

The 4th International NGO Forum on World Heritage at Risk

Villa Decius, Krakow, 30 June - 1 July 2017

Resolution

Concerning Białowieża Forest (Poland-Belarus) in the Light of Draft Decision 41COM 7B.1

Non-governmental organizations and scientists participating in the 4th International Civil Society Forum on World Heritage at Risk express serious concern over the impacts of the Polish State Party's decisions for increased logging in Białowieża Forest World Heritage Site.

Białowieża Forest has exceptional conservation significance as it is the best preserved lowland forest ecosystem in Europe where we can still observe biological processes that started thousands of years ago. This irreplaceable area for biodiversity conservation, with many threatened species still well represented, is now under serious and imminent threat.

A number of reports have shown that activities termed "sanitary cuttings" undertaken in the Polish part of the property are endangering its Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) and have never been a subject of adequate assessment.

The data on logging is dramatic and shows that the State Party of Poland is systematically transforming the best preserved old growth forest in Europe into a heavily managed forest as one can find all over Europe. In 2016 around 50,000 trees were extracted in Białowieża Forest from the World Heritage site. This tendency continues, with around 30,000 trees logged in first 4 months of 2017. According to official data, circa 40% of wood extraction in the Polish part of the site is taking place in WH management zones where logging is prohibited. Around 80% of logging is commercial, with wood sold on the open market.

We believe the World Heritage Committee should react and take urgent steps. As an international NGO community we:

- welcome Draft Decision 41COM 7B.1 which is accurately prepared, based on a scientific approach and knowledge of the current situation;
- agree with the position of the European Commission stating that increased logging is likely to cause an irreparable biodiversity loss and is a threat to the site; and
- call for logging to be halted at the World Heritage management zones excluded from logging and for commercial wood extraction to stop in the whole area of Białowieża Forest WH property.

We believe that Draft Decision 41COM 7B.1 should be adopted without amendment, but if the decision is to be discussed, we ask the Committee to consider the following:

- Retain without amendment paragraph 4, which highlights the lack of adequate assessment of impacts on the OUV of the property in the amendment to the Forest Management Białowieża Forest District, which represent a potential danger to the property;
- Retain without amendment paragraph 5, as commercial timber extraction, including “sanitary cuttings” and other extraction for which wood is sold on the open market, should be forbidden at the site;
- In order to reflect the concerns of a number of Polish natural science and environmental experts regarding the wood extraction within the Polish area of the property, it is important that the Committee should give even stronger emphasis in paragraph 6. The requirements of the World Heritage Site management zones, defined in the nomination file, should be explicitly addressed in the WHC Decision as wood extraction is ongoing in the zones excluded from logging. For the protection of the site’s OUV, it is important to stop logging on the whole area of management zones excluded from logging, not just at old-growth stands. The Committee should consider making an explicit call for logging (including “sanitary cuttings”) not to be permitted in the zones where wood extraction is forbidden, as follows:
- Reiterate its request to the State Party of Poland to maintain the continuity and integrity of Białowieża Forest and strongly urge it to immediately halt all logging and wood extraction in management zones excluded from logging, and to clarify third party reports about logging there;
- Retain without amendment paragraph 7, which requests the State Party of Poland to invite a joint World Heritage Centre/IUCN Reactive Monitoring mission to the property to assess its current state of conservation and evaluate whether the property meets the criteria for inscription on the List of World Heritage in Danger; and
- Retain without amendment paragraph 8, which reiterates the request to prepare a Trans-boundary Management Plan as a matter of priority in order to guarantee that no actions can be allowed within the entire property that could negatively impact on its OUV.

Krakow, 1 July 2017