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Forest Water Governance

Challenges in Cross-Sectoral and Multi-Level Collaboration

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Abstract

Forests and water are highly interconnected with forestry practices negatively affecting forest water. In the last five decades, the Swedish state has enacted multiple policy changes and allocated significant resources towards the implementation of soft policy instruments to alleviate the effects on forest water. The European Union Water Framework Directive has further raised the legal requirements for water protection, including within the forest sector. However, these efforts have largely failed thus far. Forests and water are governed by two separate sectors, each with its own polycentric governance system and policy goals that are often conflicting. The governance mode of these systems is determined by a unique combination of policy instruments and a varying degree of centralisation depending on state involvement. Since governing forest water requires collaboration between the forest and water sector governance systems, it entails interplay between the two systems on different ecological scales. The aim of this thesis is to explore and explain the challenges related to the governance of a resource that requires cross-sectoral multi-level governance and to examine the role of the state in those interactions. The thesis includes a mix of quantitative (survey and aerial photographs) and qualitative (interviews, analysis of documents and meeting observations) research methods for investigating forest water governance across national, regional and local levels. Empirically, it involves four case studies analysing units embedded in the larger case – namely cross-sectoral governance of forest water.

The results show that within the current structure of Swedish forest water governance there is minimal cross-sectoral collaboration, with an exception being at the national level. Regional and local implementation of the outputs produced at national level relies mainly on the forest sector, with little to no coordination with water sector institutions at the regional district or river basin levels. Moreover, power asymmetries between the two sectors are transposed to the collaborative process which affects participants' capacity to influence the governance of forest water. Since the studied cases show that most of the financial resources for forest water protection are provided top-down, the role of the state in initiating and maintaining collaboration is crucial. The thesis confirms previous research findings that water governance requires a more centralised polycentric governance system. Combining polycentric governance (including at the river basin scale) with centralised state-coordination is a potential solution to problems that require cross-sectoral and multi-level governance interplay. Further inquiry into cross-sectoral governance of natural resources could develop a better understanding of how coordination in polycentric governance systems at different ecological scales could be structured to mitigate policy goal conflicts across sectors and institutional levels, thus fostering more effective governance.

Keywords

Forest water; Governance; Cross-sectoral governance; Multi-level governance; Governance mode; Collaborative governance; Natural resource management; Environmental policy; Water Framework Directive

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