

KOMITET OCHRONY PRZYRODY POLSKIEJ AKADEMII NAUK
COMMITTEE FOR NATURE CONSERVATION, POLISH ACADEMY OF SCIENCES



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Kraków, 26.11.2015

POSITION OF THE COMMITTEE FOR NATURE CONSERVATION OF THE POLISH ACADEMY OF SCIENCE
REGARDING THE PLANNED INTENSIFICATION OF TREE CUTTING USE OF THE BIAŁOWIESKA FOREST

Białowieska Forest is widely recognised in the world as the best preserved fragment of mixed deciduous forests of the moderate climate zone in Europe. Because of its unique value on global level it was listed as one of the World Heritage Sites in the form of cross-border site, whose borders cover the entire Forest. Upon the consent of all concerned parties the entry on the list gained the current wording in 2014. The entry was made based on the significance of the Forest for the protection of continuity of natural processes and exceptional abundance of species, especially the European bison as well as the species related to dead wood. Clearly the entire forest complex would not be entered on the List if the intensity of the business use of a part of the Białowieska Forest was not reduced. This decision allowed to achieve a healthy compromise between the need to extend the protection to the area of the entire Forest and the forest management in this territory within the scope of the existing legal regulations. The Committee for Nature Conservation of Polish Academy of Science is concerned about several-fold increase of the level of wood acquisition in the forest districts of Białowieska Forest compared to the currently valid forest development plans. These plans emerged in a new proposal presented by the Regional State Forests Directorate in Białystok as an annex to the forest development plan of Białowieża forest district. This proposal essentially infringes the provisions of the Protection Tasks Plan for Białowieska Forest Natura 2000 area and the obligations undertaken by the Polish government in respect to the protection of the Białowieska Forest and the World Heritage Site. Such drastic changes pose a threat of deleting the Forest from the list of the World Heritage Sites, if they are regarded as too far reaching and infringing the value of the site. This would be irreparable loss for our country, including damage to our image. The new far reaching proposal presented in the annex, not only essentially infringes the previous arrangements and our credibility to the Belarussian partner who is co-responsible for the entire protection, but may also materially threaten the status of the site.

The proposed extent of the intervention is not justified in the Protective Tasks Plan for the Białowieska Forest Natura 2000 area PLC 200004 established under the Regulation of the Regional Environmental Protection Director in Białystok dated 6 November this year, but the experts also have serious concerns regarding the effect of these plans on the protection of Forest nature. The current Protective Tasks Plan indicates that removal of dead and dying trees is one of the basic threats to habitats of continental mixed deciduous forests, coniferous forests and bog

woods and riparian forests, while the forest clearance and removal of over 100 years old dead spruce trees threatens preservation of a relic Forest fauna, especially tree hollow birds and rare insect species from xylobiontic and xylocambiophagous group. In this context it is difficult to regard as convincing the forecasted environmental impact presented by RDLP in Białystok in regard to the planned cutting as generally positive action and assessing their potential negative impact as immaterial.

Therefore the Committee for Nature Conservation of the Polish Academy of Science believes that the attempt to increase several-fold the level of wood acquisition in relation to the binding forest development plan of Białowieża forest district is not justified; and rather opposite these actions will have adverse impact on the objectives and protection methods of this site, undermine the public trust in forest administration is responsible administrators of the national nature treasure, i.e. the Białowieska Forest and might also lead to a loss of credibility and prestige by Poland on international arena. The Committee would like to stress that it does not believe that no protective actions should be taken; including the proposed actions. The Committee would like only to point out that at present there are no objective premises to undertake interventions within the scope mentioned in the document. It would be a real loss if the attempt to restore intensive forest management in the area of the only Polish World Heritage Site would result in deleting the Forest from the World Heritage Sites list. Such situation would not just mean for Poland a loss of image on international arena. It would be also irreparable loss for the nature conservation movement in Poland, local communities and public perception of forest services and State Forests administration, which are still perceived as the guardians of national treasure. The example of Dresden shows that such threat is very real. We hope that no responsible person will allow for such action to be taken. Thus we request to reconsider many aspects of this case.

On behalf of the Committee for Nature Conservation of the Polish Academy of Science

Professor Zbigniew Mirek, PhD.

Committee Chairman

Addressees:

Minister of Environment

Minister of Culture and National Heritage

President of the State Council for Nature Conservation

Director of Białowieski National Park

Director of the Regional State Forest Commission in Białystok

The Regional Director for Environmental Protection (RDOŚ) in Białystok,

Forest Inspector of Białowieża Forest District