



## **Project report: Flexible and result-oriented collaboration in cooperative preserves: New work processes at SaarForst**

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## **Flexible and result-oriented collaboration in cooperative preserves: New work processes at SaarForst**

A detailed report about the new forest structures in the Saarland can be found in the magazine ‚Der Wald – The Forest‘ 21/2006. The core elements of the structural changes of the federal service are the newly established business divisions and the new partitioning of the Saarland in ‚cooperative preserves‘.

After the structural decision, flow consulting with its headquarters in Celle intensely coached and accompanied the introduction process in 2006. At the beginning of the coaching, the division of zones and the personnel matters were already completed.

How was the idea of collaboration realised at SaarForst in 2006? Which obstacles are there and which are the characteristics of a functioning cooperative preserve?

### **Initial situation**

Since the structural reform in 2005, the whole area of the Saarland has been consisting of 8 cooperative preserves, 3 preserve managers are responsible for each preserve. The level of the regional services (= forestry offices) was completely omitted. In each cooperative preserve normally work at least one forestry foreman and 3 up to 5 foresters.

These new cooperative preserves have been directly controlled by the central divisions of wood and service since the structural reform in 2005.

The responsibilities within the preserves are therefore clearly defined: The preserve managers with their budgets either belong to the division „Wood“ or to the division „Service“. Thus, it is ensured that the tasks concerning „Wood“ and „Service“ are realised and directly controlled according to the strategic orientation of SaarForst and to the local market requirements.

In addition to the individual budget responsibility, the preserve managers, forestry foremen and foresters of a cooperative preserve have the following common tasks: They have to run the cooperative preserve as a ‚total mission‘ and to create the appropriate conditions for an independent teamwork of the foresters.

This means that the preserve managers of a cooperative preserve will have to control the work processes concerning the teamwork within the preserve in such a way that the foresters and forestry foremen will become able to independently organise and control parts of their work in a result-oriented way. The preserve managers will coordinate and agree (in practice usually together with the foresters) how far this self-organisation can be extended. A sufficient common planning of



the preserve managers (usually by clearly defined jobs and responsibilities written down in a book of tasks and responsibilities) is an indispensable prerequisite for an independent work of the foresters.

## **New demands on the managers**

The structural reform put the individual responsibility concerning results and the need to collaborate in the centre of work. Therefore, many managers are confronted with contradicting demands that frequently require modified views with regard to the previous work processes.

### *The level of the preserve managers*

Traditionally, the preserve managers attach a high value to the freedom of decision-making and individual organisation within their preserves. The assumed ‚right to have a say’ or ‚to interfere’ of other preserve managers is perceived as a drastic cut in this freedom.

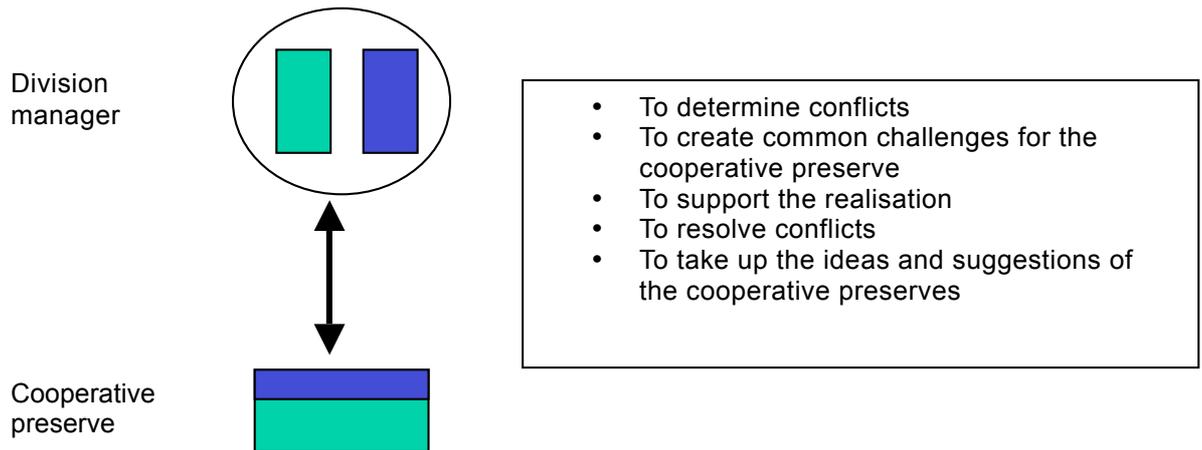
Furthermore, many preserve managers start out from the fact that they, due to the clearly defined budget responsibility, will be exclusively judged by their budget results, and that ‚soft skills’ like real collaboration neither have an important function nor are of any use to them. Many preserve managers ask themselves, why they should help the other preserve managers or divisions by ‚collaborating’ so that they ‚can make ends meet’. In their view, collaboration is only acceptable in some exceptional cases (illness, force majeure, etc.). A continuous collaboration is frequently equated with a bad work organisation on one’s own doorstep.

The following practical opinion characterises this point of view: „As a preserve manager, I have ‚my’ foresters and ‚my’ area, and I organise my preserve so that I am able to cope with my work. I only collaborate when there is an emergency (for example an illness or bad weather, etc.). In my view, collaboration and coordination with other preserve managers means additional planning and extra time for coordination and discussions. Collaboration always involves a certain risk, who knows, if I can rely on my colleagues, if I am in need of support myself.“



### *The level of the division management*

#### **Illustration 1: A close collaboration of the division managers is necessary**



The level of the division management also requires control regarding financial agreements with a simultaneous necessity to collaborate concerning the business divisions of „Wood“ and „Service“ and therefore a new and continuous management challenge has to be faced.

Thus, already in advance, both division managers have to coordinate the economic goals for ‚their‘ preserve managers in view of the feasible within a cooperative preserve: They have to determine possible job or project conflicts, to avoid work overloads due to a shortage of time in case of major projects or to take into account a corresponding support in peak periods. The following, however, is also true: If you want collaboration, some honest competition will be o.k., but do not push through your goals at the expense of others (*i.e. no „benchmarking“*).

The aim (and the challenge) is: The economic goals of the cooperative preserves must be agreed with the preserve managers in such a way that those goals are not only achieved on the expense of the other preserve managers. Simultaneously, the work should be of such a quality that even a collaboration and mutual agreements will have a certain benefit.

However, in the course of the cooperation, each serious conflict of the preserve managers may quickly become a touchstone for the collaboration of the division managers. If, for example, one of the preserve managers has not achieved the expected results, there will soon be a challenge for both division managers: The situation has to be analysed and a possible support must be jointly checked and determined, if it has any effects on the division of labour within the cooperative preserve. Such decisions will often inevitably make new arrangements with other preserves necessary and thus easily influence a variety of cooperative decisions of the foresters and preserve managers within the different preserves.



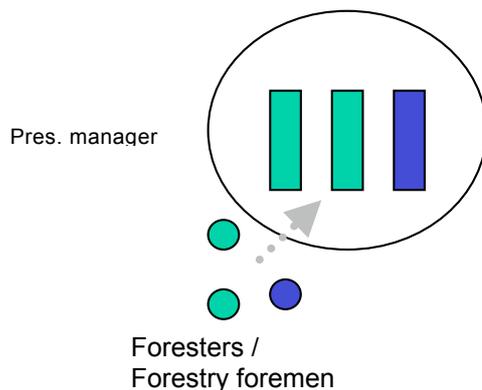
The system of the cooperative preserves, however, also offers an enormous range of opportunities like silviculture for new markets, or a pressure to perform that can be efficiently organised and oriented. Therefore, both an improvement of the existing work situation and an altered understanding of the structures with which forestry can function appropriately and successfully in practice are required.

## The practice of functioning cooperative preserves

Which are the characteristics of successful cooperative preserves? How do the preserve managers and foresters productively use the structure of these cooperative preserves in practice?

### *Transparency and general layout*

#### Illustration 2: To carry out cooperative meetings



- To pass on information
- To make arrangements
- To support each other
- To find flexible solutions
- To make plans together
- To consider everyone's know-how
- To assess the work and jobs
- To learn together

In cooperative meetings, basic information on goals and planned jobs will be exchanged and coordinated regarding their realisation. In many cases, the forestry foremen and even the foresters (depending on the project) will also participate. Information on the work and jobs to do concerning the 3 partial preserves (two "Wood" and one "Service" preserve) will be exchanged. Thus, the participants will gain a first overview. Then, it will be possible to mutually agree, how these jobs can be carried out in the most appropriate way by using the existing resources.

The aim of productive cooperative meetings is the mutual agreement, the joint planning and to take into account the expertise of all participants when making decisions. Routine work is hardly discussed, new projects, however, will be the main focus of interest.



### *Flexibility of roles and clear agreements produce specific solutions*

During the meetings, the roles of the individual participants are cast in view of the jobs to be done. The preserves may decide as freely as possible to juggle with the “Wood” and “Service” jobs, as long as the agreed budgets are kept. Special qualities or different work preferences can therefore be considered on request of the team members within the cooperative preserve. Thus, the ‘wood preserve manager’ may also carry out service tasks and the ‘service preserve manager’ is of course entitled to take on “Wood” jobs. The same applies to the foresters and to the forestry foremen.

In practice, there are now completely different models which jobs the forestry foremen have to do: Some foremen are mainly responsible of stocktaking and of pricing, others intensely work within the forestry teams, and there are also some foremen who are in charge of the planning and of the supervision of the subcontractors.

Besides the specific cast of roles within a cooperative preserve, another factor for success is that these roles once defined will, however, remain flexible: Depending on the respective project or job, it might be appropriate to change the roles, at least temporarily.

The role of the preserve managers will change as well: The better the team of foresters work independently, the less supervision of the managers on site will be necessary. Thus, they usually supervise their teams only in case of new projects or in case of very complicated jobs. This relief is, however, urgently required to manage the additional work for the now larger area.

### *Joint assessment of results*

Especially for the “Service” division, completely new tasks had to be created, and their number is still growing. There are educational tasks, for example, regarding nature conservation or tourism. The cooperative preserves often enter unknown territory. Within the cooperative preserves in which those new jobs were discussed and assessed with all project managers right from the beginning, all project participants developed transparency and responsibility concerning the economicalness of the measures.

If finished projects are jointly assessed within the cooperative preserve, realistic assessments of success will be possible and conclusions for follow-up projects can be made. Thus, the calculation and economicalness become a common subject taking advantage both of the know-how of the preserve managers and of the foresters.



## Conclusion

By means of the cooperative preserves, SaarForst follows a specific course in silviculture.

1. The economically required and market-oriented specialisation is anchored in the area concerning the divisions of "Wood" and "Service",
2. The teamwork of the foresters is introduced and their ability to work independently is developed so that it will meet the high-quality requirements of this profession.
3. The preserve managers enjoy a high degree of freedom regarding their collaboration in the area.

In 2006, the economic capacity of the cooperative preserves was so high, both for the „Wood“ and for the „Service“ division, that SaarForst, as a reconstruction company mainly based on deciduous trees, was not in need of public grants for the first time in its history, but was also able to produce a considerable profit of € 50.-/ha.