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OPINION

on dissertation for obtaining the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" in: field of higher education 3 Social, economic and legal sciences, professional field 3.7 Administration and management, scientific specialty „Economics and Management"

Author of dissertation: Stefan Petrov Bechev, Doctoral student full-time study at the Department „Forestry and management" at the University of Forestry, Sofia, Bulgaria.

Dissertation Topic: Study of the management of municipal forest areas in Bulgaria

Prepared the opinion: Professor Nikolay Karev Karev, University of Chemical Technology and Metallurgy – Sofia; field of higher education 3. Social, economic and legal sciences, professional field 3.7 Administration and management, scientific specialty Organization and management of production (by industry), appointed as a member of the scientific jury by order No. ZPS-668/24.11.2025 by the Rector of University of Forestry, Sofia.

1. Relevance of the problem.

Forests are a strategic resource, the management of which requires long-term solutions, which increases the role and importance of forest management. Considering that at the moment municipal forest territories in Bulgaria are one of the largest, the areas of which are constantly increasing, as well as the benefits of municipal forests related to filling municipal budgets, providing jobs, protecting biodiversity and water resources, mitigating climate change - assessing the management of these territories and making recommendations for its improvement determine the relevance of the dissertation work in scientific and scientific-applied terms.

2. Degree of knowledge of the state of the problem and creative interpretation of the literature review.

For the development of the dissertation work, 180 sources were used. The majority of them, 92 are in Latin, 84 in Cyrillic, and the remaining 4 are Internet sources. Based on the literature review, where a very detailed critical analysis of the state and problems in the research area is made, in which the results of other authors are also cited and discussed, it can be concluded that the doctoral student Stefan Bechev is familiar with the regulatory framework, scientific developments and achievements in the field he is researching and can creatively interpret the literary material in favor of the development of the dissertation.

3. Aim, objectives, hypotheses and research methods. Relevance of the chosen research methodology to the stated aim and objectives of the dissertation.

The goal of the dissertation is correctly and clearly defined, which requires assessing the management of municipal forest areas in the Republic of Bulgaria and making recommendations for its improvement. To achieve this goal, six tasks have been set and solved, which provide a good idea of the work done by the doctoral student. The research thesis is well described and verified through a questionnaire survey and subsequent analysis. The methods of

observation, analysis, representative sampling, normalized score evaluation, document analysis, and the questionnaire survey method have been used to solve the set tasks. The methodology used is suitable for conducting the study. It allows for the collection of data related to the study and their subsequent analysis. Based on the data obtained from the analyses, specific conclusions and recommendations have been drawn regarding the management of municipal forest areas in Bulgaria, with which the doctoral student has managed to fulfill the set goals and tasks, prove his research thesis with respect to the object of study, and formulate the relevant generalizations and conclusions

4. Visualization and presentation of the results.

The presented dissertation work is well illustrated with forty three tables. The list of abbreviations used and the two appendices presented at the end of the dissertation, including a questionnaire for studying the management of municipal forest territories in Bulgaria and the proposed form for collecting information from municipal forest structures for scientific purposes, also contribute to the good visuality. The tabular presentation of the results in chapter three is made in an appropriate way to illustrate and comment on the answers to the questions for the individual indicators. I believe that the visuality of the presented and obtained results is completely sufficient.

5. Discussion of results and literature used.

The results of the study were obtained using the survey method based on a representative regional sample. Various groups working in forests were surveyed, such as: foresters, managers, bodies engaged in the protection of all forest properties, independent experts, with the total number of respondents being 118 people. The results of the study allow for the formulation of recommendations related to sustainable management and management of municipal forest territories in Bulgaria, the most important of which are: increasing revenues from municipal forest territories through the creation of independent economic structures, provided for in the Forestry Act, production and sale of non-timber forest products and services, creation of a compensatory mechanism to stimulate sustainable forest management, maintenance and appropriate increase of the protective functions of forests. The literature used includes a wide range of Bulgarian and foreign sources related to the topic of the dissertation work. This allows for the examination of the different systems of criteria and indicators for sustainable forest management, to monitor the management of municipal forest areas in Bulgaria and Eastern Europe, and to conduct an analysis and assessment of the sustainable management of municipal forest areas in Bulgaria.

6. Contributions of the thesis.

My comprehensive acquaintance with the dissertation work allows me to assess that the five contributions, as indicated in the abstract, are correctly derived from the overall research and objectively reflect the factual results and achievements of the doctoral student's scientific and applied research. By their nature, the indicated contributions can be defined as an enrichment and concretization of the existing theoretical developments in the research area and a proposal for a practical solution to a specific problem with formulated conclusions and recommendations for practice.

7. Assessment of the extent of the dissertator's personal involvement in the contributions.

From the materials presented for the defense of the dissertation, I believe that the results obtained, the conclusions and recommendations made, and the contributions formulated are the personal work of the doctoral student.

8. Critical comments and questions.

Stefan Petrov Bechev has successfully completed his research task. I have no significant critical comments or questions regarding the text of the dissertation. As a member of the extended departmental council (of the Department of Forestry and Management at the University of Forestry) for the preliminary discussion of the dissertation, I have made critical comments and recommendations, which the author has reflected in good faith.

9. Published articles and citations.

Three articles were published in 2021, 2022, and 2023. No citations of the mentioned articles were found.

10. Assessment of the publications on the dissertation: number, nature of the publications in which they are printed. Reflections in science - use and citation by other authors.

Two of the published articles are in the journal "Management and Sustainable Development" with scientific review, referenced in VINITI and one in the journal "Forest Science", special edition, 2023, included in the CABI database and indexed in BIOSIS Citation Index. No citations of the indicated articles were found. The indicated articles are independent. They reflect parts of the content of the dissertation work and the results achieved during its development. The publications have gained fame because they are also available online.

Presented abstract reflects objectively the structure and content of the dissertation.

CONCLUSION:

On the basis of the different research methods learned and applied by the PhD student, the correctly derived experiments, the made generalizations and conclusions, I consider that the presented dissertation meets the requirements of the FRAADB and the Regulations of the University of Forestry for its application, which gives me the reason to evaluate it as **POSITIVE.**

I take the liberty of suggesting that the Honourable Scientific Jury also vote in the affirmative/negative and award Stefan Petrov Bechev - full-time doctoral student at the Department of Forestry and Management at the University of Forestry, Sofia the educational and scientific degree ***"Doctor"*** in the scientific specialty "Economics and Management (Forestry and Forest Industry)" field of higher education 3. Social, economic and legal sciences, professional field 3.7 Administration and Management.

Date: 03. 01 2026
Sofia

PREPARED THE OPINION:

(Professor Nikolay Karev)