvesting, the land must be restored in line with the site's fundamental natural type forest; the target composition defined in the plan, and practices favouring climate-resilience, biodiversity-supportive species, such as the ones Landowner plans to bring back to the site (see subsections 3.1 and 3.2).

Landowner A may resort to artificial regeneration (planting) or natural (passive), depending on what is in the plan. In this case, both options are intended to be included in the revised plan.

Landowner A must enter a forestry service contract with a certified legal entity to execute all works.

4 Address forest health and disease

In the areas where remaining native trees are weakened or diseased, Landowner A must notify the Forest Guard who may impose mandatory sanitary measures. Any removal of affected trees must be included in the forest plan, carried out by a certified operator, and be documented appropriately.

5 Designate part of the land as a protected area (for more details, see *Rewilding in Romania: Obtaining and Protecting Wild Land*, section 5)

To formally protect part of the land, Landowner A must prepare a proposal to submit to the relevant authority. The proposal needs to show scientific evidence of the ecological value of the area to be designated as well as other documentation

relevant to the type of protected area. Landowner A shall contact the relevant authorities and seek technical and legal advice.

It may be the case that both Landowner A and the state agree that the area has significant ecological value to earn protected status. In this case, Landowner A may give consent to the competent authority to create such area. In this case, because the designation is voluntary, there is no compensation due by the state (see section).

ANNEX

Legal framework

1. Law no. 331 of December 20, 2024, on the Forest Code ("**Forest Code**")
2. Government Emergency Ordinance no. 57/2007 on the regime of protected natural areas, conservation of natural habitats, wild flora and fauna; ("**GEO 57/2007**")
3. The Technical Rules regarding the development of forestry facilities, the amendment of their provisions and the change of the land use category from the forest fund as approved by Order no. 766/2018 ("**Order no. 766/2018**")
4. Technical Rules regarding the compositions, schemes and technologies for forest regeneration and afforestation of degraded lands, as approved by Order no. 2533/2022 ("**Order 2533/2022**")
5. Guide of Good Practice on compositions, schemes and technologies for forest regeneration and afforestation of degraded lands, as approved by Order no. 2533/2022 ("**Guide on forest regeneration and afforestation**")
6. Technical Rules on the care and management of stands, as approved by Order no. 2534/2022 ("**Order 2534/2022**")
7. Technical Rules on the choice and application of treatments, as approved by Order no. 2535/2022 ("**Order 2535/2022**")
8. Technical Rules on forest management as approved by Order no. 2536/2022 ("**Technical Rules on forest management**")
9. Instructions on the terms, methods, and periods of collection, removal, and transport of wood material, as approved by Order no. 1540/2011 ("**Order 1540/2011**")

End Notes:

1. Law no. 331 of December 20, 2024 on the Forest Code, available here.
2. The main diplomas composing the Forestry regime are the Forest Code, the Law on Hunting and Protection of Game no. 407/2006, GEO no. 57/2007 on the regime of protected natural areas, conservation of natural habitats, wild flora and fauna.
3. Article 1(1) of the Forest Code.
4. Article 2(1) of the Forest Code.
5. Article 2(2) of the Forest Code.
6. Article 1(3) of the Forest Code.
7. Article 62 of the Forest Code
8. Article 62(3) of the Forest Code.
9. Article 62(1a) of the Forest Code.
10. Article 8(4) of the Technical Norms on Forest Management, of September 28, 2022, approved by Order no. 2536/2022.
11. Article 62(1b) of the Forest Code.
12. Art. 63(2) of the Forest Code.
13. Article 63(5) of the Forest Code. An exception applies to productive forests containing fast-growing species such as poplar and willow, for which the validity may range from 5 to 10 years.
14. The Technical Rules regarding the development of forestry facilities, the amendment of their provisions and the change of the land use category from the forest fund as approved by Order no. 766/2018 ("Order no. 766/2018").
15. Article 2 f) of Annex 1 of Order no. 766/2018.
16. Art. 2 of Annex 1 of Order no. 766/2018. There are biotic and abiotic destabilising factors which can negatively influence the balance of a forest ecosystem. **Biotic factors** include living organisms that can cause damage to forests, such as harmful insects, diseases caused by fungi, bacteria, or viruses, and animals that can consume or destroy forest vegetation. **Abiotic factors** are non-living elements that can affect forests, such as extreme weather conditions (storms, droughts, floods), pollution, forest fires, and climate change.
17. Article 103(1) of the Forest Code.
18. Articles 101 to 120 of the Forest Code.
19. Article 142 of the Forest Code.
20. Article 94 para (1h) of the Forest Code.
21. Article 5 of Government Ordinance no. 26/2000. NGOs carrying out environmental protection activities may register under NACE code 9499.
22. Under Romanian law, to build within the forest fund, the land must be removed from the forest fund. As a rule, removing lands from the forest fund is prohibited, with few exceptions provided by law – building a house or leisure facilities, exploitation of mineral resources, etc.
23. Fire protection duties are regulated by Law no. 307/2006 on fire protection and Regulation on the management of emergency situations as result of forest fires, as approved by Order no. 1475/2006.
24. The authorisation will provide the maximum duration of harvesting, ranging from 2 to 7 months/year.
25. The authorisation provides the volume of wood to be harvested, ranging from under 300 m3 to over 1000 m3 in case of grassland zones, respectively from under 500 m3 to over 3500 m3 in case of hill and mountain areas.
26. Article 73 and 75 of the Forest Code.

27. Technical Rules regarding the compositions, schemes and technologies for forest regeneration and afforestation of degraded lands, as approved by Order no. 2533/2022 ("Order 2533/2022").
28. Guide of Good Practice on compositions, schemes and technologies for forest regeneration and afforestation of degraded lands, as approved by Order no. 2533/2022 ("Guide on forest regeneration and afforestation").
29. Article 23 of the Forest Code.
30. Article 23(2d)(2e)(2f) of the Forest Code.
31. Article 23(3) of the Forest Code.
32. Article 73 of the Forest Code.
33. Article 73(1) of the Forest Code and endnote 28.
34. Article 2 of the Guide on forest regeneration and afforestation.
35. Article 3 of Order no. 2533/2022.
36. See endnote 28. Note that General academic studies are not applicable in this context.
37. Article 4(4) of Order 2533/2022. These must comply with Romanian legal norms, including the Guide of Good Practices and relevant specialised studies prepared by national or local forestry authorities.
38. However, native poplar, willow, acacia stands (*arboretele de plopi indigeni, de salcie, de salcâm*) as well as reeds (*zăvoaiele*) may be regenerated by shoots coming out of the stumps (*regimul crângului*) (i.e. cutting a young branch developing from a root or stem of woody plant and planting it on the land subject to regeneration).
39. Article 88 of the Forest Code.
40. Article 24 of the Forest Code.
41. This is a classification used for forests located at altitudes between approximately 600 and 1,400 metres.
42. See endnote 28.
43. Idem.
44. Idem.
45. Idem.
46. Article 2(a)(b) of Order 2533/2022.
47. These obligations are set out in various legal instruments, including Order 2533/2022, which also provides technical rules for forest regeneration and the preparation of forest management plans.
48. Article 3(6) of the Guide on forest regeneration and afforestation (see note 28). Please find below a link to the National Strategy to adapt to climate change of the Romanian Government.
49. See link above (endnote 49).
50. See endnote 28.
51. Article 3(10) of Order 2533/2022.
52. Article 10((1)(5) of Order 2533/2022.
53. Article 6(i) of the Forest Codeand article 27 of the Technical Norms on Forest Management. The currently effective plans are available on the website of the Ministry of Environment, here.
54. Article 27(3) of the Technical Normes on Forests Management.
55. Article 9(1) of the Technical Rules on the choice and application of treatments, as approved by Order no. 2535/2022 ("**Order 2535/2022**").
56. Article 9(2) of Order 2535/2022.
57. Idem.

58. Article 1(2) of Order no. 1112/2018 (see note 8 above).
59. Article 71(5) of the Forest Code.
60. Article 71(2) of the Forest Code and article 9(4) of Order 2535/2022.
61. Article 71(2) of the Forest Code.
62. Government Decision no. 1076/2004, which transposes Directive 2001/42/EC (the SEA Directive).
63. Article 26 of GEO 57/2007.
64. This determination is made based on criteria listed in Annex I of GD 1076/2004.
65. Article 12 of GD 1076/2004.

Contact Us

More information about rewilding and the issues addressed in this guidance note is available on The Lifescape Project and Rewilding Europe websites.

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