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CONVENTION ON THE CONSERVATION OF EUROPEAN WILDLIFE
AND NATURAL HABITATS

Standing Committee
23rd meeting

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Document for information for the Bureau

**Conservation of the Białowieża Forest
(Poland)**

Report by the NGOs

*Document prepared by
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Protection of Birds, BirdLife in Poland) and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB,
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I. SUMMARY

The Białowieża Forest is one of the largest and best-preserved areas of primary lowland temperate forest in Europe with extensive areas of primeval character. While a core area of 4,700 ha is strictly protected within the 10,502 ha Białowieża National Park in most of the remainder of the total 62,500 ha, logging continues (over 80% of the total is used for forestry) and legal protection is inadequate. In 1998, BirdLife International brought this case to the Bern Standing Committee.

A file was not opened because the Polish Government subsequently imposed a moratorium on logging of the largest trees and began the process of designating the entire forest as a National Park. The new Government, however, is lifting the moratorium, plans to substantially intensify logging above the already damaging levels of recent decades, and has no plans to extend the national park.

There is an urgent need to end the destruction and deterioration, through logging, of the Białowieża Forest and to encourage the Polish Government to respect its international responsibility to protect this site of global biodiversity importance.

The Standing Committee is invited:

- (i) to open a file on this issue and**
- (ii) to adopt the recommendation annexed to this report specifying steps which the Government of Poland should take to comply with their obligations under the Bern Convention**
- (iii) to ask the European Commission to exert pressure on the Polish Government within the accession process to implement the recommendations as appropriate.**

II. Background

In 1998, at its 18th meeting, the Standing Committee discussed the possibility of opening a file concerning the Białowieża Forest, following BirdLife International's submission, in December 1997, of document T-PVS (98) 7 and the Polish Government's response to this in document T-PVS (98) 51 + Addendum.

BirdLife's contention was that logging and other forestry management of the part of the Białowieża Forest outside the strict reserve of the National Park (a World Heritage and Man and the Biosphere site of global importance) was severely damaging the ecological value of this buffer zone, including many species protected by Appendix II of the Convention. This management involves excessive, unsustainable logging practices including of mature trees.

BirdLife was asking the Standing Committee to recommend that the Polish Government immediately ban any further logging in old-growth stands of the Białowieża Forest and extend the National Park to encompass the entire Forest.

However, during the course of 1998, since BirdLife had made its complaint, the Polish Government (newly elected in October 1997) had made substantial progress towards addressing BirdLife's concerns and thus the Committee decided not to open a file on the case.

The Secretariat told the Committee that it could continue to be informed about progress via the planned European Diploma report.

The new Environment minister had publicly declared his intention to meet the public expectations in securing the status of national park for the entire Białowieża Primeval Forest by the year 2001 at the latest. Concrete progress on this was that:

- In August 1998, a moratorium on cutting of the oldest trees was issued by the Director of State Forestry Administration (Decyzja nr 48). This helped to slow down cutting of the remnant old growth stands.
- On 23 November 1998, an unprecedented governmental program, the 'Contract for Białowieża Forest' together with the supplementary paper *"Information on protection of Białowieża Primeval Forest"* were adopted by the Ministers' Council Committee on Regional Policy and Sustainable Development. This foresaw enlargement of the National Park to the entire Białowieża Forest in 1999, or step-by-step within the next two to three years, and was to provide state assistance to the communities neighbouring the future national park. For the two years, 1999-2000, the parliament had assigned an extra \$8 million (US\$5.9 mill.

in 1999) of the state budget to support development in the Białowieża Primeval Forest region. However there has been no such funding since 2000.

After the Standing Committee examined the case there was further good news in February 2000: the Minister of Environment accepted a draft decree on enlargement of the Białowieża National Park (BNP) from 1 January 2001 to include the whole Forest.

However, while the Minister's decision constituted a necessary step in the legal process, it was in no way binding. The document still had to be approved by all other cabinet ministers, signed and officially published. The process could be delayed or blocked at any stage, for example by a negative opinion of any minister.

Thus, nothing has in fact changed - logging in the Białowieża Forest has continued unabated and, since the optimism of February 2000, the situation has steadily deteriorated.

A very active and powerful campaign against national park enlargement was led by forestry interests, in the local media combined with lobbying at national governmental level. In September 2000 this achieved success when the official retreat was announced: the Park will not be enlarged due to lack of money.

In Winter 2000/2001, following Parliamentary elections, the new government showed no commitment to preserving the Forest.

In September 2002, the Council of Europe renewed the European Diploma for the BNP, attaching the following recommendations which promote multipurpose forestry rather than nature conservation: *'...decisions should be taken...as required by the management guidelines proposed by DANCEE¹/Białowieża Forest project...' and '...devising an eco-friendly forestry system...particularly by means of selective techniques of multilayered stands silviculture.....'*. We believe it is most unfortunate that the recommendations are based on advice from commercial forestry interests (DANCEE and COWI²) without apparently taking account of advice from nature conservation interests.

In autumn 2002 new forestry management plans for the Białowieża Forest were prepared. They are full of 'proecological' words, for example, 'no tree will be cut for commercial reasons'. They propose, however, to lift the 1998 ban on cutting the oldest trees and forecast substantial increase in cutting rates in the forest.

III. National conservation action to date

For 12 years there has been campaigning urgently to ban all the cutting of old stands and to enlarge the Białowieża National Park so as to protect the whole forest complex. Virtually all Polish bodies of conservation experts (State Council on Nature Protection, Nature Protection and Forestry Sciences Committees of the Polish Academy of Sciences, General Assembly of the Polish Academy of Sciences, Scientific Council of the Białowieża National Park), the Environment Protection Committees of the lower (Sejm) and upper (Senat) chambers of the Polish Parliament, OTOP (Polish BirdLife partner) and numerous other NGOs (including, internationally, BirdLife International, WWF, European Ornithologists' Union) have called for this with one voice.

In June 1996, eight Polish NGOs (now 10) established the Białowieża Coalition to co-ordinate efforts of the member organisations to save the Białowieża Forest. At least 200,000 (perhaps over one million) letters of protest have been sent by concerned citizens to the current and previous Polish governments.

However the forestry administration has strongly opposed the campaign and persistently tried to loosen the restrictions on cutting; it now looks as though they will be successful.

¹ Danish Cooperation for the Environment in Eastern Europe

² Danish forestry consultancy firm

IV. Socioeconomic pressures for intensification of the local forestry industry

So far as the Polish Government is concerned, the biggest problem connected to the enlargement of the National Park is the socio-economic conditions of the local communities.

However, by the end of 2001, the only people working directly in the Białowieża Forest were 236 persons employed in the forestry administration and about 100 forestry workers. Most of these would be able to find work in the enlarged National Park.

The timber industry as a whole in the area employed, at the beginning of 2000, about 1385 people (it is hard to obtain an exact figure, there being a large grey area). The number of employees has been steadily declining in the recent years due to the economic crisis and lack of competitiveness. Moreover, and more importantly, the fate of the local timber industry is not dependent on timber from the Białowieża Forest; currently only about a third of timber processed in the region originates from the Forest. Furthermore, there is oversupply to the local timber industry of timber from both national and imported sources.

The need for the local forestry administrators of Białowieża Forest to cover their financial deficit (over 6 mln Polish zloty -1.5 mln Euro in 2001) explains, in large part, why they continue to push for relaxation in the regulations that protect trees and why the state forest administration opposes an extension of the national park.

V. The ecological importance of the Białowieża Forest

Situated on the border between Poland and Belarus, the Białowieża Forest complex (1,505 km²) is the last significant remnant of the primeval temperate lowland forest that once extended across Europe. It is essential to conserve the forest because of its unique biodiversity importance. It is:

- a **World Heritage Site** (4,700 ha) since 1979 and **Biosphere reserve** (4,700 ha) since 1977
- a **Council of Europe European Diploma Site** since 1998, renewed in 2002
- a qualifying site for the **Natura 2000** network under the EU Birds and Habitats Directives and the **Emerald Network**, fulfilling all criteria (a-f) under Recommendation No 16 of the Standing Committee of the Bern Convention on areas of special conservation interest
- a **WWF European Forest Hotspot** (1997)
- an **Important Bird Area** (1990, 2000), as identified by BirdLife International, hosting significant populations of the globally threatened Corncrake *Crex crex* as well as many other species listed on Appendix II of the Bern Convention, including Black Stork *Ciconia nigra*, Honey Buzzard *Pernis apivorus*, Lesser Spotted Eagle *Aquila pomarina* and Middle Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopus medius*. It has one of the highest avifaunal diversities in the temperate zone; 250 species recorded, 82 of which are Species of European Conservation Concern and 177-180 of which breed there, including 15 bird of prey species, eight owl species, eight out of nine European woodpeckers and 18 species of Sylviinae warblers
- a site of international importance for other fauna and flora due to the high diversity of large mammals (such as European bison *Bison bonasus* extinct elsewhere in Europe, elk, wolf, lynx, beaver, otter); insects (including several endemic and relict taxa), plants and fungi (over 2000 species), especially species dependent on oldgrowth or decaying wood
- a site, 80% of which is composed of two endangered natural habitats, oak-hornbeam (41.2) and Middle European stream ash-alder (44.3) forests, requiring scientific conservation measures according to Resolution No 4 (1996) of the Bern Convention Standing Committee listing endangered natural habitats requiring specific conservation measures
- a site with a high diversity of forest landscapes retaining the natural spatial arrangement of different forest communities and transitions
- a vital, unique reference site and living museum for conservation science, offering a window into the past, through which to observe how forest ecosystems functioned before human interference; and for areas elsewhere in Europe, acting as a yardstick against which to assess the amount of

anthropogenic change and whose characteristics we can aim towards restoring; the Forest is, for biological sciences, comparable in value to the Hubble telescope for astronomy or the CERN lab for particle physics, except that it is irreplaceable

- of great importance as part of our historic and cultural heritage, being an inspiration for generations of people, including due to its huge old trees, many 200-300 years old with the tallest spruce exceeding 55 m and the tallest oaks exceeding 40 m in height. A poem referring to the Białowieża Forest is compulsory reading in all Polish schools and famous Polish painters have depicted the forest.

VI. History

From the 16th century until the First World War, the Forest was protected as the hunting grounds of ruling families. Commercial, large-scale logging operations began only during the war (1915). After the Second World War, the forest was split between Poland (42% of the area) and Belarus. In the Belarussian part timber extraction was less important, and about 10 years ago the whole of it was declared a national park. On the other hand, in the Polish part, except for the strictly protected part of Białowieża National Park which covers only 8% of the area, commercial cutting has continued.

VII. Impacts of logging on the Białowieża Forest

BirdLife International believes it is essential and urgent that a Bern file is opened on this case because of the following pressures and lack of appropriate responses from the Polish authorities since the case was last brought to the Standing Committee in 1998:

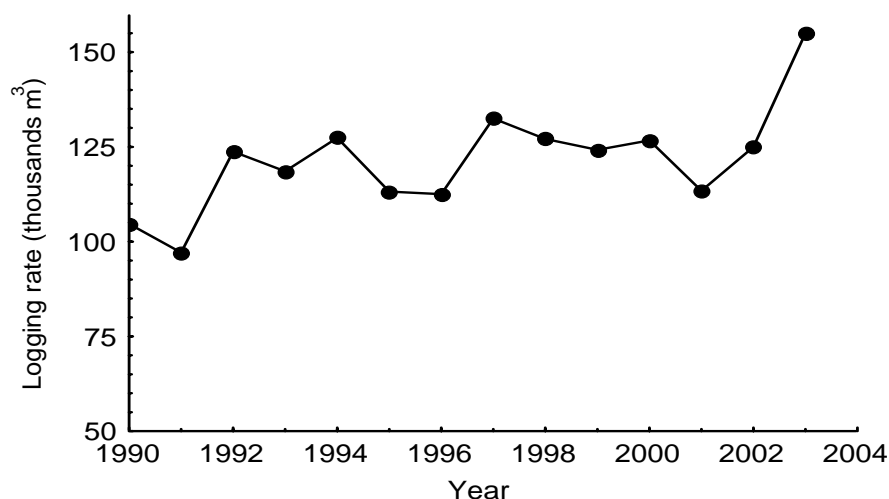
1. *Continued high logging rates - 113-127 000 m³/yr, equivalent to some 20,000 trees per annum - during 1998-2002, most of the logging is from the old-growth natural stands*

Officially reported logging rates remained within 97-133 thousand m³ during 1990-2002 (Fig. 1). The amount extracted from the forest in the last five years (1998-2002), totalling 600 000 m³, is 38% of the 1.55 million m³ removed from the forest during 1990-2002, which suggests that the extraction rate has remained fairly constant throughout this thirteen year period. To these figures one should add the volume of illegally logged trees which, according to some estimates, could amount to even 25 thousand m³/year.

So there is no evidence that there has been a reduction in logging rates over the last five to ten years despite the following (alleged) conservation measures:

- 1994, establishment of the Forestry Promotional Complex by the foresters to demonstrate the supposed 'new, sustainable, multi-purpose forestry' with cutting of only 90-95% of stands (up to 80% in nature reserves) rather than clear-cutting, as previously; however, the logging restrictions on the remaining 5-20% could be overcome for 'sanitary cutting' of trees, such as those infected by fungi or bark beetles.
- 1995, a partial ban on cutting the largest oaks and some other species of trees
- 1996, transfer of 5000 ha from the managed forest to the BNP
- 1998, introduction of a moratorium on cutting in the old-growth patches.

Fig. 1 Exploitation rates - volume of marketable timber sold by three Białowieża Forest superintendencies (Białowieża, Browsk, Hajnówka) in the years 1990-2001. Following the State Forestry Administration statistics. The 2002 figure is an estimate, the 2003 value refers to the quantity planned in the newly elaborated management plans.



It is especially striking that even the decrease in area available for logging by 5000 ha occasioned by the national park extension has not led to a decline in the volume of timber extracted. The declines visible in Fig. 1 stem from diminishing market demand for timber during the years of economic crisis, not from restrictions imposed by conservation measures. This picture demonstrates that, so far, the forestry administration manages to overcome all limitations and logging continues unabated.

The logging operations are concentrated in the remnant natural oldgrowth stands as plantations are still too young to provide valuable timber. Practically all forest stands of natural origin outside the national park are likely to be destroyed in the next decade if urgent action is not taken.

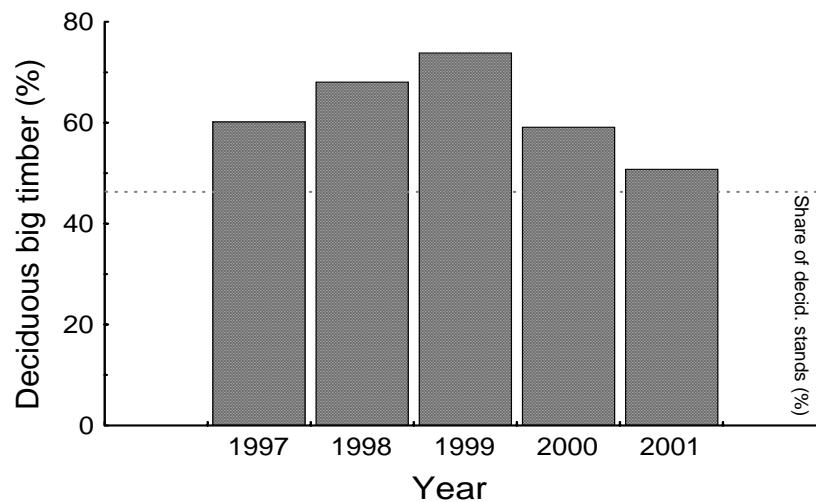
2. *Disproportionate logging of large deciduous trees from the most ecologically important forest types*

Despite restrictions, large deciduous trees form a disproportionate amount of the large timber extracted from the forest (Fig. 2). Though deciduous stands of all types cover only 47% of the area under forestry administration, they constitute 51-74% of timber extracted. Only in the years (e.g. 2001) of bark beetle (*Ips typographus*) outbreak did the proportion of deciduous logs taken decline (as that of spruces removed for sanitary reasons increased).

The proportion of deciduous trees among large timber extracted includes the regular logging of the largest deciduous trees despite the formal ban on cutting of the largest trees introduced in 1998, using pest control and sanitary logging excuses. However it appears to be impossible to quantify the number of trees above the moratorium limits which have actually been cut as data on the size distribution of trees actually logged is difficult to obtain from the forestry statistics.

Such patterns of exploitation denote that the types of forest especially protected under the Bern Convention - oak-hornbeam and Middle European stream ash-alder forests (originally occupying more than 75% of the Forest area) instead of being protected are actually being very heavily utilised. Indeed, currently, the ash-alder forest is being particularly targeted because of the high demand for alder saw-logs.

Fig. 2 Proportion of deciduous trees in volume of big timber extracted by three Białowieża Forest superintendencies (Białowieża, Browsk, Hajnówka) during 1997-2001 and proportion of deciduous stands in managed part of the Forest. According to State Forestry Administration.



3 *Impact of forestry exploitation on the forest structure of the Białowieża Forest*

The last 90 years of forestry operations have resulted in substantial changes in the structure of forest habitats in the managed part of the Białowieża Forest, especially in recent decades as forest management has intensified. The majority of primeval stands have been removed and replaced by even-aged, mostly coniferous plantations, old-growth stands of natural origin now accounting for only 20% of the Forest.

The major influences can be summarised as follows:

- appearance of new habitats - clearcuts and newly created plantations, as they differ qualitatively from treefall gaps in the primeval part (Fuller 2000);
- rejuvenation – the share of young stands has increased from about 20% in the primeval forest to almost 70% (Fig. 3);
- reduction of the amount of dead wood/fallen trees due to "sanitary cuttings" – in the managed oak-hornbeam forest a five-fold reduction in the number of large dead trees (Walankiewicz et al. 2002) and almost hundredfold reduction of the dead wood volume (Bobiec 2002a) were recorded;
- 'borealisation' – replanting of formerly deciduous sites with conifers; more than two thirds of former oak-hornbeam old-growth has been replaced by coniferous plantations and the area covered by conifers has almost doubled (Fig. 3);
- unification of spatial structure - replacement of fine grained mosaic of diversified species/age tree groups by larger patches of even-aged monocultures (Bobiec et al. 2000)
- insularisation of once continuous old-growth forests - this is especially pronounced in the deciduous forest, the remaining patches becoming more and more isolated and the BNP becoming an island surrounded by young plantations (Fig. 4).

Fig. 3. Age structure and tree species composition of woods in the primeval (strictly protected part of BNP) and managed parts of the Białowieża Forest in the early 1990s. Before large-scale commercial logging started in 1915, the tree species composition and age structure did not differ between the two parts. Areas covered with tree-stands younger than 80 years (light hatched) are of secondary origin. For each age class its upper age limit is shown. Data are from the Forest Management and Inventory Plans (Anonymous 1995, unpubl) and Tomiałojć & Wesołowski (in press).

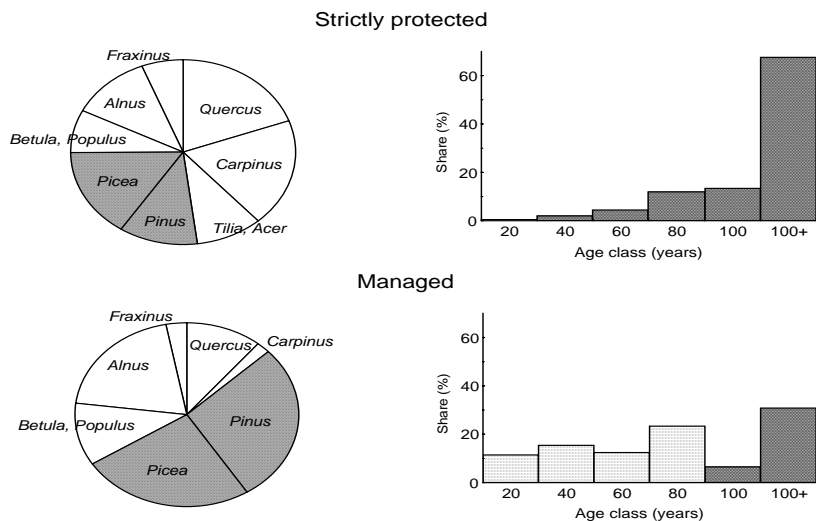


Fig. 4 The Polish part of the Białowieża Forest. Darkest grey (dark green) areas – old-growth patches

4 *Impact of forestry exploitation on the birds of the Białowieża Forest*

Specialised species dependent on resources abundant only in the old-growth forest, such as secondary hole nesters (e.g. tits, nuthatches, flycatchers) and some woodpeckers, are the most threatened (Tomiałojć & Wesołowski in press), being unable to adapt to habitats created by forestry operations. For example the following two bird species have strongly reduced presence outside the strictly protected part of BNP:

- The Three-toed Woodpecker *Picoides tridactylus* (Bern Convention Appendix II, species of unfavourable conservation status due to declines caused by forestry practices, especially the removal of old and dead trees) occurs outside the BNP at 15-20% of the pre-management level (Wesołowski et al. in press). This is particularly due to the dependence of this species, for foraging and nesting, on the dying and dead spruces which tend to be removed on the excuse of sanitation.
- The White-backed Woodpecker *Dendrocopos leucotos* (Bern Convention Appendix II) is dependent on dead deciduous wood. Its numbers in the managed part are estimated at only 25-33% of the pre-management level. Its distribution there is very patchy; the species is largely absent even from the oak-hornbeam stands (a habitat regularly occupied in the strictly protected part of BNP) (Wesołowski 1995).

There are no quantitative data on secondary hole nesters, but removal of almost three quarters of the old-growth stands (see above) are sure to have had a detrimental impact on their numbers and distribution.

All these specialists are critically dependent on the retention of the very old-growth fragments on which logging operations are concentrated. If their removal is not prevented, these species will vanish from the managed part, and only some vestige pairs, with limited prospects for long-term survival, would remain exclusively in the strictly protected part of the BNP.

VIII. How the Polish Government is failing adequately to protect the Białowieża Forest

1. Cancellation of plans to enlarge the Białowieża National Park

The Government's proposal to create natural reserves rather than extend the boundary of the National Park will not provide adequate protection of the ecosystem for the following reasons:

- The surviving old-growth patches are dispersed, forming isolated 'islands' (Fig. 4). To provide the appropriate connectivity they must be protected as part of a larger landscape matrix. No network of small reserves could guarantee the continuation of ecological processes
- Many forest animals have large spatial requirements (Table 1). Efficient protection of viable populations demands areas of thousands of hectares. The preservation of small patches of habitat is insufficient even for the survival of very small birds; a pair of Marsh Tits *Parus palustris* or Wrens *Troglodytes troglodytes* (which are old growth specialists in Poland) require 5 ha. Thus more than two thirds of birds breeding in the BNP have populations there of less than 100 pairs (Wesołowski et al. in press).
- the proposed reserves would be actively managed (pest control, sanitary and rejuvenation cuttings) as is currently the case eg Białystok voivodship, the local administration responsible for nature conservation in legally protected areas outside the national park, issued 'protection plans' for implementation during 2003 in seven nature reserves in the forest outside the National Park; the most important 'active protection tasks' required are 1) cutting and removal of trees infested by bark beetles, attacked by other insects or fungi, as well as cutting and removal of broken and windfallen trees; 2) "regulation" of tree species composition, and tree density in stands. The forestry administration will be obliged to carry out these tasks and will be paid to do so from public money allocated to nature conservation!

Table 1. Examples of spatial requirements of different organisms in the Białowieża Forest

Species	Home range size	Source
Lynx <i>Lynx lynx</i>	165 km ² – male 94 km ² – female	Schmidt et al. (1997)
Wolf <i>Canis lupus</i>	153 km ² – pack	Okarma et al. (1998)
Pine Marten <i>Martes Martes</i>	1.9 km ² – male 1.6 km ² - female	Zalewski et al (1995)
Weasel <i>Mustela nivalis</i>	24 - 170 ha - male	Jędrzejewski et al. (1995)
White-backed Woodpecker <i>Dendrocopos leucotos</i>	c 100 ha - pair	Wesołowski (1995)
Marsh Tit <i>Parus palustris</i>	5 ha - pair	T. Wesołowski, in prep.
Wren <i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>	5.4 ha - male	Wesołowski (1981)

2 *The new draft twenty year forestry management plan for the managed part of the forest by the Białowieża superintendencies would worsen the conditions for conservation of the forest that have been present since 1998*

- the existing 1998 moratorium on cutting of the largest trees is to be lifted
- removal of dying trees and dead wood (pest control, sanitary cuttings) is to be continued
- logging in old-growth stands is to be substantially increased above the current level, to 155 m³/year (Fig. 1), at least for the next ten years
- habitats to be specially protected under the Bern Conventions: oak-hornbeam and riverine stands, are to be intensively exploited

IX. Conclusion

BirdLife International consider that to save the Białowieża Forest, ensuring its long term survival with its ecosystems and functioning as intact as possible:

1. **a trans-boundary national park** must ultimately be created which protects both the Polish and Belarussian parts of the Białowieża Forest. This would of course demand co-operation between the governments of both countries.
2. **the Białowieża National Park boundary should be extended to the entire Forest** by the Polish government. Designation as a National Park is the strongest level of protection available under Polish law; all human activities within a national park are subordinate to the requirements of nature conservation.
3. **immediate action** by the Polish government, as the first steps towards extension of the National Park, should be to issue:
 - a ban on timber cutting in all old-growth stands of natural and semi-natural character in the Forest; and
 - a declaration of intent, which fully recognises the unique value of the Białowieża Forest and clearly states what action will be taken to protect the whole area.
4. **international support** may be needed in generating the resources needed to manage the park.

Neither of the steps for which immediate action is required involve spending any money, so they can be taken instantly. However, enlargement of the Park does require the raising of additional conservation funds. No detailed estimates of the costs of operating the enlarged national park are currently available. However, a rough maximum estimate would be 5 million euros/year.

This is based on the 6.6 million euro operating costs, in 1995, for the existing national park and all the Białowieża Forest forestry districts. About 40% of these costs constitute salaries of staff and workers (approximately 500 people). This budget item would not change as most of the current staff would find employment in the enlarged park. There are however, some costs connected with, for

example, the logging operations which would cease to exist in the park. Also some benefits will accrue from increased tourism (sustainable ecotourism to the Białowieża Forest should be encouraged) and the sale of wood extracted during re-naturalisation of the plantations; these would decrease the demand for budget subventions.

Restructuring of the local economy and increased environmental awareness of local communities will be necessary.

Enlargement of the park will not be administratively difficult, as it involves no change in ownership. The whole Białowieża Forest is already public (state) property. Enlargement would thus only require replacement of one manager (the administration of state forests) by another (the national park service), both of which are supervised by the same ministry.

X. Implementation of the Bern Convention

The Białowieża Forest is of global importance yet the Polish Government's management of the site contravenes the Bern Convention:

Article 4, Paragraph 1 of the Bern Convention stipulates that: 'Each contracting party shall take appropriate and necessary legislative and administrative measures to ensure the conservation of habitats of the wild flora and fauna species, especially those specified in Appendix I and II, and the conservation of endangered natural habitats.'

Article 4, Paragraph 2 requires that Contracting Parties 'shall have regard to the conservation requirements of the areas protected under the preceding paragraph, so as to avoid or minimise as far as possible any deterioration of such areas.'

Paragraph 3 of Article 4 requires that Contracting Parties undertake to give special attention to the protection of areas that are of importance for migratory species specified in Appendices II and III of the Bern Convention and which are appropriately situated in relation to migration routes, as wintering, staging, feeding, breeding or moulting areas.

Conservation of Appendix I, Appendix II and migratory species are threatened by destruction of their habitats and two habitats (comprising 80% of the area), which are specially protected under Resolution No 4 (1996) of the Bern Convention Standing Committee listing endangered natural habitats requiring specific conservation measures, are being intensively logged rather than protected.

Appendix : Draft Recommendation

Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats

Standing Committee

Draft Recommendation No.... (2003) on the logging and statutory protection of Białowieża Forest, Poland

The Standing Committee of the Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats, acting under the terms of Article 14 of the Convention,

Having regard to the aims of the Convention to conserve wild fauna and flora and their natural habitats;

Recalling that Article 3 of the Convention provides that each Contracting Party shall take the necessary steps to promote national policies for the conservation of wild flora, wild fauna and natural habitats, with particular attention to endangered and vulnerable species, especially endangered ones, and endangered habitats;

Recalling that Article 4, paragraph 1 provides that each Contracting Party shall take appropriate and necessary legislative and administrative measures to ensure the conservation of the habitats of the wild flora and fauna species, especially those listed in Appendices I and II, and the conservation of endangered natural habitats.

Recalling that Article 4, paragraph 3 provides that the Contracting Parties undertake to give special attention to the protection of areas that are of importance for the migratory species specified in Appendices II and III, and which are appropriately situated in relation to migration routes, as wintering, staging, feeding, breeding or moulting areas,

Recommends that the Polish Government and European Union as appropriate

- immediately introduces a complete ban on any further timber cutting in all old-growth stands of natural and semi-natural character in the Białowieża Forest;
- extends the Białowieża National Park to include the entire area of the Forest;
- prepares to designate the entire Forest as part of the Emerald/Natura 2000 Network under the EU Birds and Habitat Directives and takes measures to ensure the management of this site by nature conservation rather than forestry authorities.

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