



ForestCom
for better nature and life

Public Report

USFS Combating Illegal Logging
2020-2025



Combating Illegal Logging in Ukraine



ForestCom
for better nature and life

Since **2020**, the **NGO ForestCom** has been implementing a long-term project **with the support of the U.S. Forest Service International Programs and Trade** to address illegal logging and strengthen forest governance in Ukraine. The initiative brings together civic actors, environmental experts, and state institutions to improve transparency, apply remote sensing technologies, and increase accountability in the forestry sector.

The project combines field-based forest monitoring, expert research, policy advocacy, and public engagement to help protect biodiversity and reduce forest-related crime. **With more than five years of implementation**, ForestCom has adapted its activities to address the challenges in wartime, expanding its work to include analysis of war-related forest damage and opportunities for sustainable forest restoration.

This partnership has enabled the development of new tools, methods, and networks for civil society to play an active role in ensuring the **long-term resilience of Ukraine's forests**.

Institutional activities of the NGO «ForestCom» were supported by the U.S. Forest Service International Programs and Trade.

I am pleased to present the results of the "Combating Illegal Logging in Ukraine" project, implemented by ForestCom with US Forest Service support over five years. This comprehensive effort has yielded significant results across multiple sectors, strengthening Ukraine's capacity to protect its forest resources and advance sustainable forestry practices.

Key Achievements

Society

ForestCom significantly raised national awareness about illegal logging, particularly in the Carpathians, transforming public perception and mobilizing citizens as forest guardians. We established effective reporting systems connecting concerned citizens directly with ForestCom experts, enabling rapid response to violations. Our interventions kept approximately 5,000 cubic meters of illegal timber from entering the market. We equipped more than 2,000 participants across 18 regions with the skills to identify and report suspicious logging activities and biodiversity conservation efforts. In addition, we provided eco-education lessons for more than 500 kids.

Government Agencies

ForestCom provided critical expertise to support comprehensive forestry sector reform, enhancing transparency and accountability. We contributed substantially to the Forest Strategy 2035 and Economic National Strategy 2030, embedding sustainable principles into national planning. Our advocacy resulted in strengthened criminal charges for illegal logging and supported the development of the Deep Green Platform, the innovative alert system. This revolutionized forest monitoring, providing unprecedented transparency just before the active war started. ForestCom developed and transferred more than 20 reports to various government agencies supporting comprehensive decision-making processes.

Law Enforcement, Forest Service, and National Park Rangers

ForestCom delivered specialized training and consultation to more than 150 law enforcement officials and rangers, enhancing their capacity to build effective cases against illegal logging operations and nature protection. This collaboration resulted in 145 successful investigations and estimated financial damages of over 1 million dollars. These efforts have improved the prosecution rate for forest crimes and established important legal precedents in the region.

Forest Owners

ForestCom established regular monitoring of 10 million acres of forest cover changes, with a special focus on protecting more than 1,000 old-growth forest sites in the Carpathians. We examined nearly 25,000 acres on more than 300 forest sites. Through stakeholder dialogue, we've bridged the gap between public expectations and forestry practices, offering alternative solutions that satisfy both conservation and economic objectives.

Science

ForestCom developed innovative methods for identifying illegally logged forests using remote sensing technologies combined with field verification protocols. We created the first comprehensive methodology for documenting forest destruction by Russian occupiers in Northern and Eastern Ukraine and Crimea, and since 2014, we have documented approximately 15,000 hectares of affected forest land. These scientific advances have been integrated into university curricula, transferring knowledge and ensuring sustainability.

Conclusion

The "Combating Illegal Logging in Ukraine" project has transformed Ukraine's approach to forest protection. Our comprehensive project activities reached more than 14 million people nationwide and internationally. By addressing multiple dimensions—from community awareness to policy reform—ForestCom established sustainable mechanisms that will endure beyond the project's conclusion.

We extend our sincere gratitude to the U. S. Forest Service for their support and to all Ukrainian partners who collaborated in this important work. Together, we secured a foundation for the sustainable management of Ukraine's magnificent forests for current and future generations.

Respectfully submitted,

Dmytro Karabchuk
Executive Director
ForestCom



ForestCom
for better nature and life

About Us

NGO “ForestCom” was founded in **February 2020** with an intention to organize a professional team of supporters ready to play an important role in **the protection of valuable forests, improve the state of the environment, promote sustainable development and management of forestry, raise environmental awareness and living standards of communities**, through the implementation of the best available initiatives.

Our community includes **experts in forestry, ecology, forest monitoring, law, sociology, urban forestry, urban landscaping, environmental education, community development, politics, and other related fields.**

We develop and implement initiatives to protect unique natural habitats, strengthen sustainable green practices, promote sustainable development, and develop national policy to build the country in which we want to live.

Since our founding in 2020, our team has grown.

We develop and implement **democratic ideas for a more transparent society, and sustainable use of forest resources and ecosystem services** that contribute to better protection of unique natural places.



Forest Monitoring



Forest Guard is ForestCom's **core initiative to combat illegal logging** through a combination of **citizen engagement** and **expert investigation**. The team conducts **satellite-based forest cover monitoring**, **verifies changes on the ground**, and provides **legal and technical support** to activists and law enforcement.

By **consulting with local communities** and **training stakeholders**, the lab strengthens public oversight of forest resources and supports landmark cases against forest crimes.

Timber Identification Lab

ForestCom's **Timber Identification Lab** works to expose the illegal timber trade by **scientifically verifying the origin and species of wood samples**.

Using internationally accepted **forensic methods**—including **wood anatomy**, **spectroscopy**, **DNA fingerprinting**, and **isotopic analysis** — the lab determines timber quality, species, and possible illegality.

In close cooperation with law enforcement, forensic institutions, and research partners, **the lab supports investigations into timber fraud and illegal logging**.



Urban Forestry



Urban forestry and landscaping focus on the **restoration, preservation, and sustainable development of urban forests and landscapes**. ForestCom implements public projects that improve ecological conditions in cities, expand green recreational areas, and promote nature-based solutions to urban challenges.

Urban BioBird engages **young people in the protection and enhancement** of biodiversity in urban environments. Through collaboration with schools and youth groups in the L'viv region, the project combines education with action.

Forest Restoration Center

The **Forest Restoration Center** leads efforts to **reconnect people with nature** through collaborative forest and tree restoration projects.

By engaging citizens, foresters, scientists, and public authorities, the Center promotes natural regeneration, biodiversity, and climate resilience.

Our work includes **assessing forest health**, promoting **eco-friendly tourism** in protected areas, and involving communities and volunteers in **hands-on habitat recovery**.

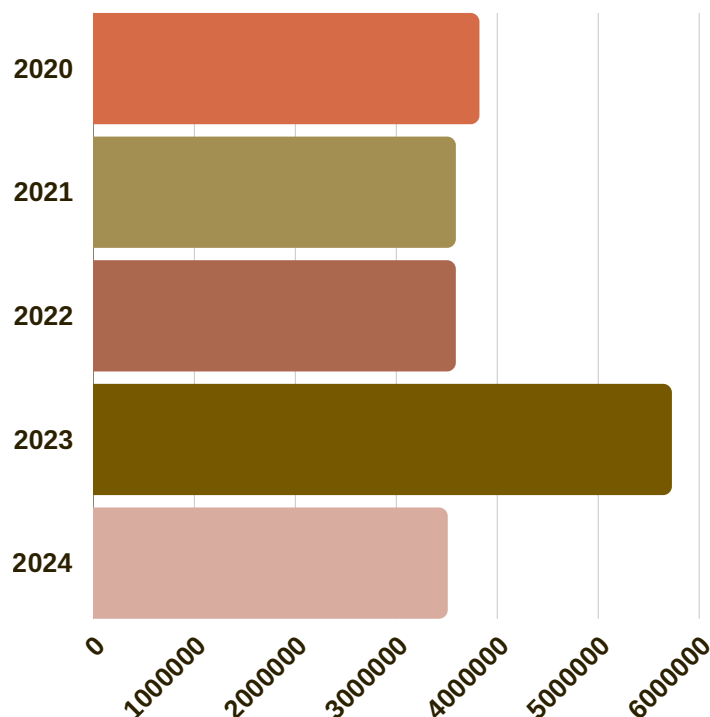


Independent Forest Monitoring by ForestCom (2020–2024)

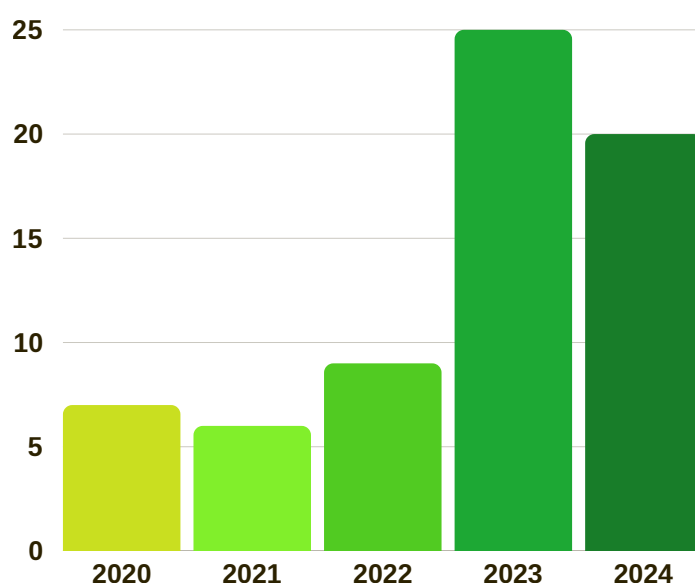
Number of forest hectares independently monitored for illegal logging:

The **method of area calculation** was improved in **2024**. Although the reported numbers appear smaller this year, there has been an **actual increase** in the frequency and area of monitoring. This is due to a **shift in the methodology** for calculating the monitored area.

Previously, we considered the entire territory to be monitored, whereas starting this year, we **only calculate the forested area that we actively monitored**.



Number of illegal logging cases submitted to law enforcement investigators:





ForestCom
for better nature and life



Violation category:

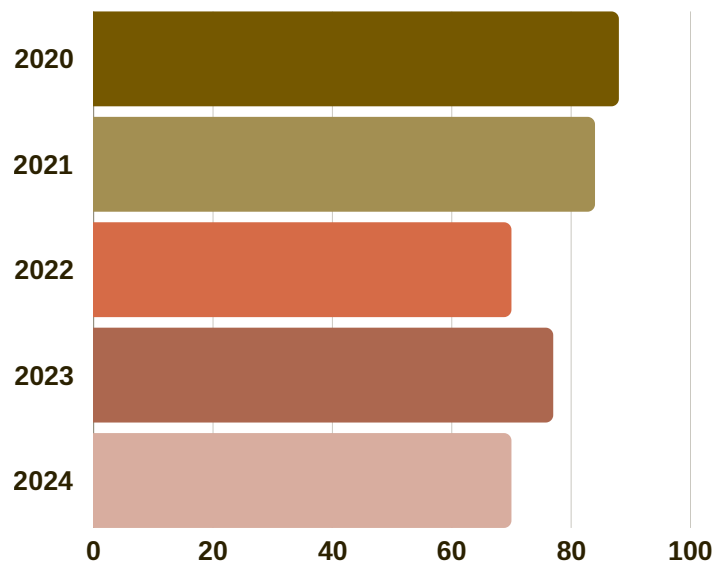
Illegal logging (Article 246 of the Criminal Code)

Includes cases when logging tickets were not found in the state register or could not be provided by the forest authority.

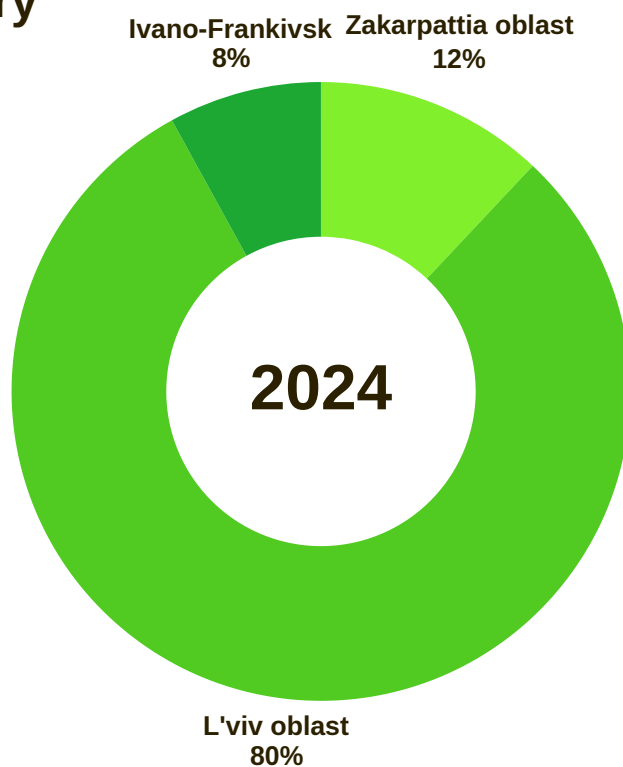
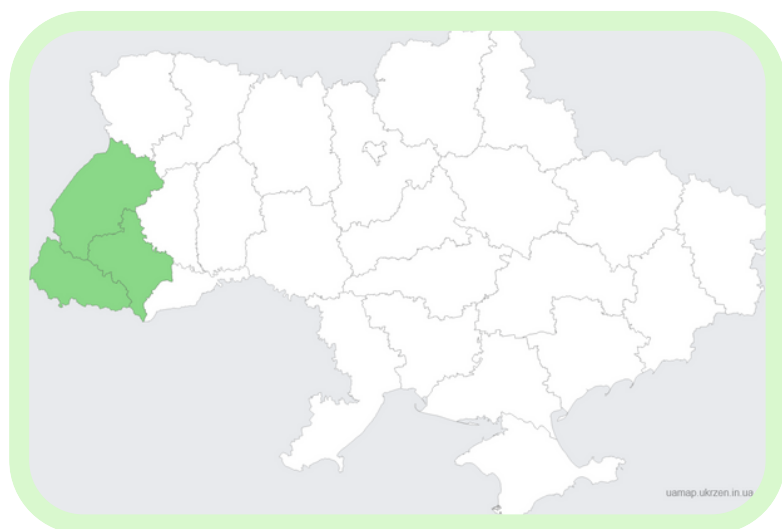
Neglect of Duties (Article 364) and Abuse of Office (Article 367)

Includes regulatory violations such as logging unapproved territories and trees, unmarked border, missing stump stamps, overcutting and logging debris.

Percent of illegal logging cases opened by law enforcement:



Forested areas/regions of the country where cases were submitted for:



Number of participants in organized meetings:



5627

Number of trainings:

107



Number of consultations provided:

447



2020

The Starting Point

2020

2025



©ForestCom

Building Forest Intelligence: DeepForest System

ForestCom launched the **first prototype** of *DeepForest*, an independent alert system designed to detect illegal logging and deforestation. To continue its development, ForestCom partnered with the NGO "Authorities Monitoring Center", the **Space Research Institute** of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine (NASU) and the **State Space Agency of Ukraine (SSAU)**.

Together, they developed the **Deep Green Ukraine** project — a next-generation alert system for public authorities in **Kyiv, L'viv, Zakarpattia, and Odesa**. The project won the **Open Data Challenge** and was piloted in the Kyiv region.

Strategic Forest Policy Contributions

ForestCom experts actively contributed to the development of national forest policy by participating in the drafting of the **State Forest Management Strategy 2035**, led by the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Natural Resources of Ukraine.

ForestCom also contributed forest-related focus areas to the **Vision for the Development of the Ukrainian Economy**, which formed the foundation of the **National Economic Strategy 2030**.

Національна
економічна
стратегія 2030

Візія • Вектори • Імплементація



©ForestCom

Forest Law Monitoring and Violations

Through its monitoring efforts, ForestCom identified several forest law violations in 2020, including:

Unauthorized logging with estimated losses of **59,843 UAH** and a clear-cutting of **3 ha** in a protected forest reserve, likely in violation of environmental laws.

2021 Spreading Influence

2020

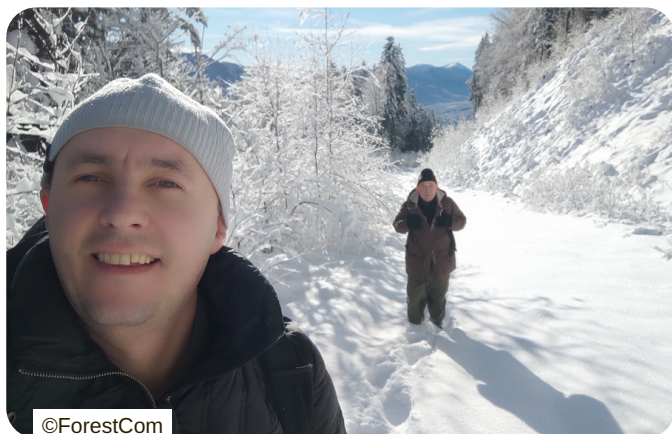
2025



©ForestCom

BioBird in Action: 188 Young Minds Inspired

Through the Urban BioBird Project, ForestCom expert **Taras Kharachko** conducted interactive lessons on winter bird conservation in four L'viv region schools — **Zhovtantsi, Artasiv, Kolodentsi, and Sudova Vyshnia**. With **188** children participating, the excitement was so great that regular classrooms couldn't hold everyone. Taras presented in school gyms, transforming them into lively spaces of biodiversity education.



©ForestCom

III Timber: Forensic Science for Forest Justice

In 2021, ForestCom's forensic forestry expert **Leonid Osadchuk** conducted five on-site investigations at the request of Ukrainian law enforcement agencies. His expert studies are now part of active criminal proceedings, bringing scientific clarity to courtrooms.

Key investigations included the assessment of illegal logging and abuse of office by forestry officials in **Radekhivske (L'viv region)** and **Yasinyanske (Zakarpattia region)** forestries and the evaluation of urban tree damage in L'viv, revealing dangerous management techniques resulting in a tree fall incident in one crowded urban setting.



©ForestCom

Protecting Forests on All Fronts

ForestCom submitted **26 reports** on behalf of public activists — each detailing significant violations, some involving **200 m³ of illegally harvested wood worth ~2 million UAH (~\$80,000)**. Experts continuously monitored thousands of hectares of high-value forests using remote sensing.

Additionally, ForestCom conducted **16 expert studies** at the request of top national bodies including the **Security Service of Ukraine (SBU)**, **State Bureau of Investigation (DBR)**, **Prosecutor General's Office**, and **State Customs Service**.

2022 Despite the War

2020

2025



VOLUMES OF ILLEGAL LOGGING
DOCUMENTED BY FOREST USERS
OF UKRAINE IN 2019-2021
(BASED ON PUBLIC REQUESTS)

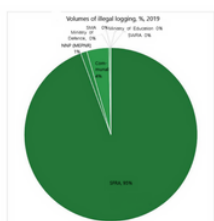


Fig. 3. Distribution of documented volumes of illegal logging by departmental subdivisions (group of forest users in 2019 (in % of the total volume of detected illegal logging)).

Volumes of officially documented illegal logging in 2020
In 2020, 14,342 cubic meters of illegal logging were detected at enterprises subordinate to the State Forest Resources Agency, in communal forestry enterprises 1366 cubic meters of illegal logging were recorded, in the institutions of the NBU of MPNR - 2048 cubic meters, forestry enterprises of the Ministry of Defense - 279 cubic meters, in institutions of Ministry of Education - 43 cubic meters, private forest users - 25 cubic meters (see Fig. 4 and 5).

* zero values indicate that no illegal logging was officially detected in these forest users

ANALYTICAL REPORT

14

Uncovering the Truth: Ukraine's First National Study on Illegal Logging

In a landmark effort, ForestCom conducted and published a pioneering report entitled

"The Scope of Illegal Logging Documented by Forest Users of Ukraine in 2019–2021 (Based on Public Requests)" — the first study of its kind in independent Ukraine.

What makes it historic?

Unlike previous statistics that relied solely on data from the State Forest Resources Agency, this report included all forest owners and users — across state, municipal, and private sectors.

Healing Among the Trees: Forest Bathing for Displaced Ukrainians

Forest bathing is a proven way to restore emotional balance, reduce stress, and reconnect with the natural world. In 2022, ForestCom introduced this method to **internally displaced people from Donetsk region**, now living in the Zolochiv territorial community.

The group hiked to the natural monument Mount Vapnyarka, guided by **ForestCom's expert Taras Kharachko** and **Yuriy, a ranger from Northern Podillia National Nature Park**. Along the way, participants traced wild animal tracks, breathed in fresh, frosty forest air and listened to local legends.



©ForestCom

New Generation Rangers: Training Program Tailored for the Wild

In 2022, together with the **Ministry of Ecology and the State Environmental Academy**, ForestCom customized the "classical" ranger curriculum to meet the needs of **Northern Podillia National Nature Park** in L'viv region. This provided a more flexible modular format — 3 blocks over 3 weeks, totalling 38 hours. In this way, the rangers could learn without leaving their posts for an extended period of time. The training took place in Brody, L'viv region and brought **together 19 participants**, including rangers and field staff, and **10 experts from ForestCom, the Academy, NGO Nature Conservancy Group, and the Red Cross**.



©ForestCom

2020

2025

In April 2023, ForestCom confronted a serious threat to Ukraine's forests — the spread of invasive tree species that destabilize ecosystems and endanger native biodiversity. Through a widely supported **open letter** to the **Ministry of Environmental Protection and Natural Resources**, ForestCom demanded decisive reform in how Ukraine manages forestry regeneration. Key demands were to ban the forest reproduction of **16 invasive tree species**, to initiate mandatory inspections of forest users to enforce proper environmental impact assessments, and to create an open registry of enterprises cultivating or harvesting invasive species. The initiative was backed by **18 stakeholders** — including major environmental NGOs like **WWF-Ukraine**, and national parks such as **Cheremoshsky and Homilshanski Forests**.



Видатий лист природоохоронно-громадськості
Міністерстві намісту довідки
та природних ресурсів України
Руслану СТРІЛЦЬ
03035, м. Київ
вул. Матроношин
Василя Литвицького

Шановний Руслане Олександровичу!

[illegible]

насіння із зазначеним терміном описаної діяльності. Забезпечити шорічне звітання таких підприємств перед Міндовілля (навесні та восени перед початком проведення лісовідновних робіт) щодо продажу/передачі сировинного матеріалу та наслідки (накопичених вистіг).

14 квітня 2023 року

Знакомлю -
Голова правління ГО «ВІС», К.С.-С.А. Дмитро Карабін

To summarize

10. ГО "Белорусское общество развития культуры", компания Наталія Радзіва
11. ГО "Громадська ініціатива "Місто Сонця", компанія Наталія Радзіва
12. ГО "УІК "Земля Чумака", компанія директорки Матвієвської Світлани
13. ГО "Українська організація з питань екології та природоохоронної освіти"
14. ГО "Запорожжя без сміття", Ірина Калюша
15. ГО "Екологічний центр Європрус", Олег Царук
16. ГО "Пізнай", компанія директорки Марини Рейна
17. ГО "Місто мислю - ІТ-спільнота розвитку Наталія Жеремко
18. ГО "Екоцентр", Лариса Оліга
19. ГО "Центр соціального ініціатива "Теміла", компанія директорки Оліга Полюшка
20. ІС "Екологічний Фонд Програми України" (WFO-Україна), компанія директорки Віктор
21. ГО "Дунайсько-Карпатська Програма" (ДКП-Україна), керівник проекту О.В.С.С., С.С. Прокопів, та викладач "Дифузійного та біотехнічного розвитку" ДІПМ НАН України



In 2023, ForestCom uncovered another link in the chain of illicit logging, centered around **sawmills in the Carpathian Mountains** that quietly process illegally harvested timber under the guise of legality. During an inspection in the **Upper Dniester Beskids Landscape Reserve**, ForestCom experts found **unauthorized felling of white spruce with falsified orange stump markings**, imitating legal forestry tags. The area was covered with traces of recent skidding leading to nearby sawmills. Despite a report to law enforcement, the illegal operators reacted faster: the wood was processed and hidden within hours. This case highlighted **deeper systemic issues**, including possible complicity by local law enforcement.

In the face of escalating threats to Ukraine's forests, both from war and illegal logging, ForestCom launched an **eco-awareness campaign** to inform, engage, and mobilize. The campaign's flagship event was a public panel discussion titled "How War and Illegal Logging Changed the Situation of Forests in Ukraine", hosted at Media Center Ukraine – L'viv. The panel brought together activists, volunteers, experts, and members of the public, creating a platform where forest conservation and national resilience intersected.



2024

In the Sky and on the Ground

2020

2025

ForestCom Turns Citizen Tip into National Exposure

In 2023, ForestCom responded to **a tip from a local resident of Strilbychi village** about suspicious logging. Its experts quickly uncovered ongoing **illegal activities in state-managed forests of the Starosambir region**. ForestCom filed reports with police and prosecutors, and initiated public pressure through media and official meetings. This was not an isolated case — ForestCom had been tracking **illegal logging in the area since 2018**. Each year, its evidence grew stronger: one site in 2021, a tracked timber truck in 2022, seven sites exposed in 2023. In January 2024 alone, five new hotspots were discovered with **over 200 trees illegally felled**. Estimated damages reached over **3.5 million UAH (~\$100,000)**. ForestCom's persistence led to the launch of a criminal case after years of silence.

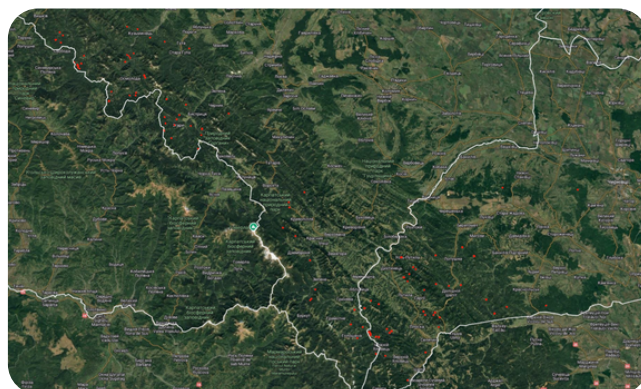


Book Birdhouse: A Community-Based Approach to Environmental Education for Children

On International Children's Day, ForestCom opened its **first "Book Birdhouse"** in Stryiskyy Park — a **free public library for kids** to exchange books. The launch featured a festive program with eco-quests, prizes, and ranger medals. The library was designed and built by Woodluck Social Furniture Workshop, which employs veterans and people in recovery, combining craftsmanship with social impact. Children participated in the **"Pathfinder Trails" quest**, donated their favorite books, and shared thoughts about reading and nature. Despite the rain, the day was full of joy, learning, and community spirit. The event concluded with a symbolic tree planting together with Stryi Park staff.

Satellite Surveillance in Action: 113 Suspected Logging Sites Identified

In October 2024, ForestCom experts applied **satellite technologies** to **identify changes in forest cover** and assess the legality of logging activities in western Ukraine. The findings were published on ForestCom's website as **an interactive map**, which now serves as both a deterrent tool for illegal loggers and a practical instrument for regional law enforcement. By publicly disclosing satellite-verified forest loss, ForestCom not only **increases pressure on those violating forest regulations** but also **enhances transparency** and **supports prompt response by state authorities**. This approach demonstrates how modern technology can strengthen civic oversight and environmental accountability in real time.





Despite all the challenges — **ongoing war, lack of responsiveness from local authorities, rising costs, and security threats to its experts** — ForestCom continues its work with consistency and professionalism.

The organization proves daily that civil society can do more than observe: **it can drive systemic change by initiating criminal cases, influencing legislation, changing the behavior of forestry enterprises, and motivating law enforcement to take action.** Through **satellite monitoring, expert fieldwork, public communication, and participation in policy development**, ForestCom ensures effective civic oversight and creates conditions in which violations are confronted and violators are held accountable.

Follow ForestCom to stay updated on how civic action protects Ukraine's forests.

Click on the icon or scan the QR code to join us on media
to see how independent monitoring, expert research, and community involvement
are driving real change — and **how you can be part of it.**

