

Overexploitation of the Bialowieza Forest – letter to EU commissioner

Frank Verhart

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Environment Directorate-General
European Commission
Commissioner
Mrs. M. Wallström
B-1049 Brussels
Belgium

Subject: Overexploitation of the Bialowieza Forest
Date: 17 december 2003

Dear Mrs. Wallström,

I would like to express my concern on the current management policy applied within the Bialowieza Forest complex, located in the Eastern province Podlaskie of Poland.

Up to date the Bialowieza forest is regarded by specialists – at least – as “one of the best preserved lowland forests within the temperate climatic zone of Europe”. The area has been and is of vital importance for biodiversity, represented by a number of species which surpasses those in other natural sites by far. The human preservation of the forest dates back to times when Polish and Lithuanian Kings and Tsars claimed the Primaeval Forest as their vast hunting grounds. The area has been and is essential to scientific research aimed at the study of natural processes, such as forest sylvigenesis and relations between mammals and flora. The area has a growing importance for eco-tourism for modern man and in within countable days it will be one of the most natural lowland forests within the European Union.

Parties involved in nature protection have been active to expand the actual Bialowieza National Park of ca. 10.500 hectares to the whole of the Polish part of the Bialowieza forest (59.500 hectares). Since the Polish government turned down this plan of protection in 1999 the prospects for the remaining forest stands of the highest natural character has deteriorated dramatically.

Currently the major plagues are not imposed by numerous insects, but by failing management, short term economic action and the Polish government, which acts unresponsably towards her natural heritage;

On July 1st 2003 a new management plan for the exploitation of the commercial part of the Bialowieza forest became operative. It allowed an increase of the level of exploitation of wood by nearly 50 % to 150.000 m³ yearly.

On July 1st 2003 the ban on cutting trees aged over one hundred years was lifted by the Polish government. This decision allows cutting of trees in parts of the Bialowieza forest with forest-stands with major primeval characters, such as natural tree composition, high level of standing and lying dead trees and wood and exceptional biodiversity, compared to the stands which have lost their virgin character in previous decades.

The Bialowieza Forest deserves our compassion, respect and **true** protection. Loss of the natural character of the unique forest, both in natural and cultural view, is unacceptable after the forests 4,000 years of proud natural growth.

Hereby I offer you a report on my view. The presented view on the protection of the Bialowieza Forest emanates from a three months internship within one of Bialowieza's scientific research institutes and my compassion to protect the natural world.

With highest regards,

Frank Verhart B.sc.
Forestry engineer

Encl.: report "Primaeval Forest or no Primaeval Forest?", december 2003-12-16

CC: European Commission, Environment Directorate-General, Commissioner
Mrs M. Wallström
European Commission, Environment Directorate-General, Nature & Bio-diversity
Mr M. Hanley
European Commission, Environment Directorate-General, Forests & Agriculture
Mr M. Hamell
European Commission, ambassador in Poland
Mr B. Dethomas
European Parliament, Dutch political party of Groen Links
Mr A. de Roo
Polish Government, dep. Forestry, Nature Conservation and Landscape Protection
Mr Z. Krezemiński
Polish Government, dep. Board of National Parks in Warsaw
Mr A. Nowicki
Polish Government, dep. Institute for Forestry Research
Mr A. Klocek
Polish Government, dep. State Forests Enterprise
Mr J. Dawidziuk
State Forests Enterprise, Regional Directorate of Bialystok
State Forests Enterprise, Forest Districts of Białowieża, Browsk and Hajnówka
European Centre for Nature Conservation
Mr R. Wolters
WWF International, Forests for Life Campaign
Mrs D. Rana
WWF Poland
WWF the Netherlands
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