



Society for Conservation Biology

European Section

Resolution

concerning the preservation of the

Bialowieza Primeval Forest (Poland)

The Bialowieza Primeval Forest in Poland is the last relict of a pristine European lowland forest. It provides a window to the past and remains a peerless template for forest restoration in Europe. Scientific research conducted in the forest has yielded nearly 4,000 scientific publications and demonstrates the value of the Bialowieza Forest as a unique reference point.

In the Bialowieza Primeval Forest, different forest types and high structural diversity result in an exceptional species richness. More than 5,500 plant species have been recorded. By the end of 2001, the corresponding count of animals was 11,564 species. The list of mammals includes wolf, lynx and the European bison (Wisent). The forest's bird communities are characterised by rare species of woodpeckers, owls and hole-nesting songbirds that depend on old growth and standing dead trees.

Protection of the Bialowieza Forest dates back to the sixteenth century. In 1921 the Polish Forest Service established a preserve that subsequently became the Bialowieski National Park. This park was included in the list of World Biosphere Reserves in 1977 and became a UNESCO World Heritage site in 1979. In 1996 the area of the National Park was doubled to its current size of 10,500 ha. This comprises only about 18% of the total Bialowieza Forest area in Poland, leaving 82% still open to logging.

The European section of the Society for Conservation Biology urges the Polish government to halt further logging of old growth and conversion of relict stands to commercial plantations in the Bialowieza Forest. A strong decline in species that are dependent on old growth and standing dead wood has already been documented. There is no plausible justification for sacrificing this invaluable wilderness for the narrow interests of one human generation. The remaining primeval forest warrants strict protection. Suitable means for protection include expanding the National Park and listing the forest as a "Natura 2000" reserve.

The European Section of the Society for Conservation Biology urges the EU Commission and national governments to express their desire for protection of the Bialowieza Forest as a unique component of European cultural heritage and an irreplaceable biological treasure. Both the EU and European governments are challenged to help provide the means for the Bialowieza Forest to become a model for the successful implementation of nature conservation and the development of local communities. This will require a shift of economic activities from the current timber-dependent industry to a diverse economy, one compatible with the maintenance of vital ecological processes, levels of biological diversity, continued existence of endemic and threatened species, and a sustainable standard of living for human communities.