The Swiss population and the forest

Results of the third socio-cultural forest monitoring survey (WaMos 3)

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Cover picture
Recreation in the forest in Geneva.
Image: S. Torre, KEYSTONE

The survey

The FOEN uses socio-cultural forest monitoring (WaMos) to examine the Swiss population's relationship to the Swiss forest over the years. Representative telephone surveys from 1997 (WaMos 1) and 2010 (WaMos 2) serve as a comparison, together with a representative online survey in 2020 (WaMos 3). This latest WaMos study was also complemented by selected case studies in the field of recreation and a scientific policy analysis.

Key data on the WaMos 3 national survey

- Survey period: 20 February to 9 March 2020
- Representative national online survey with a sample of 3,116 interviews
- Plus a selection of 156 young people between 15 and 18 years old
- Project sponsor: Federal Office for the Environment (FOEN)
- Scientific design, development of the survey instrument and data analysis: Swiss Federal Institute for Forest, Snow and Landscape Research WSL
- Carrying out the online survey: Survey research LINK Marketing Services AG, Zurich
- Further work in cantons (AG, BE, BL/BS, FR, GR, NE, SG, SO, TI, VD)

Additional information

www.bafu.admin.ch/wamos

Old beech with a hollow trunk in the Aebischen natural forest reserve (Frauenkappelen commune, BE).
Image: M. Bolliger, FOEN

How the general public sees the forest

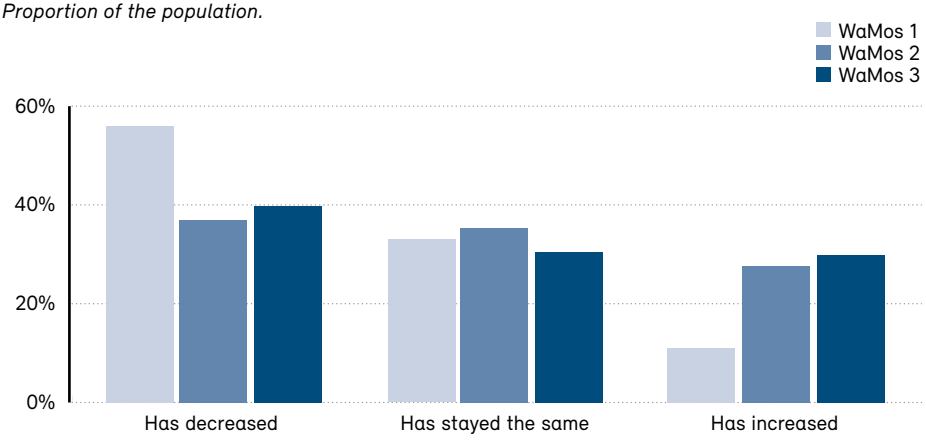
The forest protects against natural hazards, stores CO_2, is a habitat for plants and animals, produces oxygen, provides wood and fulfils many other functions. These are all rated very positively. People are becoming more aware of the forest's varied functions – and more concerned that it could become increasingly difficult for the forest to carry them out.

The most important function of the forest from the respondents' point of view is that of habitat for plants and animals (92.6%), followed by oxygen production (83.7%) and protection against natural hazards (83.6%). The contribution of the forest to mitigating climate change, which was included for the first time, is also frequently mentioned (79.2%). Compared to WaMos 2 (2010), respondents described the forest less frequently as a beautification of the landscape or as a place where they feel at home.

Compared to 1997, a larger part of the population is now aware that forested area has increased. Compared to adults, younger people are more inclined to assume that forested area is decreasing. The forest is indeed expanding (by an area the

Assessment of the change in forested area in Switzerland as a whole

Proportion of the population.



size of Lake Zug every year), but its increase is concentrated in the Alps and the region south of the Alps.

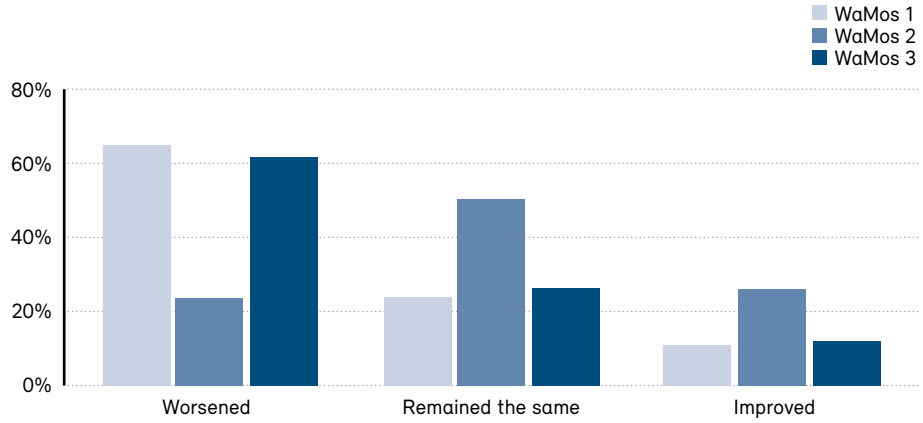
Assessment of forest health

From the perspective of WaMos 3 respondents, forest health has deteriorated significantly over the last 20 years. This assessment is consistent with the perception in 1997, while in 2010 respondents predominantly assumed that the forest was in a stable state of health. The deterioration of forest health is perceived most strongly on the southern side of the Alps.

Almost half of the respondents think that damaged or fallen trees should be removed and new ones planted in their place – a similar attitude to 2010. There has been a significant increase in the proportion of those who only want the paths cleared and are against further measures.

Assessment of the change in forest health

Proportion of the population.

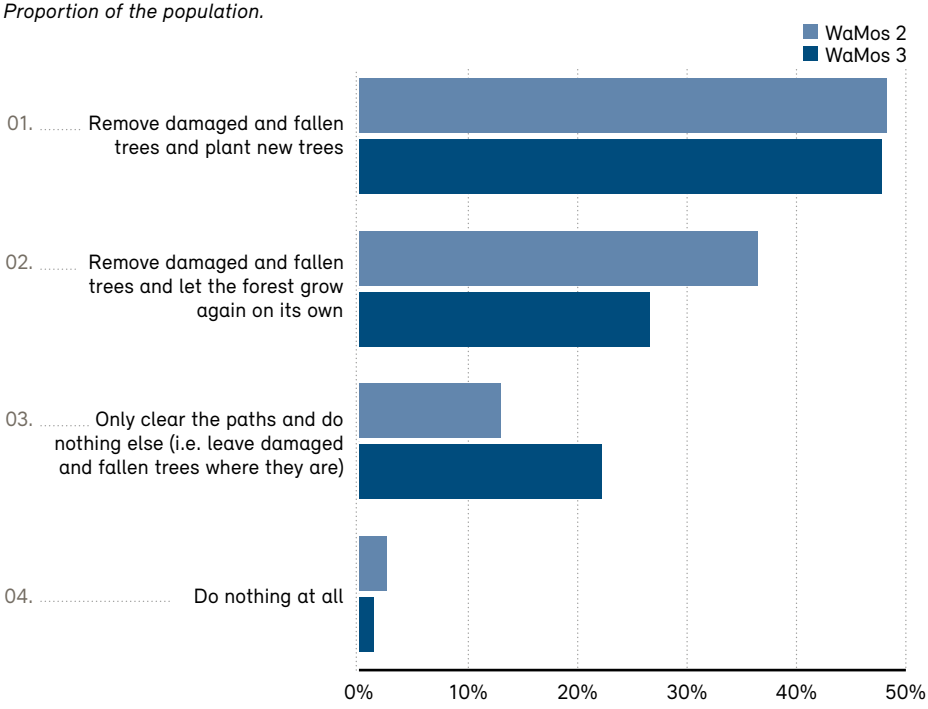


Use and protect the forest

As in 2010, more than two thirds of respondents consider the amount of wood taken from Swiss forests to be “just right”. However, the proportion of those who think that too much wood is being used has risen slightly; people in the Jura and the Central Plateau in particular think that too much wood is harvested, while in the Alps and further south more people think that rather too little wood is used. Age also plays a role: the older the respondents, the more likely they are to think that too little wood is used. In fact, the potential of the Swiss forest as a supplier of wood is far from being fully exploited. Of the 8.2 million cubic metres of wood that could be used sustainably each year, a little over half (4.8 million cubic metres) was harvested in 2020. A large majority of the Swiss population attaches particular

Public opinion on management options for forest damage

Proportion of the population.



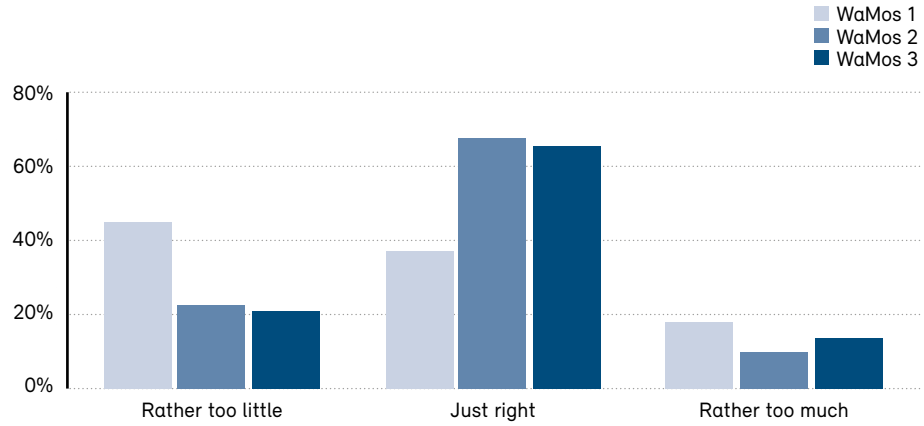
importance to buying domestic wood. For 68.7% of respondents, Swiss origin is important when buying wood products.

Around 78% of respondents estimate that biodiversity has declined in the Swiss forest over the last 20 years – an assessment that is considerably more pessimistic than in 2010 (with over 52%) and which also exceeds the negative view from 1997 (with 70%). Accordingly, fewer people think biodiversity has increased (5.7% in 2020 compared to 9.7% in 2010 and 10% in 1997). The National Forest Inventory 4 (2009–17), however, shows an increase in tree species and structural diversity as well as in the amount of deadwood in the forests. The area of forest reserves also increased, which in turn increases the diversity of habitats for a wide range of animal and plant species.

There are heated discussions about the wolf in Switzerland. While bears, lynx and wolves meet with slightly higher acceptance in 2020 than they did in 2010, the wild boar has remained almost the same in the respondents' favour.

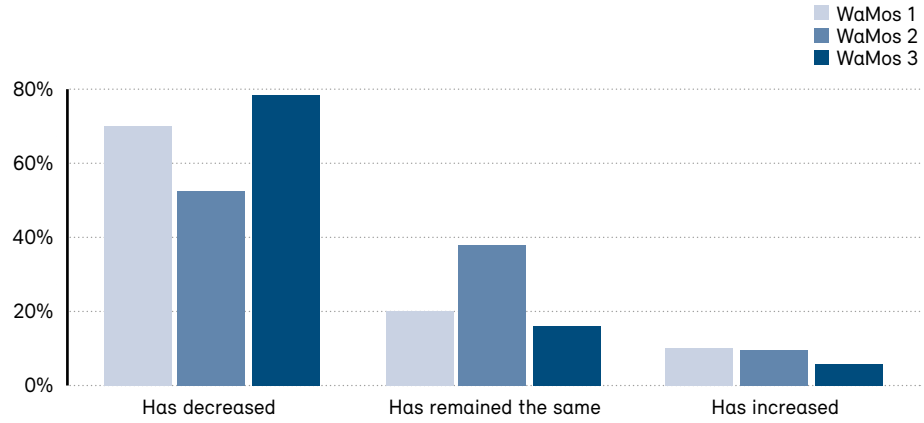
Assessment of wood use

Proportion of the population.



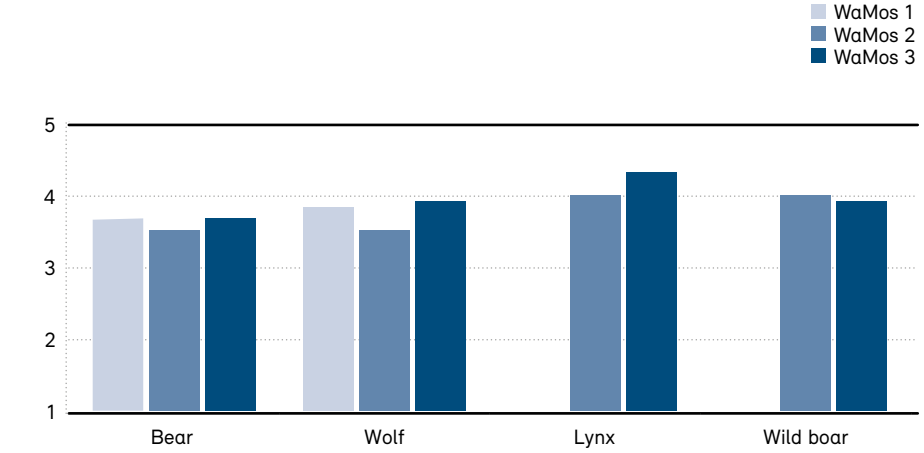
Assessment of the change in biodiversity

Proportion of the population.



Acceptance of large predators

Mean values on a scale from 1 (strongly against) to 5 (strongly in favour).



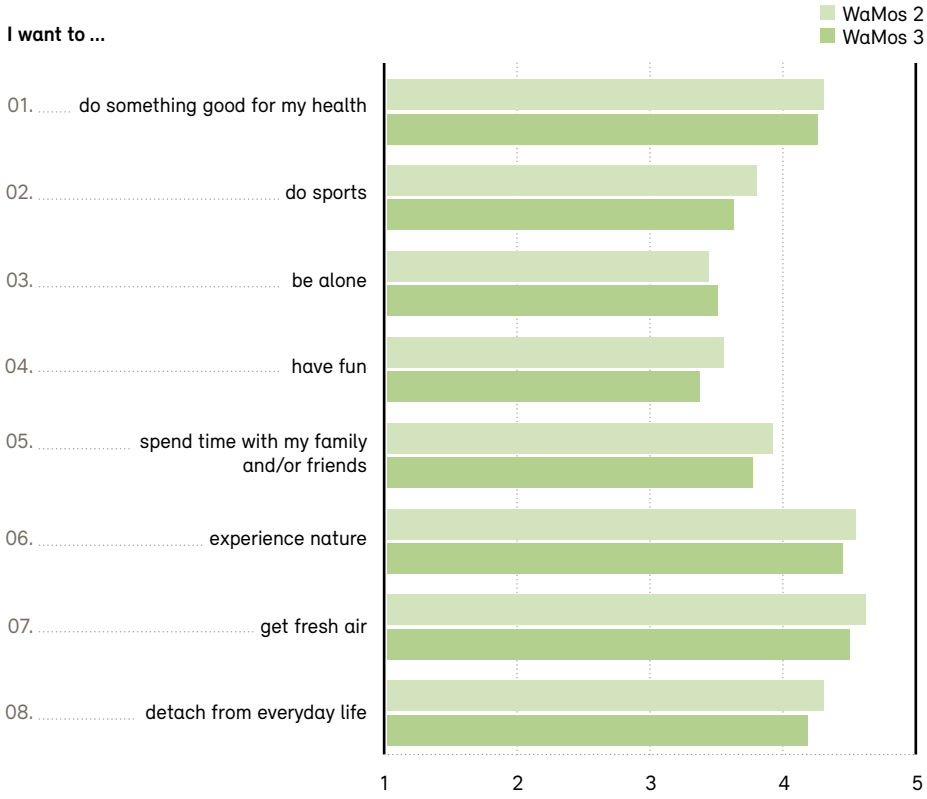
Mushroom picking in the Unteriberg region, canton of Schwyz.
Image: C. Beutler, KEYSTONE

The forest from a personal perspective

Most of the respondents go to the forest regularly. Regarding the forest that they go to the most, they report having a favourable to very favourable view of it. People visit the forest to relax and switch off from everyday life. Some do this by observing nature and enjoying the peace and quiet, while others want to be active and do sport. A majority of respondents feel more relaxed following a visit to the forest, and overall satisfaction with spending time in the forest remains high.

How well various statements describe people's recreational motivations

Mean values on a scale from 1 (not at all) to 5 (completely true).



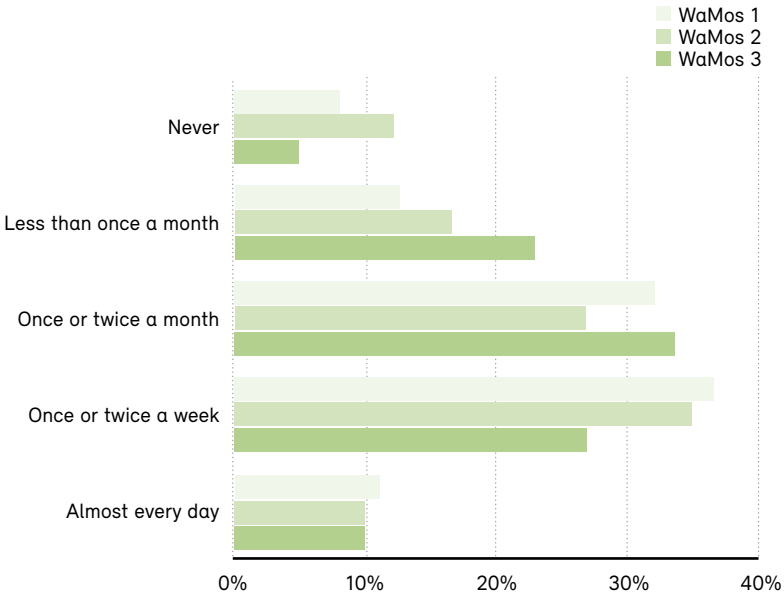
The forest is increasingly important as a place of retreat. The only motivation mentioned more often than in WaMos 2 is the desire to be alone. All other reasons are mentioned less often. The rank nevertheless remains the same: the experience of nature, fresh air and detaching from everyday life are important motivations for spending time in the forest.

Almost everyone goes to the forest

The frequency of trips to the forest among the Swiss population has remained roughly constant on average since 1978 (from a survey preceding the WaMos surveys). However, there were changes in frequency. The proportion of people who never visit the forest fell to an all-time low in 2020 (4.9%). However, the proportion of those who visit the forest one or two times a week has also declined steadily since 1997 (28.8%

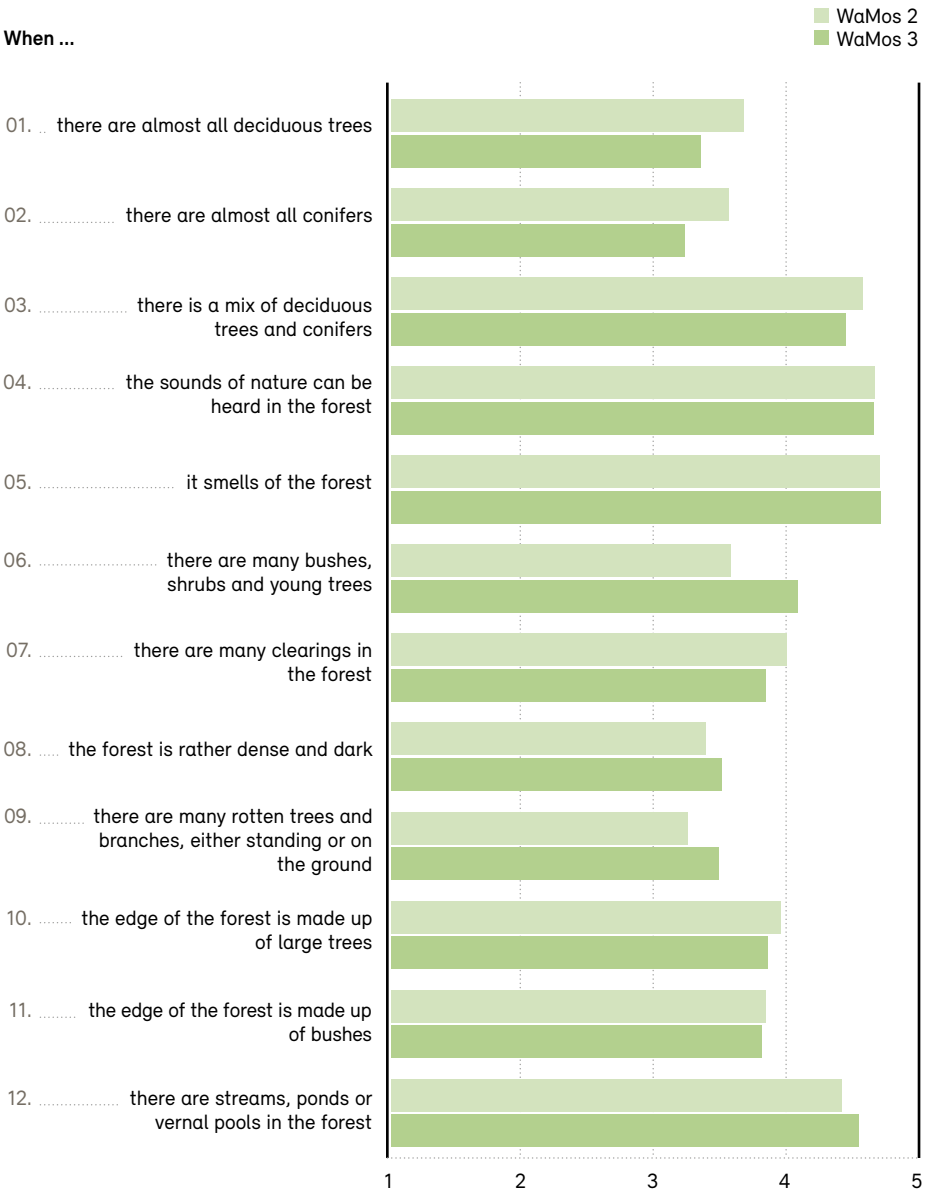
Frequency of visits to the forest

Proportion of the population.



Natural features in the forest

Mean values on a scale from 1 (it bothers me very much) to 5 (I like it very much).



in 2020). In contrast, the group of those who go to the forest one or two times a month or less has grown (22.8%). The proportion of people going to the forest every day, on the other hand, has hardly changed over all four observation periods (9.9%).

Since 1997, the duration of a trip to the forest has steadily decreased, from 106 minutes (1997) to 90 minutes (2010) to 79 minutes (2020). On average, men spend longer in the forest than women (85 minutes versus 74 minutes). Overall, more people go to the forest but for shorter periods of time, and fewer people never go to the forest.

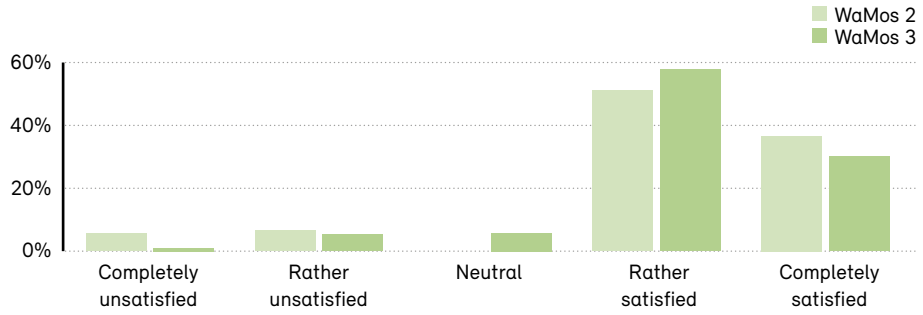
What do people like about the forest?

Forest sounds and smells are among the natural features that respondents like best. The mixture of deciduous trees and conifers as well as ponds and streams also rank high. Compared to WaMos 2, respondents appreciated forests with many young trees, bushes and shrubs, as well as dense dark forests and those with rotten trees and branches. The acceptance of deadwood, which is so important for biodiversity, has increased significantly.

Nature trails, campfire sites, forest huts and shelters as well as many benches are

Satisfaction with recreation in the forest

Proportion of the population.

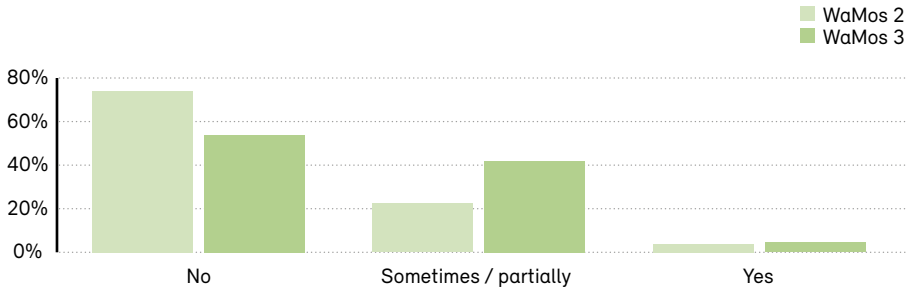


the facilities that respondents like best. Mulch running tracks and fitness trails are also popular. While young people tend to enjoy sports infrastructures, nature trails and car parks are more popular with adults. The fact that most of the infrastructure has lost popularity (except for benches and paths) indicates a stronger desire for "more naturalness" in the forest.

Although satisfaction with time spent in the forest is still very high, the proportion of those who are completely satisfied has decreased compared to 2010. The proportion of respondents who are much more relaxed following a visit to the forest has fallen sharply (67,3% 2010 and 43,7% 2020).

Recreation in the forest is disturbed by other people or activities

Proportion of the population.



A warning sign indicates that the road is closed during timber harvesting work.
Image: WaldSchweiz

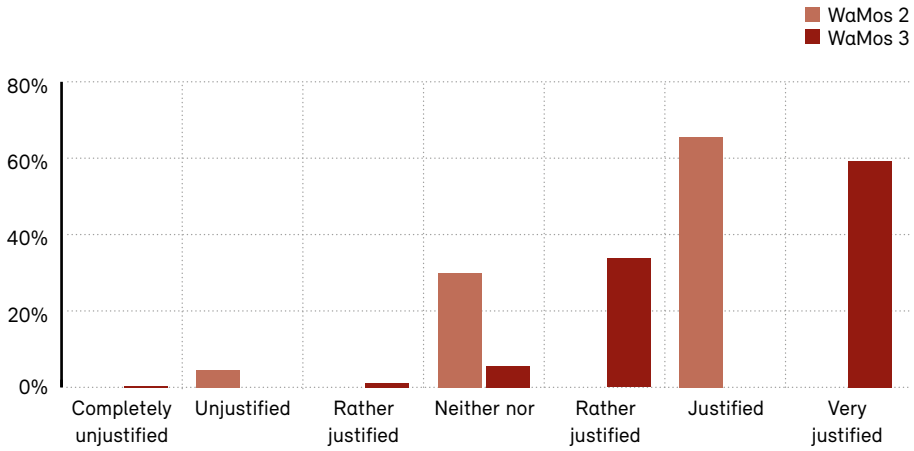
Forest, money and rules

High costs are incurred for maintenance of forest paths and other infrastructures, rubbish collection, protection against falling branches and clearing up storm damage, the implementation of wildlife and nature conservation measures, and the removal of diseased trees. These costs far exceed the proceeds from timber harvests, leaving more than half of forestry companies in the red. The political process establishes laws, regulations and programme agreements in order to maintain the area and spatial distribution of forests and ensure that they can fulfil their functions in the long term.

93% of respondents consider public subsidies for forests to be somewhat justified or very justified; there is significantly more support than in 2010. The most support should be given to precautions for protection against natural hazards; in second place are measures in favour of forest health, followed by management of the forest that maximises its capacity for CO_2 storage. This is followed by general forest maintenance and nature conservation measures. Subsidies for the recreational function are rarely mentioned.

Legitimacy of subsidies

Proportion of the population.



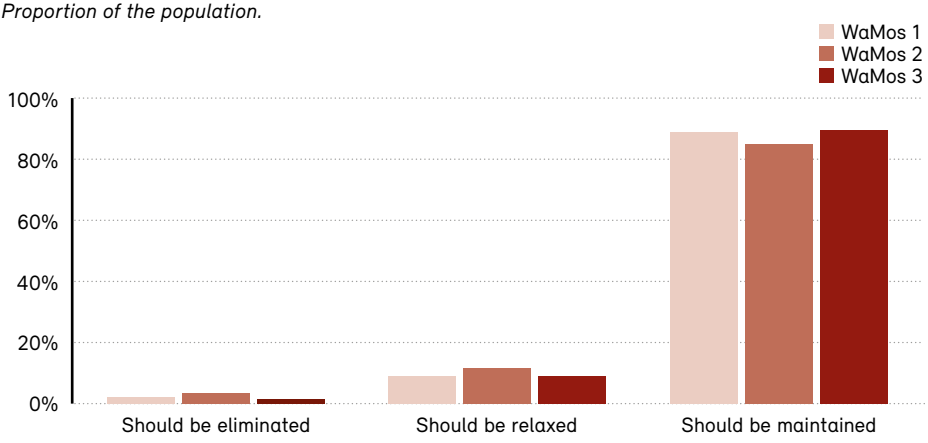
Broadly accepted ban on deforestation

The conversion of forest land for other purposes is banned in Switzerland. This ban enjoys broad acceptance, with 89.6% of respondents wanting it to remain in place. At 8.9%, the share of those in favour of easing this ban is lower than in the two previous surveys.

If clearing is approved due to overriding interests, such as motorways or other infrastructure projects, an area of forest of the same size must generally be replanted nearby. The vast majority of WaMos 2 and WaMos 3 respondents are in favour of this replacement in kind. Only a small minority believes there is no need for replacement, and the proportion of this minority has decreased significantly compared to 2010.

Attitude towards ban on clearing forest land

Proportion of the population.



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