



Warsaw, 2 June 2016

Jean-Claude Juncker
President of the European Commission

Copy: Vice-President Frans Timmermans / Commissioner Karmenu Vella

European Commission
Rue de la Loi / Wetstraat 200
1049 Brussels

Subject: start of logging in Białowieża forest

Dear President, Vice-President and Commissioner,

We are writing to you to draw your attention to the serious threat of destruction of the Białowieża Forest in Poland - the last remaining lowland old-growth forest of the northern temperate zone. This needs a quick and clear response from the Commission and we urge you to fast-track your decision-making in respect of the infringement procedure against the Polish government regarding the Białowieża Forest.

The approval by the Polish Minister of the Environment for increased logging in Białowieża Forest constitutes a breach of Art. 6(2) and (3) of the Habitats Directive and Article 4(4) of the Birds Directive. On 19 April 2016 we have submitted a complaint to the European Commission (Complaint CHAP(2016)01371), requesting the Commission to start an infringement procedure against the Polish government.

In a letter sent on 23 May¹, we highlighted that the Polish government had announced the imminent start of logging operations in Białowieża Forest.

We can now confirm that logging has started, initially in peripheral areas of the forest. We are highly alarmed by this fact and concerned that irreversible damage will occur as soon as operations are scaled up. We therefore kindly ask you to urgently discuss the Polish government's infringements of the Nature Directives at your next college meeting, with a view to sending a "letter of formal notice" within the coming days. We also urge you to fast-track the procedure by requesting a prompt reply from the Polish government, i.e. within a matter of days rather than weeks and to consider the possibility of applying for interim measures to suspend logging.

The Polish government had announced in March 2016 its decision to triple the logging in Białowieża Forest, as part of a controversial new forest management plan. Białowieża Forest is a World Heritage and Natura 2000 site² and Europe's last remaining lowland old-growth forest of the northern temperate zone. The new logging plans contravene EU law and disregard the broader economic and socio-economic benefits that this forest provides to local communities, and is in conflict with the sustainability principles.

Close to 150,000 people signed a petition calling for the protection of Białowieża Forest. Almost 31,500 people³ have signed their names to the NGO legal complaint to the Commission, acknowledging that citizens and NGOs alike have exhausted their national possibilities to challenge the controversial logging plan.

As guardian of the EU treaty, it is of utmost importance that the Commission acts quickly to protect Białowieża, which represents Poland's and the EU's natural heritage.

A quick and clear response to the government's decision to begin logging would confirm that this Commission is committed to the implementation of EU laws and common European identity, implying that Member States comply with certain basic principles and rules, and the respect for our natural heritage.

We urge you to take these considerations into account in your forthcoming deliberations.

¹ <http://www.documents.clientearth.org/wp-content/uploads/library/2016-05-23-letter-to-alexander-italianer-on-bialowieza-forest-as-logging-could-start-from-27-may-coll-en.pdf>

² see annex: background document on „logging in Białowieża“

³ <http://kochampuszcze.pl/skarga/>

We will be maintaining our public campaigning on this matter. In light of the urgency, we look forward to your prompt response.

Yours sincerely,

Marcin Stoczkiewicz

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Marcin Stoczkiewicz', with a long, sweeping horizontal stroke at the end.

Member of the Management Board of ClientEarth Poland

On behalf of:

Greenpeace

Greenmind Foundation

WWF

Polish Society for the Protection of Birds (OTOP)

Wild Poland Foundation

Workshop for All Beings