Wondolleck, Julia; University of Michigan
juliaw@umich.edu
Authors: Stefania Tiziana Almazan Casali (University of Michigan-SEAS)
Julia M. Wondolleck (University of Michigan-SEAS)
Robyn Meeks (Duke University)
Nadia Vandergriff (Infarm, Berlin)
Allegra Wrocklage (Conservation Finance Network)
Xi Chen (UDC, Inc.)
Selin Nurgun (University of Michigan)

Title: Seeking synergies to advance sustainable forest governance in Eastern Europe and Russia: Insights from IUCN’s Forest Law Enforcement & Governance (FLEG) Programme

The Boreal forests spanning Eastern Europe and North and Central Asia provide unparalleled economic, social, and environmental benefits to its rural and urban communities. Yet climate change, environmental degradation, and unsustainable management policies pose an increasing threat to this vital ecosystem, endangering both the forest resources and the communities dependent upon them for survival and economic development. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the decentralization of forestry institutions meant that each former Soviet country was responsible for establishing its own national forest management and governance systems. Each country instituted new forest management policies, yet subsistence timber extraction and internationally-driven illegal logging became common practice due to high poverty and weak institutional oversight. In 2008, the European Union, Russia, six Eastern European countries, the World Bank, WWF, and IUCN, launched the Forest Law Enforcement & Governance (FLEG) programme to combat forest crimes and transform forest governance institutions. Our study examined the IUCN’s implementation of its portion of the FLEG programme and identified key factors that facilitated its effectiveness, challenges encountered and, importantly, its institutional legacy in the region. We performed in-depth interviews with each country’s program managers to assess their activity design and implementation strategies. We reviewed all IUCN-FLEG activity reports to assess objectives, scope and outcomes. Our study found that a combination of individual country program manager characteristics, IUCN’s professional reputation and network, and unique attributes of the IUCN-FLEG programme structure and culture enabled its accomplishments. IUCN adopted a novel approach. Rather than proposing programs and reforms grounded in its expertise as an international conservation organization, it instead sought synergies between its own goals, interests and capacities and those of local/regional communities and national governments. IUCN program coordinators leveraged their professional networks and expertise to work collaboratively with communities and policymakers in a shared endeavor. In so doing, they accomplished projects that were embraced at community and national levels in each country while, at the same time, advancing IUCN’s sustainable forestry goals. The IUCN-FLEG experience provides an example of an internationally sponsored program that managed to overcome contextual barriers to implement locally relevant, and nationally impactful, institutional reform.