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CONVENTION ON THE CONSERVATION OF EUROPEAN WILDLIFE
AND NATURAL HABITATS

GROUP OF SPECIALISTS ON THE EUROPEAN DIPLOMA FOR PROTECTED AREAS

7 March 2016
Strasbourg, Palais de l'Europe, Room 11

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BIALOWIEŻA NATIONAL PARK (POLAND)

REPORT BY THE GOVERNMENT

*Document prepared
by the Polish authorities*

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Warsaw, 03 March 2016

MINISTRY OF THE ENVIRONMENT
UNDERSECRETARY OF STATE
CHIEF CONSERVATOR OF NATURE

Andrzej Szweda-Lewandowski

Mr Eladio Fernandez-Galiano
Head of the Democratic
Initiatives Department
Council of Europe

In reply to the e-mail, dated 24th of February 2016 and to your letter, dated 2nd of March 2016, I would like to kindly inform you that due to our involvement in the preparation of the meeting which will take place during the 12-13th of March 2016, neither I, nor my representatives are able to participate in the meeting of the EDPA Group of Specialists, which will take place on the 7th of March 2016.

No decisions have been taken on the possible actions within the Białowieża Primeval Forest. The decisions will be influenced by the recommendations drawn up by the IUCN experts participating in the UNESCO mission, referred to in the letter of invitation sent by the Minister of the Environment to Madame Ivana D'Alessandro on the 26th of February 2016.

At the same time, I would like to kindly inform you that in connection with the UNESCO advisory mission, the conference organised on the 12th of March 2016 and the field visit to the Polish part of Białowieża Forest on 13 March 2016, today an invitation will be sent out to all the experts who are members of the EDPA Group of Specialists asking them to participate in the above mentioned meeting and the field visit.

It is regretful that because of other, previously planned duties, you will not be able to take part in the meetings organised in Poland.

With reference to the e-mail of the 24th of February 2016, please find enclosed supplementary information on the status of Białowieża Primeval Forest.

Attachment 1

Supplementary information on the status of Białowieża Forest

At the beginning of this year, Ministry of the Environment was informed on deeply concerning deterioration of the conservation status of natural habitats forming the PLC200004 Białowieża Forest site listed as the Special Protection Area (SPA) for Birds and the Site of Community Importance (SCI) under the Natura 2000 network.

A threat of deterioration of the 9110, 91DO and 91EO forest habitats' conservation status due to the planned tree removal has raised particular concerns. Information acquired, published also in the Polish and foreign press, caused the Minister of Environment to order the control of the condition of the above habitats with a focus on the production part of the PLC200004 site.

The effects of the control demonstrate that no logging took place, but drastic deterioration of the conservation status of the 9110, 91DO and 91EO forest habitats and deterioration of the valuable natural habitat 9170 throughout the large area of the PLC200004 Białowieża Forest site occurred.

This deterioration is correlated with disappearing of forest species forming stands of Białowieża Primeval Forest (111 thousand cubic meters of pine, 2644 thousand cubic meters of spruce, 285 thousand cubic meters of oak, 254 thousand cubic meters of ash, 62 thousand cubic meters of birch, 218 thousand cubic meters of alder and 76 thousand cubic meters of linden, hornbeam, elm, maple and other trees). The assumption of a negative impact of such disappearing onto numerous flora and fauna species living in these habitats seems to be reasonable.

Forest management is based on forest management plans (FMPs) prepared by independent experts for each forest district for the 10 year period. With the exception of Białowieża National Park and nature reserves, the extent of timber harvesting in Białowieża Forest is laid down by the forest management plans (FMP) for three forest districts located within Białowieża Primeval Forest: Białowieża, Browsk and Hajnówka. Currently the plans developed for 2012-2021 are in effect and according to the FMPs total amount of harvesting forest for those three forest district is 469,980 m³ per 10 years, i.e. about 47,000 m³ per year on average.

For Białowieża Forest District the maximum extent of timber harvesting during 10 years was laid down as 63471 m³ (of so-called net merchantable timber), i.e. 6,347 m³/year on average. Compared to the previous forest management plan drawn up for 2002-2011, the timber harvesting decreased around four times, which is almost 24,000 m³/year (by 238,055 m³ during 10 years).

Despite the fact that the following areas have been excluded from operations:

- nature reserves (34% of the Białowieża Forest District area);
- tree-stands older than 100 years – *the criterion for recognising a tree-stand as older than a 100 years: the share of trees older than 100 year is at least 10% (34% of the surface area of the Forest District);*
- tree-stands younger than 100 years located on wetlands and marshlands (8.44% of the surface area of the Białowieża Forest District);

there were still necessity for implementing forest management fin other areas, particularly due to preserve sanitary condition of the forest, pursuant to the provisions of Article 8 and Article 9(1) of the Act on Forests, i.e.:

Article 8

Forest management shall be implemented in accordance with the following principles:

- 1) universal protection of forests;**
- 2) sustainability of forest management;**
- 3) sustained and sustainable use of all the functions of forests;*
- 4) augmentation of forest resources.*

Article 9

1. In order to ensure universal protection of forests, forest owners shall be obliged to shape an equilibrium in forest ecosystems and enhance the natural resilience of tree-stands; in particular, to:

- 1) carry out preventive and protective measures to prevent the outbreak and spread of fires;**
- 2) prevent, detect and combat harmful organisms which occur and spread in excessive numbers;**
- 3) protect forest soil and waters.*

As a result of the gradation of bark beetle (*Ips typographicus*), where the only way of reducing the bark beetle population is to remove the trees colonized by the bark beetle. Total amount of wood which has been remove due to bark beetle colonization has already run out the amount approved in FMP for 10 years (the maximum extent of harvesting for period 2012-2021). Thus, six years remain and in these years it is impossible to carry out the planned works in the scope of forest protection and silviculture and to take measures to contain the avalanche-like dieback of spruce stands resulting in substantial deterioration of the conservation status of valuable natural and priority habitats.

It should be emphasised that trees are attacked not only by the bark beetle (*Ips typographicus*), but also other bark beetles, such as *Pityogenes chalcographus* or *Ips amitinus*. The stands in

Białowieża Primeval Forest also suffer from *Scolytus* and *Agrilus* which attack broadleaved trees, as well as *Buprestidae*, including *Phaenops cyanea*. The damage is aggravated by other pathogens: honey fungus, *Heterobasidion annosum*, phytophthorosis, graphiosis and *Chalara fraxinea*, which cause the dieback of birch, elm and ash.

Thus, this is very complex issue and the problem is not only bark beetle *Ips typographicus*. We deal with groups of different insects, other pathogens and disease vectors which cause asynergic effects.

For this reason, pursuant to Article 23(1)-(2) of the Act of Forests, the Superintendent of the Białowieża Forest District has took measures to amend the forest management plan for the Białowieża Forest District.

Work on this amendment is in progress. The amendment is subject to opinions and consultations. The final version of the document will be verified and finally prepared after the meeting with the experts' mission in Białowieża, and will take into account the recommendations adopted during this meeting.


PODSEKRETAŹ STANU
Główny Konserwator Przyrody
Andrzej Szweda-Lewandowski

**MINISTER OF THE ENVIRONMENT***Jan Szyszko*

Warsaw 26 February 2016 r.

DLP-III.083.3.2016

Ms. Ivana d'ALESSANDRO
Head of the Biodiversity Unit
Secretariat General
Council of Europe

Madame,

With regard to the letter of the Department of Forestry and Nature Conservation, dated 16th of February 2016, I would like to take this opportunity to inform you that a UNESCO advisory mission will take place in Poland from the 12th until the 13th of March 2016. The aim of the mission is to discuss the current principles of protection, which apply to the Polish part of the Białowieża Forest.

Due to the visit of the advisory mission to Poland, a conference titled "The Białowieża Forest – Myths, Facts and Future" will be held in the Polish Parliament on the 12th of March. Subsequently, on the 13th of March, there will be a field trip organized to the Białowieża Forest, during which the conservation program for the Polish part of the Białowieża Forest will be presented and discussed. Taking into account the above information, I would like to invite you, as a guest of the Minister of the Environment, to participate in these meetings.

For logistic reasons, we suggest for your arrival to Poland to take place on the 11th March in the afternoon and your departure to be arranged on the 14th March, after 12.00. Ms. Ewa Siddique-Olesiejuk, Minister's Counselor, from the Department of Sustainable Development, has been designated as the contact person for the organization of your visit. Her contact details are the following: +48 22 369 2369, e-mail: ewa.olesiejuk@mos.gov.pl

Sincerely yours



DLP-III.083.1.2016

Warsaw, 16th February 2016

**Ms Ivana d'Alessandro
Head of Biodiversity Unit
Secretariat General
of the Council of Europe**

Sear Madam,

With regard to the letter of 18 January 2016, ref. no. DG-II.IdA/CB/tp, sent via email to the General Directorate for Environmental Protection, which concerns press information related to the current preparation of the annex to the Forest Management Plan created for the Białowieża Forest District, which is part of the Regional Directorate of the State Forests National Forest Holding in Białystok, for the years 2012-2021 and the renewal of the European Diploma for Protected Areas, we express our thanks for your interest in the condition of the Białowieża Forest.

The Białowieża Forest, as a unique area in the European scale due to its outstanding biodiversity, is the subject of great attention of the Minister of Environment. It is a protected entity, which has its primeval nature preserved. Therefore, one should make all efforts to protect and maintain this valuable site for the next generations. The Białowieża Forest is part of the cultural heritage of local communities, which have protected and taken responsibility for this site for generations. Their efforts have allowed for the preservation of the unique nature of the Forest.

We would like to kindly inform that the area of the polish part of the Białowieża Forest (app. 62 thousand ha) is managed by the Białowieża National Park (app. 10.5 thousand ha) and by three Forest Districts of the State Forests National Forest Holding: Białowieża, Browsk and Hajnówka (app. 52 thousand ha). This area is subject to the following planning documents currently in force: Białowieża National Park Protection Plan established in 2014, Forest Management Plans drawn-up for each Forest District for the years 2012-2021 and the Management Plan of 2015 for the Natura 2000 site Białowieża Forest. In addition, the Białowieża Primeval Forest is subject to multiple forms of nature conservation and the fulfilment of obligations under domestic and international law.

Currently, the Minister of Environment has been receiving information on the deterioration of the condition of Sites of Community Importance. The unification of hornbeam-oak forests, the sites of the uttermost priority for the Białowieża Forest, has been progressing, followed by the extinction of plant species specific for certain coniferous forests. Hundreds of thousands of trees have died off, with

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their volume exceeding 4 million cubic meters. The decay of entire tree stands has been observed, including areas in which all trees have died off.

At present, the inventory undertaken by the State Forests National Forest Holding, which has the aim of assessing the natural resources of the Białowieża Forest, both from the tree stand and habitat perspectives, is in progress. This activity is necessary to identify the trend of undergoing changes.

Considering the international status of the Białowieża Forest, in particular as the Natural Heritage Site, the Minister of Environment has invited the Director of UNESCO's World Heritage Centre to send a mission to Poland between the 11th and the 14th of March 2016 in order to present and discuss the principles of protection of the Polish part of the Białowieża Forest, which are currently in force. The meeting may be also attended by an expert from the Council of Europe. Therefore, we will be grateful for your confirmation of participation in the planned mission.

Upon the collection of all the data and consultations with UNESCO's experts, we will undertake all possible steps to protect and preserve this unique site for future generations.

At the same time, we would like to thank you for your invitation to the meeting of the Group of Specialists on the 7th of March 2016, in the course of which the issue of the annex to the Forest Management Plan and its relation to the Białowieża National Park Protection Plan, will be discussed.

Yours sincerely,

Zastępca Dyrektora
Departamentu Leśnictwa
i Ochrony Przyrody
A. Dąbniak
Agnieszka Dąbniak