

On June 13, 2017 WWF Poland handed over to Polish Prime Minister, Beata Szydło, the report from the monitoring of forest habitats. The diagnosis is clear: felling trees and artificial planting of new ones pose the biggest threat to the Białowieża Forest.

The monitoring showed that:

- the condition of forest stands' preservation on the majority of the area of Natura 2000 Białowieża Forest is not adequate;
- two main factors having negative influence on the condition of forest stands' preservation are: drying of habitats (with an increasingly low water level) and forest management (timber extraction, artificial plantations);
- the outbreak of the spruce bark beetle does not deteriorate the condition of the forest stands in question; similarly, dying spruces are a part of natural processes;
- mass outbreaks of spruce bark beetles and dying of whole tree stands were observed in those areas of the forest that had been most heavily transformed by forest management.

The research was conducted in detail over Nature 2000 Białowieża Forest (apart from the national park) and according to State Environmental Monitoring regulations. The aim of the monitoring was to assess the condition of habitats and find out which factors have the biggest influence on their degradation.

The report points out that one of the negative factors is drying of habitats. It can result from climate changes – changes in rainfall frequencies, poor snowfalls, lowered levels of ground water. Also people could have contributed to this situation by straightening of riverbeds and drainage.

Another negative aspect is forest management based on deforestation and then artificial planting. Thus, the forest structure is simplified and dead wood – necessary for survival of many rare species – is no longer present.

In conclusion, logging in old-growth tree stands and extracting dead wood have nothing in common with nature protection and preservation of habitats.

Moreover, the research proved that the outbreak of spruce bark beetle does not deteriorate the condition of these habitats. Therefore, logging cannot be justified by this outbreak. In those areas of the forest where human impact was the slightest, researchers recorded only single trees infected by the insect. Mass occurrence of the bark beetle and dying of whole parts of the forest is actually taking place only in places of most intensive forest management activities.

It should be emphasized that the fact of spruce trees dying from the bark beetle does not contribute to deterioration of Nature 2000 forest stands. In some kinds of the forest stands spruce is only an admixture. Quite the opposite, bark beetle outbreaks are a part of natural processes that create space and guarantee access to light for new generations of trees. At the same time, dead wood constitutes one of the essential components of natural forests.

In view of the above, NGOs (ClientEarth, Dzika Polska, Greenmind, Greenpeace, OTOP, Pracownia na rzecz Wszystkich Istot and WWF) sent the Polish PM, Beata Szydło, an appeal to take action leading to protection of the Białowieża Forest. They also expressed hope for a discussion with decisive bodies, especially with the Minister of Environment, that would be based on scientific facts.