



## Factsheet

November 2023

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# Sustainability of Swiss wood

**Swiss forests are managed sustainably and in a near-natural way so that they can fulfil all their functions and provide services. The enforcement authorities have wide-ranging powers to ensure that forest legislation is applied throughout the country (comprehensive enforcement). The risk in Switzerland of illegal wood harvesting is therefore negligible.**

This factsheet provides an overview of the legal requirements for forest management and wood use and gives a brief presentation of the wood labels used in Switzerland.

## Forest management and wood use in Switzerland

### Swiss legislation on forests ensures that forests are managed sustainably

The Swiss forest must be managed according to the principles of sustainability. For example, the forest must be conserved in its area and spatial distribution (deforestation ban) and no environmentally hazardous substances such as fertilisers may be applied. Sustainable forest use is regulated by the Swiss Forest Act (ForA, SR 921.0) and the more detailed Forest Ordinance (ForO, SR 921.01). These statutory bases form the **framework legislation** for all activities related to forest management and wood harvesting in Swiss forests.

- Forest Act (ForA): [SR 921.0 – Federal Act of 4 October 1991 on Forest \(admin.ch\)](#)
- Forest Ordinance (ForO): [SR 921.01 – Ordinance of 30 November 1992 on Forest \(admin.ch\)](#)

Any person who wishes to fell trees requires a **permit issued by the forestry service** (Art. 21 ForA). The cantons draw up planning and management regulations (Art. 20 ForA) and their forestry services ensure that these are complied with throughout their territory (Art. 50 and 51 ForA).

The law does not allow the Confederation to raise duties or levies on wood harvesting. No customs duties are raised on the export of wood and wood products in Switzerland.

### Swiss forest legislation ensures comprehensive application

The cantonal forestry services are responsible for oversight of sustainable wood harvesting and near-natural forest management. The Confederation and the cantons enforce the Forest Act (Arts 49 and 50 ForA). The cantons ensure that their **forest services are appropriate and cover the whole of their territory**. They employ qualified foresters and forestry experts with tertiary-level education to manage the forest areas (Art. 51 ForA). The cantons enact planning and management regulations; in doing so, they take into account the requirements of wood supply, near-natural silviculture and the protection of nature and cultural heritage (Art. 20 para. 2 ForA). The Confederation supervises enforcement of the Act (Art. 49 ForA); the Federal Office for the Environment FOEN is responsible for this task. Offences and contraventions of the Forest Act may be prosecuted (Art. 42 and 43 ForA).

## Forest policy

The Confederation's forest policy creates a favourable framework that allows the forest to fulfil its diverse functions for society, the economy, the environment and the climate. It provides a basis for sustainable, efficient and innovative forest management.

## Forest protection

The Swiss forest is exposed to numerous hazards. Harmful organisms, storms, pressure by snow, forest fires and pollutants are just as much a part of this as climate change. The Confederation monitors these hazards and initiates measures to prevent and address them. Its activities are aligned with developments abroad and coordinated at national level with the cantons and other players.

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### In brief: Legality of wood harvesting in Switzerland

Thanks to the clear division of enforcement responsibilities and comprehensive oversight and control of cantonal forestry services, the statutory regulations on sustainable forest management and wood harvesting in Switzerland are well observed and monitored. The risk in Switzerland of illegal wood harvesting is therefore negligible.

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## Products made from Swiss wood

The Wood Resource Policy supports Switzerland's sustainable development strategy. It makes significant contributions to forest, climate, energy and regional policy and other sectoral policies, and also to the Sustainable Development Goals of the UN.

## Swiss wood

Not only do private sector certification labels contribute to ensuring the sustainable development of forests, a country's legislation and good enforcement also play a vital role, as described in the previous section. With one of the strictest laws on forest in the world, Swiss forest owners already manage their forests sustainably and observe the highest ecological standards in comparison with other countries. Or in the words of the Swiss government: "*The Swiss forest is managed sustainably thanks to the high requirements and comprehensive enforcement of statutory regulations by the cantonal forestry services. Swiss wood therefore meets the requirements of sustainable and legal wood harvesting*".<sup>1</sup>

The Confederation thus promotes the marketing and use of sustainably produced timber (Art. 34a ForA and Art. 37b ForO). It promotes the use of sustainably produced timber where appropriate in the planning, construction and operation of its own buildings and installations. When purchasing wood products, it takes account of sustainable and near-natural forest management and the aim of reducing greenhouse gas emissions (Art. 34b ForA and Art. 37c ForO).

## Timber trade regulation in Switzerland

The Ordinance on the Marketing of Timber and Timber Products (Timber Trade Ordinance, TTO, SR 814.021) was issued by the Federal Council based on the Environmental Protection Act (EPA, SR 814.01). Since 2022 it has been forbidden in Switzerland to place illegally harvested timber and products made from it onto the market. The TTO requires all market players to comply with their duty of care and to minimise the risks of illegal timber appearing on the market. They must establish, apply and regularly update a system of due diligence. The FOEN is responsible for monitoring initial distributors and traders,

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<sup>1</sup> Federal Council response of 3 February 2010 to interpellation 09.4026 on ecological criteria for timber purchasing"

while the cantons are responsible for monitoring forest owners. The TTO is legislation analogue to the EU's European Timber Regulation (EUTR 995/2010).

### **Mandatory declaration for wood and wood products in Switzerland**

Based on the Federal Act on Consumer Information (ConsumIA, SR 944.0) and the Environmental Protection Act (EPA, SR 814.01), the Federal Council issued the Ordinance on the Declaration of Wood and Wood Products (SR 944.021). This ordinance regulates the duty to declare the type and origin of wood for round timber and raw timber as well as certain timber products made from solid wood. Persons who sell wood and wood products to consumers are required to declare the type of wood and its origin (the country in which the wood was harvested). The purpose of this duty to declare is to ensure transparency for consumers.

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### **In brief: Sustainability and legality of wood traded in Switzerland**

Products made from Swiss wood are proven to come from sustainable forestry and therefore meet the requirements of legal wood harvesting.

Enforcement of the Timber Trade Ordinance and oversight and controls by the FOEN and the cantons can ensure that the risk of illegally harvested timber and its products appearing on the market is minimised.

Enforcement of the Ordinance on the Declaration of Wood and Wood Products and oversight and controls by the Federal Consumer Affairs Bureau (FCAB) create transparency for customers regarding wood type and origin.

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## Wood labels used in Switzerland

The first labels to protect forests were introduced in the 1990s. Wood labels are designed to help consumers understand wood products better by indicating how sustainable they are. The two main labels on the global market today are FSC and PEFC. In Switzerland, the Swiss Wood label has also become well established.



### Swiss wood label

The Swiss Wood Label was launched in 2009 by the umbrella organisation Lignum Holzwirtschaft Schweiz. It provides proof of the origin of Swiss wood and thus of its origin from sustainable and near-natural forest management. It certifies that wood products which bear this label consist of at least 80 per cent Swiss wood. Besides the origin of the wood, the regulations stipulate that at least 60 per cent of the manufacturing costs of the wood products must be incurred in Switzerland. This means that production complies with Swiss ecological, social and labour law standards and also generates added value, particularly in peripheral regions of Switzerland. The company-specific certificate and registration number confirm that the producer meets the requirements set by the Lignum regulations in an external inspection.

[www.holz-bois-legno.ch](http://www.holz-bois-legno.ch)



### FSC

For over 30 years, the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) has stood for responsible forest management according to the strictest guidelines. The three-chamber system, an integral part of the FSC's DNA, guarantees forest management that is environmentally and socially compatible as well as economically viable. FSC Switzerland is responsible for the Swiss FSC forest standard, which is developed in a transparent and democratic manner with all local stakeholders on an ongoing basis. The FSC attaches great importance to an above-average proportion of near-natural forest areas. Compliance with the globally applicable FSC standards is regularly checked at all stages of the product chain by independent certification bodies. This ensures that wood products with the FSC label originate from responsible forest management. [www.fsc-schweiz.ch](http://www.fsc-schweiz.ch)



### PEFC

In 1999, forestry and timber industry representatives from seventeen European countries, including Switzerland, joined together to form the Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification Schemes (PEFC). Companies in the timber industry require PEFC certification to prove that their timber products are from sustainable, PEFC-certified forest management. The certification itself must be carried out by an independent accredited certification body with the appropriate technical skills. Countries have the option of adopting their own forest standard adapted to their national situation, always in compliance with the specified minimum requirements for sustainable forest management. The PEFC label is proof that wood and wood products originate from sustainable forestry. [www.pefc.ch](http://www.pefc.ch)

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**In brief: Sustainable forestry and legal wood harvesting**

Wood products bearing the Swiss Wood, FSC or PEFC label are proven to originate from sustainable forestry and therefore also meet the requirements of legal wood harvesting.

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**Enquiries to**

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**Further information**

NB: The majority of these documents are not available in English

- [Forest policy \(admin.ch\)](#)
- [Resource policy, wood \(admin.ch\)](#)
- [Timber trade regulation in Switzerland \(admin.ch\)](#)
- [Timber declaration requirement \(admin.ch\)](#)
- [SR 921.552.1 - Ordinance of 29 November 1994 on Forest Reproductive Material \(admin.ch\)](#)
- [SR 916.20 - Ordinance of 31 October 2018 on the Protection of Plants from Particularly Harmful Organisms \(Plant Health Ordinance, PHO\) \(admin.ch\)](#)
- [SR 916.202.2 – FOEN Ordinance of 29 November 2017 on Phytosanitary Measures for the Forest \(admin.ch\)](#)
- [National law: Forestry, hunting, fishing \(admin.ch\)](#)
- [Forest protection enforcement aid \(admin.ch\)](#)
- [Deforestation and compensation enforcement aid \(admin.ch\)](#)
- [Forest and game enforcement aid \(admin.ch\)](#)
- [Enforcement of the Timber Trade Ordinance \(TTO\) \(admin.ch\)](#)
- [Storm damage manual \(admin.ch\)](#)
- [Sustainability and success monitoring in protection forests \(admin.ch\)](#)
- [Coordination of training in the forest sector \(admin.ch\)](#)
- [Forest and timber \(admin.ch\)](#)
- [2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development \(admin.ch\)](#)