

Peasants' labour obligations for the lords' forests: another form of corvée in the *Gutsherrschaft* of Prussian monarchs, 1763–1850

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Abstract

Demesne lords (*Gutsherren*) in early modern Brandenburg-Prussia often owned and managed sizable forests besides their demesne farms. In royal domain lordship, while peasants' corvée for demesne farms prevailed from the sixteenth century to 1799, corvée for royal forests only began in the late eighteenth century, when the authorities began to reform the management of the forests, switching from natural to artificial regeneration. Peasants gave their forest labour in return for their long-established entitlements to receive building timber from royal forests and, to retain these rights, often continued to undertake it until the mid-nineteenth century. Some peasants became independent of the royal forests by creating their own woodlands and readily ended their obligation to do forestry service. Thus, the peasants' accommodation to the new corvée did not arise from their subordination to lords' oppression, as assumed in traditional research, but their calculation of self-advantage in a reciprocal relationship with their lords.

In the long historiography of demesne lordship (*Gutsherrschaft*), which prevailed in East-Elbian Germany during the early modern period, peasants' labour obligations for their lords' demesne farms (*Hofdienst*) have been the central issue. They certainly made up a substantial element of demesne lordship, even if they were not the only form of labour employed in the demesne farm economy.¹ However, peasants' labour obligations for the lords' forests (*Forstdienst*) have received much less attention, even though many demesne lords (*Gutsherren*) owned and managed sizable forests besides demesne farms.² To widen the scope of research on demesne lordship, this paper focuses on forest labour obligations in the case of Prussian royal lordship in Brandenburg.

In Brandenburg, the demesne farm economy using peasants' compulsory labour had developed in the sixteenth century. In 1799, upon the request of peasants in the Gramzow domain to

¹ Werner Rösener, *The peasantry of Europe* (1994), p. 104. For various forms of demesne economy, Markus Cerman, 'Demesne lordship and rural society in early modern East Central and Eastern Europe: comparative perspectives', *AgHR* 59 (2011), pp. 246–7; id., *Villagers*

and lords in Eastern Europe, 1300–1800 (2012), pp. 70–86.

² Karl Hasel and Ekkehard Schwartz, *Forstgeschichte: Ein Grundriss für Studium und Praxis* (third edn, 2006), pp. 100–2.

redeem their labour services, King Friedrich Wilhelm III not only granted them their wish but ordered the general abolition of his subjects' labour services for the royal demesne farms.³ This decisively accelerated the replacement of compulsory labour with free labour, and the partitioning and hereditary leasing of demesne farms, which had in part already been realized during the eighteenth century.⁴ As Lieselott Enders showed, the peasants' initiatives figured significantly in the early emancipation of domain peasants from *corvée* for the demesne farms from 1799.⁵ This understanding is embedded in the research on demesne lordships undertaken since the mid-1980s, which has found that it was peasant protests against labour services in late eighteenth-century Brandenburg that prompted the subsequent liberal reform, challenging the century-old view of East-Elbian peasants as being totally oppressed by the lords' exploitation.⁶ Indeed, the latest scholarship has pursued a synthesis of old and new views, arguing that the peasants, despite their hostility to labour services, were still often willing to accommodate the increased demands their lords' placed on them.⁷ In any case, peasants' compulsory labour on their lords' demesne farms (including buildings) was a major source of conflict because it was entirely to the lord's advantage and brought no benefit to the tenants.

In contrast, however, the labour obligations for the lords' forests were more reciprocal, because, in general, demesne lords had an obligation to grant the timber necessary for construction free of charge to subject peasants who held farmsteads by leasehold tenure. This obligation was owed because the lords owned the farmsteads and, thus, were solely responsible for the construction and maintenance of the farm's buildings.⁸ In the royal domains, the principle of reciprocity was well established. Based on the wood ordinances of 1590, 1593, and 1622, the peasants of the electoral domains were entitled to any timber necessary for constructing and maintaining farm buildings by paying half the cost at most.⁹ The patent King Friedrich Wilhelm I issued on 25 April 1729 entitled all peasants in the royal domains who did not own farms to receive timber

³ Georg Friedrich Knapp, *Die Bauernbefreiung und der Ursprung der Landarbeiter in den älteren Theilen Preußens* (sec. edn, 2 vols, 1927), I, p. 96; Hartmut Har-nisch, 'Der preußische Absolutismus und die Bauern. Sozialkonservative Gesellschaftspolitik und Vorleistung zur Modernisierung', *Jahrbuch für Wirtschaftsgeschichte* (1994), pt 2, p. 18.

⁴ Hans-Heinrich Müller, 'Domänenpächter im 19. Jahrhundert', *Jahrbuch für Wirtschaftsgeschichte* (1989), pt 1, p. 126.

⁵ Lieselott Enders, 'Emanzipation der Agrargesellschaft im 18. Jahrhundert: Trends und Gegentrends in der Mark Brandenburg', in J. Peters (ed.), *Konflikt und Kontrolle in Gutsherrschaftsgesellschaften: Über Resistenz- und Herrschaftsverhalten in ländlichen Sozialgebilden der frühen Neuzeit* (1995), pp. 427–9.

⁶ William W. Hagen, 'The Junkers' faithless servants: peasant insubordination and the breakdown of serfdom in Brandenburg-Prussia, 1763–1811', in R. J. Evans and W. R. Lee (eds), *The German peasantry: conflict and community in rural society from the eighteenth to the twentieth centuries* (1986), pp. 71–101. See also Mark

Finlay, 'New sources, new theses, and new organizations in the new Germany: recent research on the history of German agriculture', *Agricultural Hist.* 75 (2001), p. 284.

⁷ Heinrich Kaak, *Eigenwillige Bauern, ehrgeizige Amtsmänner, distanzierte fürstliche Dorfherren: Vermittelte Herrschaft im brandenburgischen Alt-Quilitz im 17. und 18. Jahrhundert* (2010), pp. 296, 325, 334–5, 342–7, 365.

⁸ F. P. Eisenberg and C. L. Stengel, *Beiträge zur Kenntniß der Justizverfassung und juristischen Literatur in den Preußischen Staaten* (15 vols, Berlin, 1796), II, pp. 10–11; Günther Franz (ed.), *Quellen zur Geschichte des deutschen Bauernstandes in der Neuzeit* (1963), p. 362; Sean A. Eddie, *Freedom's price. Serfdom, subjection, and reform in Prussia, 1648–1848* (2013), pp. 108–10.

⁹ Christian Otto Mylius (ed.), *Corpus Constitutionum Marchicarum oder Königlich Preußische und Churfürstlich Brandenburgische in der Chur- und Marck Brandenburg, auch incorporirten Landen publicirte und ergangene Ordnungen, Edicta, Mandata, Rescripta etc.* (6 vols, 1737–51), IV, I, II, cols 501, 515, 537; Wilhelm Pfeil, *Die Forstgeschichte Preußens bis zum Jahre 1806* (1839, repr. Remagen, 2009), p. 54.

from royal forests for new constructions or the maintenance of buildings. This was free of charge except for *Stammgeld*, an assignment charge of three *Groschen* (gr) for every *Reichsthaler* (rt) of timber bought or received (1 rt = 24 gr). Additionally, all peasants in the royal domains who owned farms were entitled to have timber at one-third of the cost, plus *Stammgeld*.¹⁰ Building on this, an order of 17 January 1785 stipulated that each subject who was entitled to receive timber for building from the royal forests should render gratuitous labour for improving the forests.¹¹ Thus, domain subjects came to give their labour in their lords' forests only in the late eighteenth century and in return for their long-established entitlements to timber.

This late introduction of forest labour obligations is, as will be shown later, to be explained by the switch from natural regeneration to artificial regeneration (by the planting of tree seeds) as a result of Friedrich II's forestry reform, which took place after the end of the Seven Years' War in 1763.¹² After 1785, *corvée* for royal forests continued for several decades because domain peasants wished to keep their entitlements to timber.¹³

This paper examines the development of the labour obligations for the royal forests from 1763 to 1850, focusing on the mutual and conflicting interests of the domain peasants and royal authorities. While presenting the general developments in royal domains and forests in the Kurmark, this paper specifically focuses on the royal domain of Alt-Ruppin (*das königliche Domänenamt Alt-Ruppin*) and the royal forest district of Alt-Ruppin (*das königliche Forstrevier Alt-Ruppin*). A detailed investigation of this area serves to clarify the demands for labour services in the royal forests, and the different responses of villages and peasants to labour obligations, according to their socioeconomic conditions.

I

The royal domain and royal forest district of Alt-Ruppin traditionally belonged to the district of Ruppin (*Kreis Ruppin*), and thus to the *Kurmark Brandenburg* (Figure 1), the greater part of Brandenburg west of the Oder River. In 1815, after ceding the Altmark in 1807, the *Kurmark* area roughly became the governorate district of Potsdam (*Regierungsbezirk Potsdam*), the western part of the Prussian province of Brandenburg.

¹⁰ Takashi Iida, 'The practice of timber granting from lords to peasants: a forest-historical perspective of the *Gutsherrschaft* in Brandenburg-Prussia from 1650 to 1850', *Agricultural Hist.* 87 (2013), pp. 506–7.

¹¹ *Novum corpus constitutionum Prussico-Brandenburgensium Praecipue Marchicarum, Oder Neue Sammlung Königl. Preuß. und Churfürstl. Brandenburgischer, sonderlich in der Chur- und Marck-Brandenburg, Wie auch anderen Provinzien, publicirten und ergangenen Ordnungen, Edicta, Mandaten, Rescripten etc.* (10 vols, 1751–1803) [hereafter NCC], VII, col. 3009–14.

¹² Hasel and Schwartz, *Forstgeschichte*, pp. 279, 284–5; Pfeil, *Die Forstgeschichte Preußens*, p. 136; Rudolph Stadelmann, *Preußens Könige in ihrer Thätigkeit für die Landescultur. Zweiter Theil, Friedrich der Große* (1882), pp. 139–45; Heinrich Rubner, *Forstgeschichte im Zeitalter*

der industriellen Revolution (1967), pp. 68–70; Matthias Asche, 'Von walddglashütten, Teeröfen und anderen Formen traditioneller Holznutzung: Brandenburg-preußische Staatswirtschaft im Spannungsfeld von Nachhaltigkeitsdenken und Ressourcenbegrenzung, Landesausbau und Peuplierungspolitik vom 17. bis zum frühen 19. Jahrhundert', in G. Schulz and R. Reith (eds), *Wirtschaft und Umwelt vom Spätmittelalter bis zur Gegenwart: Auf dem Weg zu Nachhaltigkeit?* (2015), pp. 71–2.

¹³ Pfeil, *Die Forstgeschichte Preußens*, pp. 54–5; Iida, 'Timber granting', pp. 517–20; id., 'Bäuerliches Beharren auf der "Holzberechtigung": Die Auseinandersetzungen zwischen Gutsherrn und Bauern im brandenburgischen Amt Alt-Ruppin während der ersten Hälfte des 19. Jahrhunderts', *Jahrbuch für die Geschichte Mittel- und Ostdeutschlands* 55 (2009), pp. 129–58.

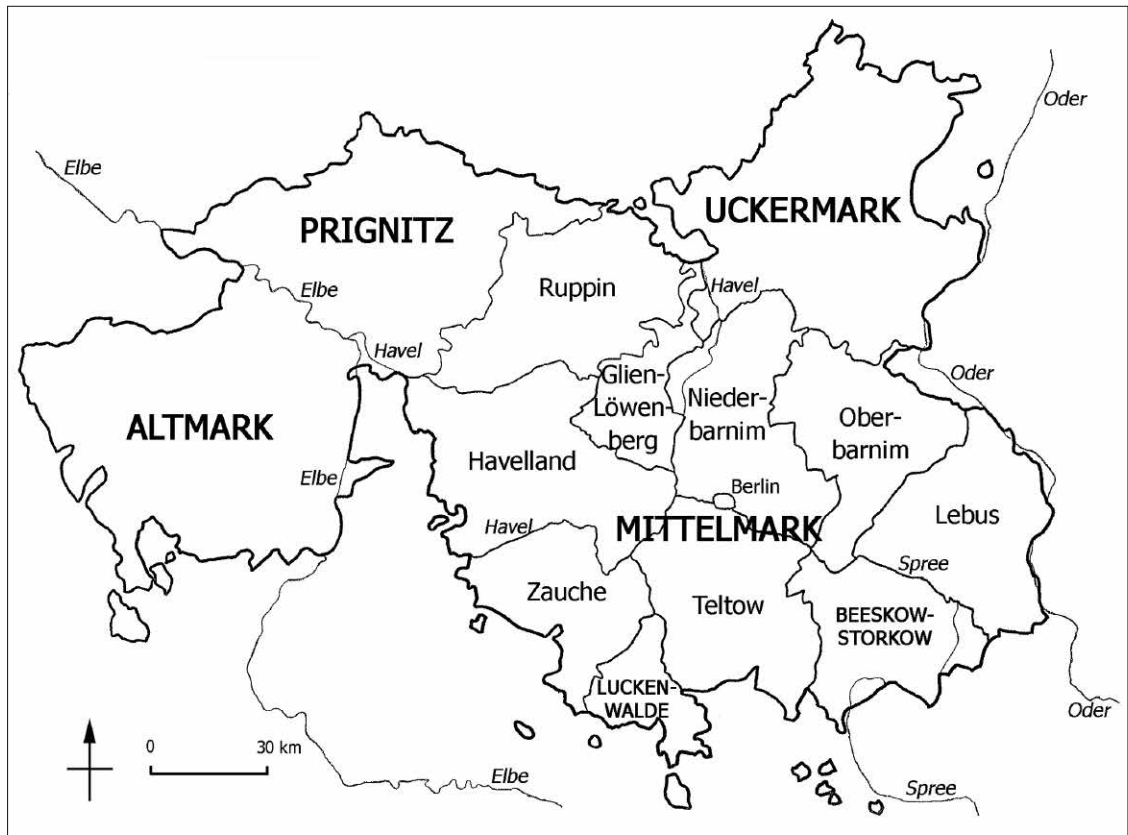


FIGURE 1. Map of the Kurmark Brandenburg, c.1800

Source: Friedrich Wilhelm August Bratring, *Statistisch-Topographische Beschreibung der gesamten Mark Brandenburg* (3 vols, 1804-09; repr. 1968), pp. x-xi, appended map drawn by Gerd Heinrich.

The Kurmark had a higher density of royal lordship than most Prussian territories. At the end of the eighteenth century, it included 54 royal domains, and in its East Elbian area, 40 per cent of all peasants belonged to the royal domains.¹⁴ Furthermore, it included 72 royal forest districts, amounting to 58 per cent of the woodland in the Kurmark, which covered roughly a third of its total area. Of the rest of the woodland, the nobility and peasants owned 28 per cent, and the cities and towns 14 per cent. For this calculation however, at least 134 noble and peasant forests were omitted because no records were available for their areas.¹⁵ Data regarding the share of peasant ownership are available in the district of Ruppín, which shows that peasants owned only four per cent of the forests, while 75 per cent belonged to royal families, and 13 per cent to noble lords and private owners. Peasants or peasant

¹⁴ Hans-Heinrich Müller, 'Domänen und Domänenpächter in Brandenburg-Preußen im 18. Jahrhundert', *Jahrbuch für Wirtschaftsgeschichte* (1965), pt 4, p. 152.

¹⁵ Rosemarie Baudisch, 'Geographische Grundlagen

und historisch-politische Gliederung Brandenburgs', in I. Materna and W. Ribbe (eds), *Brandenburgische Geschichte* (1995), p. 21; Bratring, *Statistisch-Topographische Beschreibung*, I, pp. 101-5.

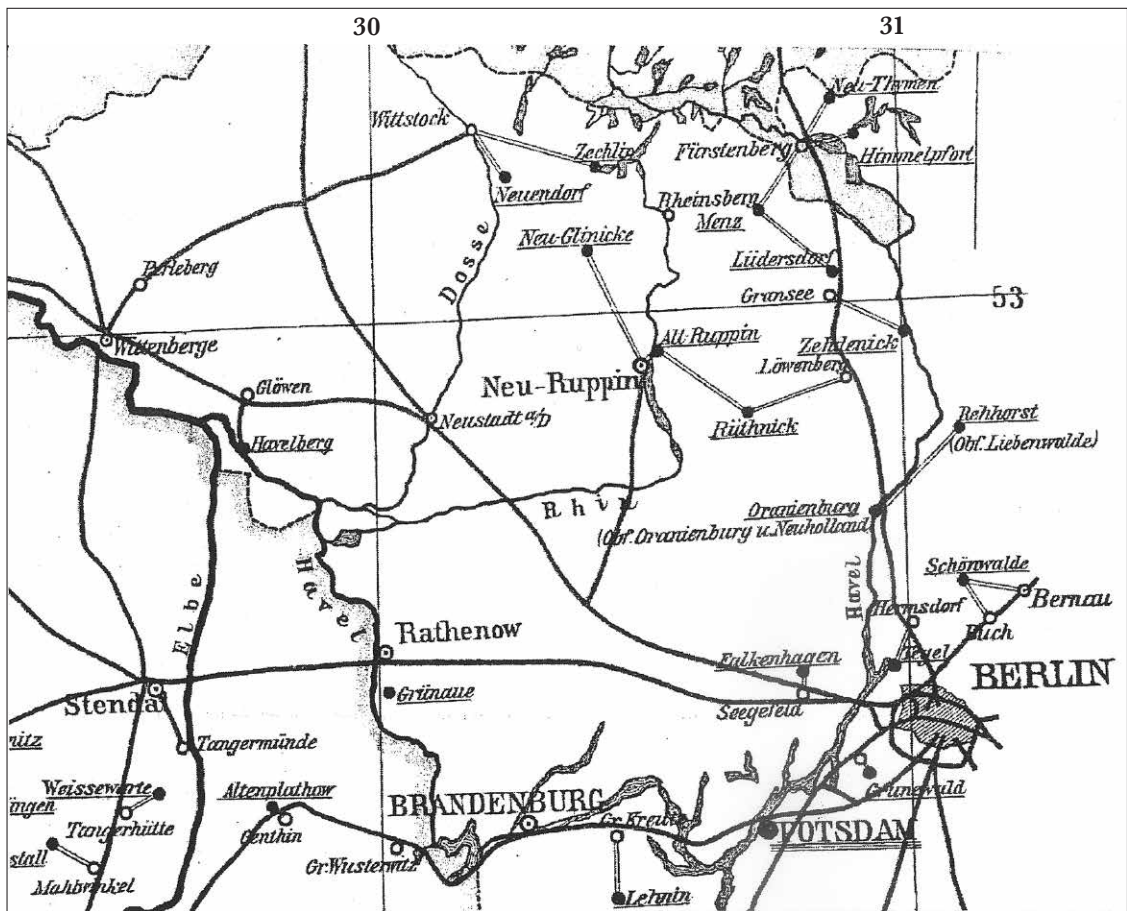


FIGURE 2. Map of royal forest districts (underlined) in north-western Brandenburg, 1885

Note: Ferro meridians are shown.

Source: Albrecht Milnik, *Im Dienst am Wald. Lebenswege und Leistungen brandenburgischer Forstleute* (2006), p. ii.

communities often had little or no woodland, making their entitlement to the lords' forests indispensable.¹⁶

The headquarters of the royal domain and royal forest district of Alt-Ruppin were in or around the town of Alt-Ruppin, which lay about 60 km northwest of Berlin (Figure 2). Thus, the domain and forest officials cooperated in exercising royal lordship over the agricultural lands in the domain and the woodlands in the forest district.¹⁷

The royal domain of Alt-Ruppin was enlarged in 1764 by incorporating into it a part of the royal domain of Lindow on its dissolution. The extended domain included the two towns of

¹⁶ Friedrich Wilhelm August Bratring, *Die Grafschaft Ruppin in historischer, statistischer und geographischer Hinsicht: ein Beitrag zur Kunde der Mark Brandenburg* (1799), pp. 40–8.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 390–5.

Alt-Ruppin and Lindow, two royal demesne farms, and 27 villages, including the settler village of Pfalzheim.¹⁸ The number of peasant farmers with large and small holdings (*Bauern* and *Kossäten*) in each village was largely constant due to the undivided inheritance of their farms while the number of cottage residents (*Büdner* and *Einlieger*) drastically increased from the mid-eighteenth to mid-nineteenth century.¹⁹

The peasant farmers of four villages (Dabergotz, Molchow, Nietwerder, and Wuthenow) were obliged to render labour for the two royal demesne farms, one in the town of Alt-Ruppin and the other in the village of Dabergotz. According to the 1734 regulation, each *Bauer* had to render labour with draught animals (two horses) three days a week, i.e., 156 days a year (in case of smaller holdings, only 104 or 78 days a year), and each *Kossäte* should render labour without draught animals three days a week. These regulations were amended over time. After the 1782 modification, the peasants of Nietwerder were exempted from the overnight journeys that burdened their farm economy and, in particular, their draught animals. From around 1800, the *Bauern* in Wuthenow and Nietwerder had to render labour only two days a week with four draught animals, being permitted to pay money in lieu of a third day of service.²⁰

The royal forest district of Alt-Ruppin belonged to the chain of royal forest districts that densely covered the northern border area of Brandenburg (Figure 2). In 1798, it included a total area of 35,186 *Morgen* (8983 ha).²¹ In 1820, it incorporated a part of the neighbouring forest district of Zühlen and became a sizable district of more than 40,000 *Morgen* (10,212 ha), which consisted of the seven sub-districts of Klausheide, Lietze, Krangenbrück, Hohenheide, Pfefferteich, Glienicke, and Rägelin. In 1843, as the new forest district of Neu-Glienicke was founded, the two sub-districts of Glienicke and Rägelin were transferred to it. Consequently, the Alt-Ruppin forest district was reduced to about 26,500 *Morgen* (6765 ha).²²

Data on the composition of tree species are only available from 1825 when the forest district official drew up a Description and Management Plan, an exercise which was then repeated at least once every 20 years. Pure pine-stand coverage amounted to approximately 76 per cent of the total forested area in 1825 but had decreased to 64 per cent in 1845 (Table 1). This data seems to reflect general trends in Brandenburg. Brandenburg was notable for the dominance of coniferous stands even during the German settlement of the region in the high Middle Ages. On the predominantly sandy soil of Brandenburg, clearing and reclamation occurred only in fertile areas where broadleaved trees could grow, while the sandy areas that could only grow conifers were maintained as woodlands. In Brandenburg, therefore, coniferous tree areas were already so dominant by 1300 that areas of solely broadleaf woodland were restricted to the

¹⁸ Berthold Schulze, *Besitz- und siedlungsgeschichtliche Statistik der brandenburgischen Ämter und Städte 1540–1800* (1935), pp. 52–7.

¹⁹ Takashi Iida, 'Lords' forestry for people's basic needs: evidence from Prussia's royal domains and forests during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries', in M. Tanimoto and R. B. Wong (eds), *Public goods provision in the early modern economy: Comparative perspectives from Japan, China, and Europe* (2019), p. 241.

²⁰ Takashi Iida, *Ruppiner Bauernleben 1648–1806: Sozial- und wirtschaftsgeschichtliche Untersuchungen einer ländlichen Gegend Ostelbiens* (2010), pp. 90–3.

²¹ Bratring, *Statistisch-Topographische Beschreibung*, I, p. 104.

²² Brandenburgisches Landeshauptarchiv, Potsdam, Germany [hereafter BLHA], Rep. 2A, Regierung Potsdam, III F, no. 4286, fos 266, 285; nos 4524–9.

TABLE 1. Stand composition of the forest district of Alt-Ruppin in 1825 and 1845 in *Morgen*

	1825	1845
Pine	30,099	16,190
Broadleaf and coniferous trees (mottled)		8,160
Beech	4,953	144
Oak	73	25
Birch	292	
Alder	20	57
Broadleaf trees (mottled)		57
Tree-covered forested area in total	35,437	24,632
Clearings	4,146	572
Potential forested area in total	39,583	25,205
Total area	40,578	26,530

Note: figures rounded to the nearest *Morgen*.

Sources: For 1825, BLHA, Rep. 2A, Regierung Potsdam, III F, no. 4285, fo. 52; for 1845, no. 4286, fo. 66.

valley areas of larger rivers.²³ In the 1780s, 58 per cent of the woodland in the Kurmark was covered with pure pine stands; seven per cent with pine, oak, and beech (mottled); 15 per cent with oak; four per cent with beech; and 16 per cent with alder and birch. In the following decades, the cover of pine stands became 'endlessly still more overwhelming', until 'recently more for maintaining broadleaf trees was done again', as Wilhelm Pfeil observed in 1839.²⁴ Following this general trend, the cover of pure pine stands in the forest district of Alt-Ruppin reached its peak around 1825.

Considering the dominance of pine trees, it is no wonder that in the forest district of Alt-Ruppin, high forest management with 100- or 120-year cutting cycles was practised. Here, even the broadleaf trees exclusively formed a high forest, leaving no room for coppice.²⁵ Traditionally, only alder trees formed a coppice in Brandenburg.²⁶ Thus, subjects and locals were permitted to gather fallen dead wood as fuel and to graze their livestock under the tall trees.

On the domain land, there were also peasants' woods (*Bauernheide*) that belonged to some village communities (Table 2) but were under the supervision of domain authorities until the *Landeskulturedikt* of 1811.²⁷ Although covering a much smaller portion of the woodlands in Brandenburg than the royal and noble lords', they were never negligible and gained importance throughout the nineteenth century. According to the 1833 forestry report, nearly everywhere in the province of Brandenburg, peasants and peasant communities were converting inferior

²³ Pfeil, *Die Forstgeschichte Preußens*, pp. 15, 41–3; no. 4285, fo. 4; no. 4295.
Hasel and Schwartz, *Forstgeschichte*, pp. 292–4.

²⁴ Pfeil, *Die Forstgeschichte Preußens*, pp. 20–1.

²⁵ BLHA, Rep. 2A, Regierung Potsdam, III F,

²⁶ Pfeil, *Die Forstgeschichte Preußens*, p. 58.

²⁷ Karl Hasel, *Zur Geschichte der Forstgesetzgebung in Preußen* (1974), pp. 10, 24.

TABLE 2. Development of the areas of peasants' wood (*Bauernheide*) in the villages of the royal domain of Alt-Ruppin from 1799 to 1860 (in *Morgen*)

	1799	1817	1860
Buberow			15
Dabergotz		1.5	
Darritz			70
Glambeck	110		
Grieben	400		3705
Herzberg		70–80	831
Keller		12	
Klosterheide	50	50	678
Königstädt		10	40
Krangen	100		1633
Lichtenberg	30	32	
Lüdersdorf	10	48	98
Molchow	60	70	820
Pfalzheim	70		240
Rönnebeck		3–4	
Schönberg		110	1905
Schulzendorf		20	?
Seebeck	84		678
Storbeck		26	598
Strubensee	150		437
Vielitz	150		709
Wuthenow	40		526

Sources: For 1799, Bratring, *Die Grafschaft Ruppin*; for 1817, BLHA, Rep. 7, Amt Alt-Ruppin, No. 207; for 1860, Lieselott Enders, *Historisches Ortslexikon für Brandenburg, Teil II Ruppin* (1970).

arable land to forest.²⁸ This was precisely the case in the Alt-Ruppin royal domain. For 22 out of the 30 villages that belonged to the Alt-Ruppin domain from 1819 to 1846, we have evidence for existence of peasant-owned woodland between 1799 and 1860. Out of the 22, twelve succeeded in extending their woodland to 200–2000 *Morgen* (c.50–500 ha) or more by 1860, while the others created modest woodlands of under 100 *Morgen* (c.25 ha) (Table 2).

²⁸ Hartmut Harnisch, *Kapitalistische Agrarreform und industrielle Revolution: Agrarhistorische Untersuchungen über das ostelbische Preußen zwischen Spätféudalismus und bürgerlich-demokratischer Revolution von 1848/49 unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Provinz Brandenburg* (1984), p. 157.

II

The Seven Years' War between 1756 and 1763 caused immense damage to the Prussian economy and woodlands. After the War, the royal authorities had to reconstruct the Prussian Treasury and the royal forests. In this situation, it was no wonder that the authorities were interested in converting the tenant rights of domain peasants into freeholds. Until 1764, most peasants in the royal domains of Alt-Ruppin and Lindow were usufructuaries and entitled to free timber. When the Lindow domain was dissolved in 1764 and incorporated into the neighbouring domains of Alt-Ruppin, Friedrichsthal, etc., the authorities offered farm ownership to the usufructuary peasants in these domains under the condition that they give up their right to free timber and pay one-third of the costs of any timber granted to them. In the expanded domain of Alt-Ruppin, peasants from 17 villages accepted ownership of their farms and agreed to forego their right to free timber, while peasants from ten other villages did not accept this offer because they were concerned not to lose the provision of free timber.²⁹ In the Kurmark, there was a general reluctance among usufructuary peasants to accept the ownership of their farm if it entailed giving up their entitlement to free timber.³⁰

Meanwhile, however, Friedrich II accomplished fundamental reforms of royal forest management to improve the forest revenue. In 1764, he prohibited selection cutting and ordered the division of his forests into compartments with a 70-year cutting cycle. However, this plan could not immediately be realized due to the lack of trained officials or appropriate administrative organs for forestry. In 1770, the king created the forest academy in Berlin and the independent forest department under a minister in the General Directory (*Generaldirektorium*), the central administration in Berlin. It was only between 1780 and 1786 that Carl Philipp von Kropff, as a councillor of the forest department, took charge of dividing the forest districts in Brandenburg, Pommern, West and East Prussia into compartments. To produce thick pinewoods, he sought to adopt longer cutting cycles than the 70 years that Friedrich II insisted on into his final years. While following the king's order of division into 70 compartments, von Kropff divided each district into two blocks with 70 compartments and, by doing so, realized the longer cutting cycle of 140 years.³¹ The shift from selection cutting to compartment cutting was significant: as the areas of large-scale felling increased, it became possible and necessary to reforest them through sowing or planting. Thus, the royal forestry shifted from natural to artificial regeneration, which required much more intensive labour-inputs.³²

No later than 1776, Friedrich II ordered subjects entitled to timber grants from royal forests to perform gratuitous labour in the forests.³³ Details relating to this were only stipulated in the subsequent order of 1785. As such, the compulsory labour consisted essentially of ploughing, harrowing, and hoeing forest grounds to prepare them for sowing, and gathering and delivering pinecones. Each full-peasant (*Vollbauer*) was compelled to plough at least one

²⁹ Iida, *Ruppiner Bauernleben*, pp. 101–4.

³⁰ Lieselott Enders, 'Das bäuerliche Besitzrecht in der Mark Brandenburg, untersucht am Beispiel der Prignitz vom 13. bis 18. Jahrhundert', in J. Peters (ed.), *Gutsherrschaftsgesellschaften im europäischen Vergleich* (1997), pp. 418–9.

³¹ Rubner, *Forstgeschichte im Zeitalter der industriellen Revolution*, pp. 68–70; Asche, 'Von Waldglashütten', p. 72; Milnik, *Im Dienst am Wald*, pp. 56–7.

³² Hasel and Schwartz, *Forstgeschichte*, p. 279.

³³ BLHA, Rep. 2A, Regierung Potsdam, III F, no. 226, fo. 1.

Morgen (roughly a quarter hectare) of land each year, harrow two *Morgen* of land and gather two *Scheffel* of pinecones (one *Scheffel* = 55 litres). Each half-peasant (*Halbbauer* or *Kossäte*) was held to half of these obligations. Ploughing and harrowing could be replaced by hoeing.³⁴ A draft of the declaration of the 1785 order prescribed possible substitutes for these labours and conversion tables. Services which might be required included transporting pinecones and brushwood, trenching forest land, sowing pinecones from a sack into furrows and 'turning' them, pruning branches that came too near to firebreaks, cutting and spreading brushwood, etc.³⁵ This shows that obligatory labourers took particular charge of a whole series of pine plantation tasks. They cultivated land with ploughs, harrows or hoes, gathered and brought pinecones, sowed them and, as soon as they burst open on a warm day, 'turned' them to and fro so that the seeds fell out.³⁶

For the peasants, labour obligations in royal forests were new. In an order of 1776, Friedrich II admitted that the obligations were an innovation but rejected any argument that the peasants had not been previously required to undertake these tasks.³⁷ The royal authorities, however, did concede some limitations when imposing the new *corvée*. The order contained a proviso that the labour services should only be demanded in the forests that provided the peasants with timber and 'never for the other from which they received nothing'.³⁸ Thus, the king admitted the reciprocal character of the new *corvée*. The 1785 order combined this reciprocal character with the rhetoric of 'wood shortage'.³⁹ Since the burden of timber grants had produced a deterioration of the forests, the subjects needed to render labour so that they could restore the forests to the condition necessary to provide them with free timber again and to protect their offspring from future wood shortages. The order stated that the king was thus concerned for 'conservation' of his subjects and never intended to impose excess labour on them.⁴⁰

The labour due for the forest was much lighter than that for demesne farms, which, as we saw, might amount to 156 days a year in the Alt-Ruppin domain. According to the draft of the declaration for the 1785 order, the yearly labour of each full-peasant, for instance ploughing one *Morgen* of forest land and harrowing two *Morgen* of forest land, were to be equivalent to four days of the labour that a competent and mature person could perform in a day of twelve hours.⁴¹ Additionally, the order charged domain officials to make sure that the peasants' forest *corvée* did not conflict with their sowing season on the crop field. They should perform ploughing immediately after the harvest, harrowing in the spring and collecting pinecones in December and January.⁴²

³⁴ NCC, VII, cols 3009–14.

³⁵ BLHA, Rep. 2A, Regierung Potsdam, III F, no. 226, fos 61–6.

³⁶ Ludwig von Rönne, *Das Domainen-, Forst- und Jagd-Wesen des Preußischen Staates* (1854), pp. 590–2; Georg Ludwig Hartig, 'Ueber das dichte und dünne Säen und Pflanzen bei Holzkulturen', *Allgemeines Forst- und Jagd-Archiv*, VII (1826), pp. 15–16.

³⁷ BLHA, Rep. 2A, Regierung Potsdam, III F, no. 226, fo. 1.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ See, for instance, Joachim Radkau, *Wood: a history* (2012), pp. 156–71; Paul Warde, 'Fear of wood shortage and the reality of the woodland in Europe, c.1450–1850', *Hist. Workshop J.* 62 (2006), pp. 28–57.

⁴⁰ NCC, VII, col. 3009.

⁴¹ BLHA, Rep. 2A, Regierung Potsdam, III F, no. 226, fo. 64.

⁴² NCC, VII, cols 3010, 3012.

What helped the peasants' economy was that they could enjoy an increasing amount of timber so long as they performed the forest *corvée*. As shown in Table 5, the *corvée* that the peasants of Alt-Ruppin domain had to perform in 1825 was not at all different from what the 1785 order stipulated, and the obligations remained fixed until 1846. In contrast, the timber grants could increase in line with demand. As stipulated in Clause 210, Title 22, Part I of the Prussian General Legal Code of 1794,

when the changed situations or increased demands of the entitled farm make a relocation or enlargement of the farm buildings that originally existed necessary, then the timber needed for that can be taken from the obligated wood.⁴³

It seems likely that timber was especially needed in the late eighteenth century for enlarging farm buildings. According to the 1750 'livestock table' of the royal domain of Alt-Ruppin, the total number of livestock in all 22 villages and the town of Alt-Ruppin was 1593 horses, 2303 cattle, and 9936 sheep. In 1798, whilst the number of horses decreased to 1442, the number of cattle and sheep almost doubled to 4834 and 18,001 respectively.⁴⁴ The late eighteenth century coincided with a period of agrarian boom, which encouraged those villages equipped with extensive open lands to develop excellent meadows and pastures to enable them to augment the numbers of their livestock.⁴⁵

While imposing forest labour on all peasants in the domains in return for timber grants, the royal authorities specifically mobilized peasants living close to royal forests to perform additional labours in return for access to the forest's resources. In 1796, the villagers of Storbeck petitioned the authorities to permit them to continue raking moss and pine needles in the Alt-Ruppin forest, which they needed as litter because they were short of hay and straw. On this occasion, the forest official for Alt-Ruppin not only granted Storbeck's demand, but also offered the same concession to the villages of Darritz, Pfalzheim, and Nietwerder, all of whom were experiencing the same shortage. Ultimately, the four villages were allowed to rake moss and pine needles on a predetermined day every week (only during the winter) in a place specified by the forest officials. The peasants' gain from the forest was, of course, combined with their obligations to the forest owner. In return for being permitted to rake moss and pine needles, the peasants were obligated to deliver a certain quantity of pinecones to the forest authorities, in accordance with an ordinance of 1788.⁴⁶ In 1796, after large-scale insect and wind damage had occurred in the Ruppin forests in 1792–93, as in most Prussian forests, the authorities needed larger numbers of pinecones for reforestation.⁴⁷

The forest authorities combined the neighbouring villagers' forest use and labour in another way. Among the villages near the Alt-Ruppin forest, Pfalzheim was especially disadvantaged

⁴³ Hans Hattenhauer (ed.), *Allgemeines Landrecht für die preussischen Staaten von 1794* (third edn, 1996), p. 346.

⁴⁴ BLHA, Rep. 7, Amt Alt-Ruppin, no. 882; Bratring, *Die Grafschaft Ruppin*, pp. 380–449.

⁴⁵ Iida, *Ruppiner Bauernleben*, pp. 66–71; Hartmut Harnisch, 'Peasants and markets: the background to the agrarian reforms in feudal Prussia east of the Elbe,

1760–1807', in Evans and Lee (eds), *German Peasantry*, pp. 37–70.

⁴⁶ BLHA, Rep. 2A, Regierung Potsdam, III F, no. 1871, fos 1–7; no. 1836, fos 65–6.

⁴⁷ Bratring, *Die Grafschaft Ruppin*, p. 42; Carl Wilhelm Hennert, *Ueber den Raupenfraß und Windbruch in den Königl. Preuß. Forsten von dem Jahre 1791 bis 1794* (sec. edn, 1798; repr. 2013).

and regarded as the most miserable village in the Alt-Ruppin domain. Its poor crops were insufficient to provide the villagers' basic needs. For this reason, Alt-Ruppin's forest official used to lease forest land to the villagers, who cultivated it before it was afforested in the following year. Thus, the villagers could attain an increase in arable land while the forest office not only gained some rent but also saved the expense of preparing the ground for afforestation.⁴⁸ Reportedly, Pfalzheim villagers used 74 *Morgen* of land agriculturally in 1789–90, 44 *Morgen* of land in 1790–91, two pieces of 60-*Morgen* land in 1791–92, and 24 *Morgen* of land in 1794–95. The 90-*Morgen* clearing, which was planted with pine in 1797–98, showed 'very good tree growth', because the villagers had previously cultivated the area for crops.⁴⁹ Thus, in the royal forest grounds, cooperation between peasants and the authorities improved even in the late eighteenth century.

III

From 1799, a few decades after the introduction of forest labour obligations, the question arose over whether these obligations should be cancelled as part of Friedrich Wilhelm III's order to abolish labour services for the demesne farms in royal domains. In the Alt-Ruppin domain, negotiations began in 1803 with four villages (Dabergotz, Molchow, Nietwerder, and Wuthenow) where usufructuary peasants were saddled with labour obligations for the royal demesne farms in Dabergotz and Alt-Ruppin. For their release from labour obligations for both demesne farms, the peasants were required to pay commutation rents that were at least twice as high as those paid by neighbouring peasants who were already exempt from labour. Simultaneously, they were required to purchase their farms and relinquish their rights to timber. The peasants in Nietwerder responded by offering to continue their labour services for the forests (but not for the demesne farms) in order to retain their right to timber. The authorities refused their request and insisted that the cancellation of their right to timber was a non-negotiable condition. It was not until 1817 that Nietwerder eventually accepted these terms, following three other villages, in order to be free from *corvée* for demesne farms. Following the emancipation, the demesne farm in Dabergotz was alienated in 1810.⁵⁰ The demesne farm in Alt-Ruppin was divided into plots, most of which were obtained by the inhabitants of the town of Alt-Ruppin.⁵¹

Whilst freeing peasants of the four villages from their labour obligations for royal demesne farms and forests, the royal authorities were initially ready to accept other peasants' applications to convert their forest labour obligations into a commutation rent. Accordingly, an order of 13 December 1804 stipulated the conversion rates of each type of forest labour, 16 gr for ploughing one *Morgen* of forest land, four gr for harrowing one *Morgen* of forest land, and four gr for delivering one *Scheffel* of pinecones. Before long, however, the authorities had to reconsider this policy. In January 1817, Carl Philipp von Kropff, chief forest supervisor (*Oberforstmeister*) of the governorate district of Potsdam, argued that it was an inopportune

⁴⁸ BLHA, Rep. 7, Amt Alt-Ruppin, no. 115, fo. 95.

⁴⁹ BLHA, Rep. 2, Kurmärkische Kriegs- und Domänenkammer, no. D. 16527.

⁵⁰ Iida, 'Bäuerliches Beharren', pp. 129–37.

⁵¹ BLHA, Rep. 2A, Regierung Potsdam, III F, no. 4534.

TABLE 3. Area distribution of age groups of trees in the Alt-Ruppin forest district in 1846 (in *Morgen*)

Over 100	81–100	61–80	41–60	21–40	1–20	Clearing	Total
2,995	1,504	2,331	5,220	7,601	5,137	417	25,205
11.9%	6.0%	9.2%	20.7%	30.2%	20.4%	1.7%	100.0%

Source: BLHA, Rep. 2A, Regierung Potsdam, III F, no. 4286, fos 314–15.

moment for converting forest labour obligations into fixed commutation rent. Insects had recently devastated parts of the forest, which needed to be replanted. As a result of the wars from 1813, there was a shortage of labour and so the price of pinecones was very high. For these reasons, the forest labour services were, for the time being, 'still very necessary'. Therefore, von Kropff proposed either to suspend the conversion of forest labour services into rent temporarily or to raise the 1804 conversion rate from 16 gr to one rt for ploughing one *Morgen* of land, from four gr to six gr for harrowing one *Morgen* of land, and from four gr to at least five gr for delivering one *Scheffel* of pinecones.⁵² After this, the authorities compelled the peasants to pay higher commutation rent for being freed from their forest labour services.⁵³

The problems von Kropff mentioned seem to have not only been caused by temporary circumstances, but also reflected the longer-term development of forest structure. According to a description of the Alt-Ruppin forest district of 1846, the distribution of age groups of trees in the district was remarkably uneven (Table 3). While the area with trees over 60 years of age was only 27 per cent, the area with trees younger than 60 years amounted to 71 per cent. This shows that afforestation had intensified since the mid-1780s, the decade in which forest labour services had been introduced. Also, Table 3 demonstrates that afforestation reached its peak between the mid-1800s and mid-1820s. It was exactly during these two decades that von Kropff considered forest labour services to be imperative.

As reported in 1846, intensive afforestation essentially resulted from the endeavour to replace beech trees with pine trees, which corresponded with the growing dominance of conifer from the 1780s to the 1820s in the province of Brandenburg as a whole.⁵⁴ To use the upper storey of pine trees, the lower beech stands were cut down before reaching their useable thickness. Consequently, forest authorities achieved large areas of coniferous forestry but had insufficient labour at their disposal to undertake reforestation after felling. Thus, there arose a backlog of bare lands to be reforested.⁵⁵

Reforestation often failed and had to be repeated because the clear-felled areas tended to become overgrown with grass, as did the areas formerly covered with beech trees, which, because of richer soil, had once been used for agriculture. Prior agricultural use also brought mice, which devastated the subsequent silviculture. Indeed, some areas that had once been

⁵² BLHA, Rep. 2A, Regierung Potsdam, III F, no. 226.

⁵³ BLHA, Rep. 2A, Regierung Potsdam, III F, no. 747, fos 198–203.

⁵⁴ Pfeil, *Die Forstgeschichte Preußens*, pp. 20–1.

⁵⁵ BLHA, Rep. 2A, Regierung Potsdam, III F, no. 4286, fos 326–7.

covered with dense beech stands became broad bare land with only sparse pine trees after a succession of unsuccessful seedings.⁵⁶ These failures necessarily wasted labour and seed. Waste was also caused by insect damage. The pure pine stands were more vulnerable to this than mixed stands and created a broader area of bare land that needed replanting.⁵⁷

According to the general planting plan of the Alt-Ruppin forest district, there were bare lands of about 4523 *Morgen* (1155 ha) in 1820, which were to be afforested within 20 years.⁵⁸ In 1845, however, there remained 572 *Morgen* (146 ha) of bare lands (Table 1). The authorities made efforts to quicken the regeneration process through artificial planting, but this required more labour than they had at their disposal.⁵⁹ It is no wonder that, in 1829 and 1830, the then forest inspector of Rheinsberg, who was responsible for Alt-Ruppin and several other forest districts, carried out an investigation to discover how many royal subjects were entitled to the timber grant, but were not performing their labour obligations in the forest districts. These proved to be only few in number. He then investigated the possibility of strictly enforcing the 1785 order.⁶⁰

Artificial planting helped not only to quicken regeneration but also to make the forestry more compatible with wood pasturage, which was used by neighbouring peasants and foresters into the second half of the nineteenth century. Indeed, the pasture in the forest dominated by dense conifer stands was not rich. According to an estimate made in 1856 for the Alt-Ruppin forest district, the average area needed for pasturing a cow was either 29 or 38 *Morgen* in conifer stands (depending on the cutting cycle) while it was 25 in oak and beech.⁶¹ The grazing area of the district was extensive and almost all the forested area was open for grazing unless it was closed to protect young trees.⁶² The expansion of younger stands, however, meant an increase in the area in which grazing was not permitted, which necessarily narrowed the area for wood pasturage. Accordingly the authorities endeavoured to reopen the preserved area promptly. Therefore, in the list of each preserve, they recorded when it could be reopened for livestock grazing. This data confirms that the duration of the closure depended on whether the area had been sown by hand (*aus der Hand angesät*) or left to 'natural seeding' (*natürliche Besamung*). According to the 1835 list (Table 4), areas artificially sown in 1820 were already scheduled to be reopened in four years, while in areas of 'natural seeding', many closed areas had existed since 1809 and still had no prospect of being reopened. Thus, artificial sowing was likely to result in an even-aged stand that could be reopened more promptly, while natural seeding resulted in a stand of 'unequal ages' that delayed its reopening.⁶³

Because the forestry authorities needed more labour to undertake the sowing of trees, they did not press for the redemption of forest labour obligations. Table 5 compares the existing labour obligations for the Alt-Ruppin forest district in 1825 and 1846. In 1825, peasants of almost all the villages of the Alt-Ruppin domain – except the aforementioned four villages of Dabergotz, Molchow, Nietwerder and Wuthenow – were still obliged to do forest labour. In

⁵⁶ Ibid., fos 327–8.

⁵⁷ Hasel and Schwartz, *Forstgeschichte*, p. 300.

⁵⁸ BLHA, Rep. 2A, Regierung Potsdam, III F, no. 4285, fos 15–18.

⁵⁹ BLHA, Rep. 2A, Regierung Potsdam, III F, no. 4286, fos 316, 318, 330.

⁶⁰ BLHA, Rep. 2A, Regierung Potsdam, III F, no. 748,

fos 337–50.

⁶¹ BLHA, Rep. 2A, Regierung Potsdam, III F, no. 4288, p. 33.

⁶² Table 1; BLHA, Rep. 2A, Regierung Potsdam, III F, no. 4286, fos 393–408.

⁶³ BLHA, Rep. 2A, Regierung Potsdam, III F, no. 4524.

TABLE 4. Preserved areas in the royal forest district of Alt-Ruppin in 1835

<i>Year established</i>	<i>Artificial sowing</i>				<i>Natural seeding</i>			
	<i>Size (Morgen)</i>	<i>Tree type</i>	<i>Ages of trees (years)</i>	<i>When to be reopened</i>	<i>Size (Morgen)</i>	<i>Tree type</i>	<i>Ages of trees (years)</i>	<i>When to be reopened</i>
1809					32	Pine	9–23	Undecided
1810					82	Beech/Pine	18–23	Undecided
					143	Beech/Pine	23–63	Undecided
1812					175	Pine/Birch	8–21	Undecided
1813					271	Pine	9–28	Undecided
					53	Pine	12–20	Undecided
					62	Pine	3–24	Undecided
					80	Pine	3–24	Undecided
					22	Pine	8–24	Undecided
					99	Pine	8–24	Undecided
1814					22	Pine	16–24	Undecided
					15	Pine	12–20	Undecided
					275	Pine	16–24	Undecided
					39	Pine	19	Undecided
					51	Pine	19	Undecided
1815					117	Pine	1–23	Undecided
					20	Pine	19	Soon
					131	Pine	1–23	Undecided
					24	Pine/Birch	11–19	Undecided
1816					215	Pine	3–20	Undecided
					37	Pine	7–10	Undecided
					306	Pine/Birch	1–19	Undecided
					79	Pine/Birch	14–24	In a few years
					131	Pine/Birch	10–16	Undecided
1817					128	Pine	13–21	In a few years
1818					61	Pine	18	In a few years
1820	56	Pine	15	In 4 years	219	Pine	1–19	Undecided
	4	Pine	15	In 4 years	141	Pine	8–14	Undecided
					42	Pine	4–13	Undecided
1821	34	Pine	14	In 6 years	34	Pine/Beech	13–27	Undecided
	4	Pine	14	In 6 years	209	Pine/Beech	11–21	Undecided
	99	Pine	14	Undecided	170	Pine	8–11	Undecided
					94	Pine/Beech	10–14	Undecided
					182	Pine/Beech	8–14	Undecided

Year established	Artificial sowing				Natural seeding			
	Size (Morgen)	Tree type	Ages of trees (years)	When to be reopened	Size (Morgen)	Tree type	Ages of trees (years)	When to be reopened
1821					193	Pine/Beech	10–19	Undecided
<i>continued</i>					90	Pine/Beech	10–19	Undecided
					273	Beech/Pine	2–24	Undecided
1822	110	Pine	13	Undecided	116	Pine	1–9	Undecided
1823	95	Pine	10–12	Undecided	134	Pine	1–9	Undecided
					289	Pine/Beech	1–40	Undecided
					180	Pine/Birch	2–11	Undecided
					199	Beech/Pine	4–12	Undecided
					91	Pine/Beech	12	Undecided
					127	Pine/Beech	12	Undecided
1824	76	Pine	11	Undecided				
1825	145	Pine	5–10	Undecided				
1829					44	Pine	1–4	Undecided
1830	19	Pine	4	Undecided	91	Pine	2–6	Undecided
	59	Pine	4	Undecided				
1834	100	Pine	–	Undecided				
1835	15	Pine		Undecided	52	Pine	Seeding	Undecided
	113	Pine		Undecided	129	Pine	Seeding	Undecided
	50	Oak		Undecided	134	Pine	Seeding	Undecided
					335	Pine/Oak	Seeding	Undecided
					210	Beech/Pine	1–60	Undecided

Notes: The preserved areas that were partly sown and partly left to natural seeding are not included. In cases, where the year of establishment is unknown, the areas are also excluded.

Source: BLHA, Rep. 2A, Regierung Potsdam, III F, no. 4524.

1846, about two-thirds of the 1825 labour obligations still existed. This was, however, not solely due to the authorities' need for labour, but the preference of many peasants to maintain their entitlements to timber grants from the royal forest.

The enfranchisement edict (*Regulierungsedikt*) of 14 September 1811 and its declaration of 29 May 1816 provided the framework for liquidating the relationships between the royal authorities and usufructuary peasants in the villages of Bechlin, Kerzlin, Kraatz, Schulzendorf, Vielitz, and Wildberg, who were already exempt from labour obligations for demesne farms. Negotiations did not always begin quickly after the legislation. Without the inducement of relief from their labour obligations for the demesne farms, these peasants often preferred to negotiate for better terms and, while doing so, continued to render forest labour services.⁶⁴

⁶⁴ Iida, 'Bäuerliches Beharren', pp. 137–47.

TABLE 5. Labour obligations for the Alt-Ruppin forest district in 1825 and 1846

Village/ Town	Number of subjects obligated to labour (1825)			Labour obligations per year (1825)					Remaining labour obligations per year (1846)				
	<i>Bauern</i>	<i>Kossäten</i>	<i>Büdner</i>	Ploughing <i>Morgen</i>	Harrowing <i>Morgen</i>	Hoeing <i>Morgen</i>	Collecting pine cones <i>Wispel</i>	<i>Scheffel</i>	Ploughing <i>Morgen</i>	Harrowing <i>Morgen</i>	Hoeing <i>Morgen</i>	Collecting pine cones <i>Wispel</i>	<i>Scheffel</i>
1 Alt-Ruppin	7		94	7	14	5.22	2	13	5	10	5.22	2	10
2 Bechlin	14	14.5		21.25	42.5		1	18.5					
3 Dabergotz		5		2.5	5			5					
4 Darritz	9			9	18			18	9	18			18
5 Keller	8	2		9	18			18	6	12			12
6 Kerzlin	14	11											
7 Klosterheide	5			5	10			10					
8 Krangen	15			15	30		1	6	14	28		1	4
9 Langen	6	1		3.25	6.5			6.5					
10 Lichtenberg	16	2		17	34		1	10	15	30		1	6
11 Manker	11	18		20	40		1	16	18.5	37		1	13
12 Pfalzheim	6			6	12			12					
13 Rönnebeck	21	6		24	48		2		23	46		1	22
14 Schönberg	14	5		16.5	33		1	9					
15 Seebeck	12			12	24		1		12	24		1	
16 Storbeck	12			12	24		1		11	22			22
17 Strubensee	8	1		8.5	17			17	7.5	15			15
18 Walchow	11	1		11.5	23			23	11.5	23			23
19 Nietwerder		1		0.5	1			1					
20 Wuthenow		1		0.5	1			1					
Total	189	68.5	94	200.5	401	5.22	18	16	132.5	265	5.22	13	1

Note: One *Wispel* = 24 *Scheffel*.

Source: For 1825, BLHA, Rep. 2A, Regierung Potsdam, III F, no. 4285, fos 13–14; for 1846, BLHA, Rep. 2A, Regierung Potsdam, III F, no. 4286, fo. 532.

The peasants in Bechlin and Kerzlin continued to perform labour after 1825 (Table 5), though those in Kerzlin did so only occasionally, perhaps because of their remote location.⁶⁵ The peasants in Vielitz performed services until at least 1832, probably in the Rühnick forest district.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ BLHA, Rep. 2A, Regierung Potsdam, III D, no. 17180.

⁶⁶ BLHA, Rep. 2A, Regierung Potsdam, III D, no. 17309.

In the village of Schulzendorf, however, the peasants began negotiations in 1818 and secured a settlement in 1823.⁶⁷ Their willingness to give up their entitlement to timber can be traced back to their decision to create their own woodland. In around 1809, they decided to sow the sandy or stony area of their arable field, consisting of about 60 *Morgen*, with pinecones. As they could not obtain sufficient pinecones all at once, they planned to sow the area in stages over six years. Each of the peasants had to obtain yearly ten to twelve *Scheffel* of pinecones while, as a community, they were obliged to supply the royal forest district of Lüdersdorf with 32 *Scheffel* of pinecones annually. They considered this to be impossible and petitioned the king to free them from this obligation for six years, but their request was not granted. At that time, the pinecones from Schulzendorf were needed by the Lüdersdorf forest district, which was running short of funds for recovering from the most recent insect damage.⁶⁸ Thus, the peasants' own forestry conflicted with their labour services for the royal forest. An 1817 report stated that their woodland of 20 *Morgen* not only included the young plantations mentioned above but, also six *Morgen* that was densely wooded.⁶⁹ For these reasons, it is understandable that when they had the opportunity to do so, they terminated their forest service by giving up their timber rights.

The ending of the relationship between the farm-owning peasants and the royal authorities was authorized by the redemption order (*Ablösungsordnung*) of 7 June 1821. In the Alt-Ruppin domain, this category of peasants was found in the 17 villages that in 1764 had accepted the offer of farm ownership. In 1819, three more villages that consisted of farm-owning peasants (Buberow, Glambeck, and Grieben) were incorporated from Friedrichsthal into Alt-Ruppin domain. It was only in 1839–40 that the governorate of Potsdam commissioned an official named Wittchow to begin negotiating with a greater part of these villages. As Wittchow's report of 4 June 1840 stated, all the peasants in Buberow, Grieben, Klosterheide, and Schönberg quickly agreed to the authorities' redemption proposal including the redemption of their entitlements to timber grants. Wittchow remarked that the villages of Grieben, Klosterheide, and Schönberg had quite large quantities of woodlands, which Table 2 confirms. Buberow owned only small woodlands but had, for a long time, been interested in redeeming their labour obligation to the remote forest district of Lüdersdorf.⁷⁰ However, few if any of the peasants in the eleven other villages agreed to the redemption plan, because they wished to retain their timber grants.⁷¹

It was prudent for peasants to retain their right to timber because the fixed compensation rents that they received after the redemption did not cover the future cost of timber. This rose considerably during the first two-thirds of the nineteenth century. The price of pine timber per cubic meter in the forest district of Alt-Ruppin climbed from 4.90 Mark in the 1800s to 11.93 Mark in the 1840s, and further advanced to about 17 or 18 Mark in the 1870s, following the general trend in the governorate district of Potsdam.⁷² As long as they were entitled to timber, the peasants could receive, instead of a fixed rent, an increasing quantity of building

⁶⁷ Iida, 'Bäuerliches Beharren', pp. 137–8.

⁶⁸ BLHA, Rep. 2A, Regierung Potsdam, III F, no. 747, fos 1–13.

⁶⁹ BLHA, Rep. 7, Amt Alt-Ruppin, no. 207, fo. 150.

⁷⁰ BLHA, Rep. 2A, Regierung Potsdam, III F, no. 747, fo. 198.

⁷¹ Iida, 'Bäuerliches Beharren', pp. 148–58.

⁷² Udo Eggert, 'Die Bewegung der Holzpreise und Tagelohn-Sätze in den preussischen Staatsforsten von 1800 bis 1879', in *Zeitschrift des Königl. Preussischen Statistischen Bureaus* 23 (1883), pp. 8–9, 12–3.

timber for rebuilding or enlarging their stables and barns to handle the concurrent advances in agriculture.⁷³ As Hartmut Harnisch has shown, the need to enlarge farm buildings came from the shift to the stall-feeding of livestock and the increase in farm produce.⁷⁴ In the domain of Alt-Ruppin, the numbers of stall-fed horses increased considerably. In the 1831 statistical survey of the domain, the horses the inhabitants held were divided between 'stall horses' (*Stallpferde*), 'grass horses' (*Graspferde*), and 'foals' (*Fohlen*). Of the 31 villages recorded, stall horses were found in all but three. In all there were 918 'stall horses' and 553 'grass horses'.⁷⁵ In 1800 stall-feeding was only noticed in nine settlements in the district of Ruppin comprising 136 villages and other settlements.⁷⁶ The spread of this practice required the peasants to extend their stables and, thus, necessitated more timber. Even more timber was demanded because, among farm buildings, stables endured least well because of the animals' sweat and excrement, and needed to be rebuilt every 50 or 80 years, where houses and barns needed to be rebuilt only every 100 and 120 years respectively.⁷⁷ In 1856, an official observed that the agriculture of peasants' farms of the Alt-Ruppin domain was generally improving, increasing the need to extend their stables and barns.⁷⁸ There was therefore little incentive for peasants to end their forest labour services when it involved the loss of their rights to timber.

Thus, while a significant part of the forest labour obligations introduced by the 1785 order remained throughout the first half of the nineteenth century, the authorities also introduced additional labour obligations for the forests. Since the forests suffered from repeated insect damage, forest officials required compulsory labour for exterminating insects. After the peasants in Molchow, on 24 and 26 March 1821, sent 13 men on each day to collect moss from a royal forest, pile it in a heap and bury it, the peasants asked the authorities to pay them daily wages for this labour. They believed that they were no longer required to offer forest labour for nothing, because they had, as mentioned, already given up their entitlement to timber. The governorate of Potsdam, however, rejected this demand, because, in the 1818 settlement with Molchow, the authorities reserved the right to demand forest labour for exterminating insects while giving up the labour for afforestation due to the 1785 order. This was not merely a single occurrence but a general policy in the province. The governorate stated that, due to the order of 18 May 1815, each inhabitant should help to exterminate forest insects in his district. There was, however, much confusion and conflict over whether this labour should be paid or not.⁷⁹

IV

In the case of Prussia's royal domains, the peasants' labour obligations for demesne farms developed in the sixteenth century and ceased after the 1799 order but those for royal forests only started in the late eighteenth century and continued in part at least until after 1850.

⁷³ BLHA, Rep. 2A, Regierung Potsdam, III F, no. 4288, pp. 96–7.

⁷⁴ Harnisch, *Kapitalistische Agrarreform*, pp. 312–13.

⁷⁵ BLHA, Rep. 7, Amt Alt-Ruppin, no. 283, fos 134–6.

⁷⁶ BLHA, Rep. 2, Kurmärkische Kriegs- und Domänenkammer, D. 39, fo. 82; Bratring, *Statistisch-*

Topographische Beschreibung, II, p. 20.

⁷⁷ BLHA, Rep. 2A, Regierung Potsdam, III D, no. 1154, fo. 56.

⁷⁸ BLHA, Rep. 2A, Regierung Potsdam, III F, no. 4288, pp. 96–7.

⁷⁹ BLHA, Rep. 2A, Regierung Potsdam, III F, no. 229.

The royal authorities introduced this new *corvée* as part of a closer management of the forests and a shift from selection cutting to compartment cutting. Large-scale felling enabled and required artificial regeneration, which needed peasant labour comparable to agriculture. The royal forests continued to need this *corvée* during the first half of the nineteenth century. Endeavours to create pure pine stands by cutting beech trees resulted in too much bare land requiring reforestation. The reforestation attempts suffered from frequent failure and often needed to be replanted. Thus, the redemption of forest labour obligations proceeded slowly because the labour continued to be needed.

The peasants accepted this new *corvée* and often continued until the mid-nineteenth century to undertake it because it gave them access to timber at a discount price. It was much lighter than the *corvée* for demesne farms; it did not increase and it enabled the peasants to meet their increasing needs for timber. Hence they saw advantage in these labour services where their labour obligations for the demesne farms only served the lords' purposes with no corresponding advantage to the peasants. Where peasants had taken the initiative to create their own woodlands, becoming independent of timber grants, they quickly redeemed their forest labour obligations.

Peasants' accommodation to forest labour obligations was not a result of their subordination to the lords' oppression, which older writers tended to take for granted, but rather arose out of their calculation of self-advantage in a relationship with their lords which was more reciprocal than repressive. Whilst these conclusions come from a study of the royal domain estates, it should be asked whether comparable developments occurred on noble estates in Brandenburg-Prussia, where the lords often had sizable forests and were usually responsible for providing their non-farm-owning peasants with timber. The available brief accounts of forestry in noble lordships like Boitzenburg and Stavenow suggest that developments here run in parallel with those in the royal domains we have identified here. This is a subject worthy of future research. Here too we may well find forms of reciprocity between peasants and lords.⁸⁰

⁸⁰ Hartmut Harnisch, *Die Herrschaft Boitzenburg. Untersuchungen zur Entwicklung der sozialökonomischen Struktur ländlicher Gebiete in der Mark Brandenburg vom 14. bis zum 19. Jahrhundert* (1968), pp. 177–80, 207; William W. Hagen, *Ordinary Prussians. Brandenburg Junkers and villagers, 1500–1840* (2002), pp. 219–20, 587, 600.