

Programme for the Białowieża Forest as UNESCO cultural and natural heritage site and the Natura 2000 site prepared by the Minister of the Environment Prof. Dr. Jan Szyszko and the General Director of State Forests Dr. Konrad Tomaszewski.

There is a serious conflict between the majority of local community, sympathizing with foresters, that have been managing state forests for almost hundred years, and some, both Polish and foreign opinion-building centers about the state of the Polish part of the Białowieża Forest covering over 60 thousand hectares of forests in the Białowieża, Browsk and Hajnówka districts. Local community of the region believes that the Białowieża Forest is their cultural heritage, and the state of the forest with unique biodiversity is the derivative of its past use. They claim that they know how to manage the Forest so that it would serve the humans, give them its goods, and they want that the entire world not only admires it, but also that the entire world would use both their knowledge and the goods from the Forest. Local community is hospitable and open for Guests [*translator note: capital letters as used in the original Polish version are kept in the whole document*]. However, they think that they are being ignored and offended. What has been created through their knowledge and their labor, is treated by the multi-edition social media as a good untouched by the human hand, and They are being [*treated as*] the main threat to this good. They feel threatened, they also feel the risk to the Forest and its goods, which, according to them, are currently being degraded.

The data presented under the report session of the [*Polish*] Senate on the 12th of March 2016, as well as local visit in Białowieża Forest on the 13th of March 2015, appear to indicate that local community as well as foresters are right (see the attachment). There is absolutely no doubt that the Białowieża Forest is one of the best documented places in terms of the history of the use of the forest goods by humans. Treating this object as the best preserved primeval forests, or even untouched by the human hand, is an exaggeration. It is also beyond doubt that the Białowieża Forest is a cultural and natural heritage of the local people and the local foresters, so excellently utilized in the past that it can be admired and considered by the whole world as a natural object with forests of natural character with unique richness, of existing wild species and habitats for these species. It is thus an example of the implementation of the sustainable development concept, so fashionable currently in highly developed countries and so desirable to emulate in the light of the Holy Father Francis encyclical *Laudat Si*. This Forest has been utilized, was serving humans, and humans were protecting its biodiversity.

The conflict is, however, evident and it should be solved based on scientific evidence.

This is the programme by the Minister of Environment and the General Director of the State Forests, leading to both exact documentation of the different points of view and determining the responsibility of specific persons for the decisions taken. In order to do that one must:

Prepare and make available for the public:

1. Full and available documentation of all legislative and management acts, including ecological survey encompassing nature reserves and Natura 2000 sites within the three management districts, i.e. Białowieża, Browsk and Hajnowka, as far back as possible.

2. Full documentation of available press articles and internet-based information published in Poland and abroad last 25 years, concerning the Białowieża Forest.
3. Full list of letters, to be found in the Ministry of Environment and the General Directorate of the State Forests, from last 25 years, considering the Białowieża Forest.
4. A list of names of the authors of the legislative and management acts, press articles, internet-based information and letters to be found in the Ministry of Environment and the General Directorate of the State Forests, with a possibility to obtain these documents.

To start a monitoring and research programme, financed by the State Forests, encompassing the following activities:

1. Identification, with help of remote sensing and field inspections, of all locations in the Forest where, without doubts, the settlements and various economic activities have occurred.
2. Each of the forest stands located in the three forest districts mentioned above will be described concerning its current state and the state of habitats, in particular taking into account forest habitats 91IO, 91DO and 91EO [*i.e. Natura 2000 sites*] and species of these habitats, taking into account quantitative occurrence of, among others, white-backed woodpecker (*Dendrocopos leucotos*), three-toed woodpecker (*Picoides tridactylus*), pygmy owl (*Glaucidium passerinum*), Tengmalm's owl (*Aegolius funereus*), goldstreifiger (*Buprestis splendens*), *Cucujus cinnaberinus*, *Rhysodes sulcateus*, rhinoceros beetle (*Sinodendron cylindricum*), and ground beetles (*Carabidae*). This work will be performed, according to accepted methods, by the well trained scientific staff employed by the management districts Białowieża, Browsk and Hajnowka. In each forest stand the number and volume of dead trees will be assessed. In each forest stand the contents of organic carbon will be measured in the litter and in the soil profile on the depth of 0-5 and 20-25 cm. These measures will be performed in the same way in at least 5 years intervals.
3. Each of the forest stands located in the three forest districts will be photographed from a permanent place towards a permanent place in spring and in the middle of vegetation period (July) in 2016. The place from which the photos will be taken and the place being photographed will be marked permanently in the field. Such photographic documentation will be repeated in at least 5 years intervals.
4. Because of the different ideas, aiming at protection of habitats 91IO, 91DO and 91EO, as well as species of these habitats, in 2016 the area of the three forest districts will be divided into two representative parts at which the protection of these habitats and the species of these habitats is to be conducted. The first part, constituting about 1/3 of the area, in line with the suggestions of the European Commission, UNESCO, a part of scientists and part of the public, will be left without any human interference, consequently a total ban on tree logging will be introduced. The second part, in line with the suggestions of the other part of scientists, State Forests, part of the public and the predominant part of the local community, will be subject to the activities of ecological engineering through the implementation of the forest management plans.
5. Starting a long-term experiment that will allow answering the question who is right. Is it the ones who judge that they know how to utilize natural resources and how to use them, so that the whole world can consider them as primeval forests untouched by the human hand, or that ones who do not own such natural resources in their neighborhood, as they have

damaged them in the past, and demand lack of any activities, which according to the first ones is leading to destroying these resources.

6. The whole experiment will be subject of economic analysis, considering losses and gains linked to the regeneration and restoration of the analyzed priority habitats and habitats for species, as well as losses and gains linked to the CO₂ emission to the atmosphere in the both applied versions.
7. Taking advantage [*of this text*] the Authors of this project turn to the European Commission and UNESCO with an appeal to popularize in other highly developed countries the ideas of starting such an experiment on similarly large area, based on the forest resources existing there. The Polish side is ready to take part in such activities and design activities leading to restoration of habitats 91IO, 91DO and 91EO, or habitats close to them, on 2/3 of the area, in the regions in Europe where they can occur.
8. This programme is being translated to all UN languages, as well as all the languages of the European Union and sent around to Ministers of Environment or the corresponding authorities in all the countries of the world.

Attachment:

Report with conclusions from the scientific Conference entitled "Białowieża Forest: myths, facts and the future" on 13th March of 2016.

[Signed by:]

Dr. Konrad Tomaszewski, General Director of the State Forests

Prof. Jan Szyszko, Minister of Environment

Warszawa 25.03.2016