



8 June 2016

**Prime Minister of the Republic of Poland
Mrs. Beata Szydło**

**Minister of Environment of the Republic Poland
Mr. Prof. Jan Szyszko**

Dear Mrs. Szydło and Prof. Szyszko,

INTECOL, The International Association for Ecology, pursues the development of the science of ecology and the application of ecological principles to global problems. Its members are the national ecological societies of many countries around the world. Since its foundation in 1967, INTECOL has been active in organizing conferences, meetings, symposia, programs and projects, conducting speaking-series, publication of manuscripts and supporting young scientists internationally.

The INTECOL Board has been informed by members about the plans of the Polish government to allow much greater logging in the Białowieża Forest in Eastern Poland than earlier established in long-term management plans. These major changes in the exploitation of the vast forest areas in the Polish part of Białowieża have been motivated officially by outbreaks of the bark beetle, which is affecting spruce trees in the outer areas of the forest. In these mixed forest areas, spruce is only a minor vegetation component and the bark beetle damage, even to the extent that it kills spruce trees, by no means warrants the logging of entire mixed forest stretches with many very large and old deciduous trees.

The Białowieża Forest is the very last primeval, natural forest in Europe. It has a tremendous value because of its biodiversity, 9000 years of development history, and its vast, very extensive size as a natural resource virtually untouched by humans. It is also very important as a source of education and recreation for inhabitants of Poland, Europe and the world. The learning experience and deep impression of seeing and wandering through a natural, primeval forest can hardly be overestimated. This gives opportunities for ecotourism, nature education and scientific research, now and for many future generations.

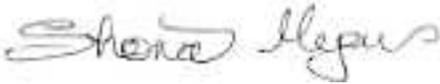
The INTECOL Board is very concerned about the major harmful measures proposed recently because they would seriously threaten the integrity of the whole area. The Polish Ministry of the Environment proposed that of the forest area outside of the Białowieża National Park, but protected as a UNESCO Cultural and Natural Heritage and Natura 2000 site, one third will remain under passive protection, whereas two-thirds would be "subjected to measures of ecological engineering through the implementation of forest management plans". These measures would imply the logging of more than four times as much wood than earlier indicated in previous long-term management plans. Whole forest stretches would be logged and it would take several centuries before they have recovered to mixed, uneven-aged forest stands. It is in this part of the forest area that the European Bison has been reintroduced successfully after a long-term and carefully executed program.

The Polish Government claims that the change in logging is necessary "to prevent the decline of habitats harmed by the bark beetle and to restore the natural processes in the forest". The INTECOL Board strongly opposes this statement and is convinced that the logging will result in the opposite: the integrity of the forest will be seriously jeopardized and natural functioning as well as species diversity will be affected in a negative way. Occasional outbreaks of population sizes of species killing trees such as the

bark beetle, are a perfectly normal phenomenon in natural forests. They lead to shifts in the dominance patterns of trees, in this case giving a number of deciduous and conifer tree species other than spruce, a chance to become more dominant in the forest. In addition, the decomposition of the dead trees is associated with an extremely diverse community of microbial decomposer species and a complete separate food web associated with them.

The INTECOL Board also rejects that "it is not scientifically proven" or "not known" what is the best strategy to protect lowland broad-leaf forests and their populations of endangered species. Studies in natural forests around the world have demonstrated that a no-intervention strategy is the only feasible option to really protect such vast, self-sustaining systems. It is exactly the age of these systems and their enormous diversity which has led over the millennia to a balanced situation which is extremely resilient and where natural dynamics do renew all regeneration processes in a perfectly natural way. Human interference is totally unnecessary and, if large-scale, will lead to a weakening and severe loss of these self-perpetuating processes.

Summarizing, the INTECOL Board is very concerned about the plans of the Polish government with the Białowieża forest and urges the government to change its plans while it is still possible.



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