

Central Highlands have a population of 4.6 million, and an area of 5.5 million hectares; and 3.1 million hectares of which are covered with forests representing 35.3% of Vietnam's forest area. As of 1996, the forest protection task has been done well by provincial governments, strong measures taken and many achievements gained. However, results in recent years are limited when the army of rangers failed to maintain the forest area. The area of natural forest reduces by some 6% a year, higher than the area of newly planted forest; and the area contracted out to individuals reached some 76% of the planned target. Up to now, some 35% of districts on the Highlands haven't worked out and implemented effectively the task of protecting various kinds of forests (water-conservation forest, exploited forest, and specialized forest). Cases of illegal exploitation of forest for wood increased by some 6% a year while the area of forest burned accidentally or intentionally is on the increase. In protecting and caring forests, there is no cooperation among relevant authorities and between forestry companies of the central and local levels. At present, provincial governments on Central Highlands couldn't estimate the effectiveness of the forest protecting task in order to introduce new measures and methods more suitable to current conditions.

Generally, local authorities and the army of rangers, especially at the commune level, can't prevent illegal exploitation of forest. Inspections and investigations are not carried regularly and violations are not dealt with properly. In many communes and districts, this task is considered as a mere formality and there is no information about this problem.

These shortcomings come from the following causes:

- Forest protecting strategies are not carried out effectively. Many local authorities consider it as an exclusive task for forestry authority and ranger offices and tend to refrain from intervening in this task. There is no legal

regulation on duties, responsibility and rights for local authorities in cooperating with ranger offices to protect forests and punish violations.

- Mechanism for contracting forest lots out to individuals is not suitable to various kinds of forests and contractors. Limits on areas contracted are low compared with

illegally. They receive no preferential treatment although their job is dangerous. Moreover, they receive almost no cooperation and support from local authorities and residents.

- Poor managerial mechanism of the forestry authority makes units of rangers who directly protect forests reactive and dependent too much on

Causes of Deforestation in Central Highlands

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actual conditions, especially in forests near to residential areas where danger of illegal deforestation is high. Product division terms in contracts fail to encourage contractors to protect and care the forests. Knowledge of contractors is limited (statistics show that some 40% of them haven't finished primary education; 62% know nothing about techniques of caring forest.)

- Ranger offices lack expertise and organizational skills. Many offices need consolidation. Most of them lack necessary facilities and equipment. Rangers have no authority to deal with persons who exploit, transport and sell wood

their superior bodies. And as a result, they become passive and reluctant to carry out decisions made by their superiors.

To deal with these causes of deforestation, provincial governments should adopt sets of measures that aim at improving working conditions and incomes of rangers, encouraging local residents to protect and develop forests, and disseminating knowledge about forestry and forest protection for one thing, and for another, beefing up the organization of ranger offices and implementation of plans on forest protection, and making regulations on responsibility of local authorities for this task ■