

## HAFL Master's Thesis Abstract

*Year:* 2013

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*English Title:* **Structural changes in Swiss private forests – case study in the canton of Bern**

*English Summary:*

In the past, forest owners have mostly been also farmers. Structural changes nowadays lead to a decreasing number of farms. At the same time, forest surface is increasing. This development leads to the assumption that there must also be changes in the socio-cultural structure of forest owners. New owners with a lower relation to agriculture and the traditional connected knowledge about forestry could gain importance.

The questions are, to which extend those urban owners are important in Switzerland, how their requests to and demands on forests change, as well as the influence of this development on forest management. In this thesis, “urban” was primarily defined through the relation to agriculture. The attempt to find other characteristics for a meaningful grouping was unsuccessful. Beside urbanization, the strong parcelling is an important issue; the average forest holding is about 1.4ha. It is often subdivided into smaller lots. This is a major challenge for a sustainable forestry and requires adapted management strategies.

If you want to understand the decisions, respectively the motivation of forest owners, it is important to know the framework conditions. On the one hand, legislation sets a fundamental framework. The Swiss forest area is protected by a number of regulations. Beside the federal and cantonal forest laws, the Constitution and the Spatial planning Act have to be mentioned. On the other hand, different factors like forest functions or wood prices can influence forest owners' decisions.

To get a database, 1000 forest owners had been asked about their forest ownership and their behaviour by a postal questionnaire. Additionally three cantonal foresters were interviewed. The majority of forest owners are still full-time and part-time farmers living quite close to their forests. But the forest is normally no source for income anymore. If any, it is just a small additional earning. This has strong effects on the forest management.

Timber utilization decreases in importance whereas idealistic values like leisure, recreation or environmental protection gain importance. Many times, firewood is the only utilization. With increasing urbanization of the forest owners, the danger of losing the attachment to the forest might increase. To nevertheless ensure sustainable management, consultation and support by third parties, like foresters, is becomes increasingly important. It is necessary to keep in mind that urban owners have different requests than agricultural forest owners. They could have a lack of basic

knowledge. It is necessary that all involved parties work hand in hand and are open-minded towards new approaches and management strategies.

*Keywords:* Private forests, structural changes, urban forest-owners, forest management, Switzerland

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