The Department of Forests is one of the oldest government departments established by the British Colonial Government in Cyprus. The operation of the Department began in 1879, a year after the arrival of the British on the island. Other services such as the “Department of Agriculture” which was established in 1896 were initially under the jurisdiction of the “Chief Forester”.

Previously, during the occupation of the island by Turkey in 1570 – 1878, there was no systematic management or protection of the forests. The forests were then almost destroyed because of uncontrolled felling of trees and other vegetation, free grazing and large area land reclamation for agricultural development and also because of large scale fires.

The first effort towards eliminating destruction was in 1839 when a decision was taken to impose some kind of forests taxation this, however, was never implemented. In 1874, within the framework of forest control by the Ottoman Empire, a team of French Foresters visited Cyprus under De Montrichard, who noted that the island forests were ravaged and there was a tendency for abandonment by the residents. The first Bill regarding Turkish land was published in Cyprus in 1870 which identified forests and provided for some kind of sketchy control. From 1874 to 1877 a new Forest Inspector was appointed together with three Forest Rangers and they were posted in three villages on the hills.

The treaty which provided for the transfer of Cyprus to the British was signed on 4 June 1878 and in the beginning of September of the same year the English Governor of Cyprus was instructed by the English Ministry of Foreign Affairs to arrange the arrival of an English forester from the Forest Service of India. The first forester was A.E. Wild who arrived on the island in 1878-1879 and P.G. Madon in 1880 who came from French Toulon and was previously serving in Algiers. The British, despite the fact that they had sovereignty and were ruling the colony, paid attention to the protection and management of the forests on the island. During the same year, they implemented the first Forest Legislation which aimed at protecting the forests.

In 1898 the first body of Forest Rangers was established and they were asigned with the task to patrol the forests in order to protect them from the many dangers that threatened them. The Forest Law was enacted in 1913 and its provisions essentially put an end to grazing in the forests and it provided for a specified number of goats to be bred in other areas in exchange for some socio-economic provisions for the shepherds.

By 1922 a number of foresters visited Cyprus and each one of them was distinguished either in relation to something in the field of reforestation, or the protection and restoration of the forests of Cyprus. A most significant and valuable contribution is attributed to Dr. A. H. Unwin who served as Director of the Department of Forests from 1922 to 1936. In 1926 there are 242 employees and 100 labourers working in the Department, among them 6 university graduates.

The first Forest Inventory on a national basis was carried out in 1940 and many woodlands were declared state forests and were integrated into the existing state ones, thus, they enjoyed the same protection and management. The relevant order declared both the area covered by each forest as well as the cadastral on which the boundaries are shown, and this was a significant legal act because all problems related to ownership regarding forest land and the surrounding area were solved once and for all.

The first codification of the Official Forest Policy takes place, later, in 1950. In The Forestry College was established in 1951 and it was essentially considered as the basic blood donor as regards the provision of suitably trained staff.

The last Directors of the Department of Forests during the British Rule were: Davidson in 1955 and later, until 1961 the Turkish Cypriot I. Sitkis. Since then, and up to this day, the Department’s Directors have been Greek Cypriot Foresters.

The new Forest Law entered into force in 1967 and its provisions regulate all matters regarding forests and the people who are in any way related to them. The legislation also lays the foundations for addressing problems on a contemporary basis and environmental approaches and it also classifies forests into Permanent Forest Areas, National Forest Parks and Areas for the Protection of the Fauna and Flora. The forests, apart from the production of wood are also areas for recreation and for this reason a lot of camping and picnic sites have been established for the recreation of the forest visitors.

In 1974 the Turkish invasion and occupation halts every forest activity and development. Huge fires, the result of bombarding and other warfare, burn 35% of the most productive forest areas in Pafos and the northwest side of the Troodos range. The total area burned during that difficult period was approximately 26.000 hectares.

The Department of Forests undertook the difficult task to rescue all burned timber with the urgent logging of the burned trees, the transfer to timber factories and its prompt utilization to prevent secondary damage such as moth, fungus etc. Later, they began reforestation of the burned areas and in general their protection in order to prevent erosion and degrading. The whole strategic planning for the rescue of the burned timber and reforestation provided employment to many refugees and other residents of the area in the difficult times that followed the invasion. For this significant effort the Department of Forests received praise by FAO and prominent Forest Scientists from many countries.

The Department of Forests gradually acquired a modern fleet of fire engine vehicles and other flexible equipment. It organizes trained Forest Fire Fighting Task Forces placed at strategic Forest Stations all over the island and it prepares Action Plans for emergency action in case of fires and the ability to extinguish quickly. At the same time it promotes various programmes for the prevention of fires through relevant and suitable information programmes. In general the protection of forests from fires is better addressed with the use of firefighting aircrafts, collaboration with other government services, mainly the Cyprus Fire Service, assistance from organised agencies and other interested individuals and the education and training of Forest Personnel in accordance to the new EU regulations.

Today, the Department of Forests continues to be responsible for the Management and Protection of forests for social and environmental purposes as well as for recreation. These are first priority objects while timber collection is simply a forest activity for the improvement of the forests where it is required.

The main objects of the new Forest Policy of the Department of Forests are:

* + Sustainable development and conservation of natural resources
	+ Expansion of forests through the reforestation of government and degraded private lands
	+ Conservation, improvement and promotion of the natural environment and natural inheritance
	+ Extending and upgrading the infrastructure for tourist and recreation purposes
	+ Development and revival of the villages adjacent to forests
	+ Environmental education of the citizens and the creation of forest consciousness