

BELARUS/POLAND

Belovezhskaya Pushcha / Białowieża Forest

Brief description

Situated on the watershed of the Baltic Sea and the Black Sea, this immense forest range, consisting of evergreens and broad-leaved trees, is home to some remarkable animal life, including rare mammals such as the wolf, the lynx and the otter, as well as some 300 European Bison, a species which has been reintroduced into the park.

1. Introduction

Years of Inscription 1979, 1992

Agencies responsible for site management

- Białowieża National Park
Park Pałacowy 11
17-230 Białowieża
e-mail: bpn@bpn.com.pl
Web-site: www.bpn.com.pl
- Belovezhskaya Pushcha National Park
v. Kamenuki Kamenetz distr., Brest region
225063
e-mail: npbpbby@rambler.ru
Web-site: www.npbp.brest.by
- State Nature-Protection Establishment
President Affairs Management Department
Republic of Belarus
38 K.-Marx St., 220016 Minsk Belarus
Tel. 222-61-54, fax 222-35-56

Statement of Significance

Inscription Criteria N (iii)

- Change to criteria proposed by Poland

Justification provided by the States Parties

POLAND, 1978: N/A

BELARUS, 1991: State National Park "Belovezhskaya Pushcha" is the unique natural complex, the only in Europe least subjected to the anthropogenic influence large-scale massif of the old age forest with the preserved population of rare animals & plants. Variety of the plants & diversity of the conditions of growing gave the possibility to define 12 types of the forests. The samples of the

old trees of large sizes have been retained. Of special merit in Pushcha is the revival on its territory the largest representatives of the European fauna the aurochs, the number of which has already exceeded 315.

Belovezhskaya Pushcha is one of the oldest & deeply investigated territories of the country. Its foundation was stated by the ancient acts of the 13th century. Beginning from the 14th century it was turned into the preserve forest massif with the limited hunting right, and in 1541 it was formed the hunting *zakaznik* (special farm) for the protection of the aurochs.

Diversity & well-preserved nature complex, long-century history of the establishment of the varied forms of protection practically have already made the Belovezhskaya Pushcha outstanding universal value. The Byeloruseian part of the Pushcha directly sides with the analogous object, less in area, Byelovezhsky National Park, situated on the territory of Poland. Taking into account that the latter had already been included to the List of World Cultural & Natural Heritage, then the necessity of inclusion of the second Byeloruseian part of this single forest massif becomes more than obvious.

As provided in IUCN evaluation

(1991): Although there are a number of management details lacking and much work to be done to strengthen management of the site, the forest habitat of BP is largely still intact. It would substantially add to the integrity of the existing site particularly if the fence between the two parks was removed. A sharing of experience between the Polish and Belarus sides is essential and a beginning has been made to foster cooperation. The management planning process should thus involve both sides and be seen as a priority activity.

It is also not entirely clear in the nomination that the area being nominated is only the contiguous core of the forest and not the buffer zone nor the isolates in the south-west corner. Recommendations

The old growth forests and associated fauna of BP clearly meets criteria (iii) and its inclusion on the World Heritage as an extension of Białowieża National Park in Poland is recommended. The Bureau should request the Belarus authorities:

- to confirm their understanding that the boundaries of the site only include the core zone;
- to undertake (with assistance from the World Heritage Fund if necessary) a management plan for

the area which would be coordinated with that for the Polish side;

- to coordinate and share management experience with their Polish counterparts; and
- to state their willingness to remove the fence between the two parks if the management plan determines that this would lead to enhanced viability.

In addition, the Governments of Poland and Belarus should be asked if they would agree to designate the Białowieża Forest as one single transfrontier site on the World Heritage List.

Committee Decision

(1978 Bureau): In reviewing other natural site nominations, the IUCN representative made the following observations: should be referred to IUCN European Bison Group for further expert evaluation.

(1992 Bureau): The Bureau noted that this site is an extension of the Białowieża National Park of Poland and requested the Belarus authorities to:

- (a) confirm that the boundaries of the site only include the core zone;
- (b) prepare a management plan which would be co-ordinated with the management of the adjacent World Heritage site in Poland;
- (c) co-ordinate and share management experience with their Polish counterparts, and (d) remove the fence between this site and the Polish site if the management plan determines that such an action would improve viability of the site.

The Bureau recommended that the Committee request the Belarus and Polish authorities to recognize the ecological unity of the two sites and agree to the inscription of the whole area as a single transfrontier property on the World Heritage List.

(1992 Session): The Committee inscribed the core zone of this property on the World Heritage List, noting that this site is an extension of the Białowieża National Park of Poland. The Committee inscribed the transfrontier property as a single entry on the World Heritage List as Belovezhskaya Pushcha/Białowieża Forest of Belarus/Poland. The Committee commended the authorities of the two States Parties for recognizing the ecological unity of the transborder site and agreeing to inscribe the whole area as a single entry on the World Heritage List. The Committee

requested the Belarus authorities to prepare a management plan for the area, in co-ordination with the plan available for the Polish part of the site and encouraged the two States Parties to share management experience. The Committee recommended that the fence between the two parks be removed if the management plan indicates that it would lead to enhanced viability.

- Statement of Significance does not adequately define the outstanding universal value of the site according to Poland, but does adequately define it according to Belarus
- Need to seek a decision from the Committee on changes to the statement of significance according to Poland, no need according to Belarus
- Proposal for revised text has not been made by State Parties
- Brief description of the site is not satisfactory, according to Poland
- Name of the site is not adequate, according to Poland

Boundaries and Buffer Zone

- Status of boundaries of the site: not adequate for Poland, adequate for Belarus; need to seek a decision from the Committee on changes to the boundaries
- No buffer zone has been defined in Poland, but is needed; buffer zone has been defined in Belarus and is adequate; need to seek a decision from the Committee on changes to the buffer zone according to Poland, no need according to Belarus

Status of Authenticity/Integrity

- World Heritage site values have been maintained (Belarus), World Heritage site values have been maintained (Poland)
- In the future the integrity/authenticity of the site may be at risk from: climate changes and related changes in water conditions; changes of flora, fauna and groups of fungi caused by invasion of foreign species; further change of forest ecosystems surrounding the site caused by human activity; increased investment development pressure on the border with the ground belonging to the village of Białowieża

2. Protection

Legislative and Administrative Arrangements In Poland

- The site is part of the Białowieża National Park, which will have a protection plan for the next 20

years, currently it is being adjusted to the recent Ordinance of the Minister of Environment dated 12 May 2005. The plan will come into force in January 2007; until then, the National Park has to prepare annual protection plans. The provisions of the Park protection plan supersede the spatial development plan provisions within the boundaries of the National Park

In Belarus

- Laws of the Republic of Belarus "On the Environment Protection" (1992), "On Specially Protected Natural Territories" (1994), "On Use of the Animal World" (1996); Land Code of the Republic of Belarus (1999); Law of the Republic of Belarus "On Flora" (2003); Forest Code of the Republic of Belarus (2000); Decree of the President of the Republic of Belarus "On Belovezhskaya Pushcha National Park" № 460 (2004), which determines the status, description area and composition of the lands of the Belovezhskaya Pushcha National Park
- The protection arrangements are considered sufficiently effective

Actions taken/proposed

- Enlargement of the strictly protected area would be needed in order to make the protected ecosystem less affected by human activity carried out on the borders of the site; a buffer zone should be delimited for the Polish part and is being studied by Belarus

3. Management

Use of site/property

- Visitor attraction, national park, research site, genome bank "in situ"

Management/Administrative Body

- No bi-national steering group
- Belarus: Steering group legally constituted in 1992. Poland: no steering group
- No joint site manager/coordinator. In Belarus there is a site manager/coordinator with responsibilities added to an existing job. No site manager in Poland although one is needed
- Levels of public authority primarily involved with the management of the site: national (in Poland and Belarus); local (in Belarus)
- The current management system is sufficiently effective

Actions proposed/taken

- There are talks with the partners of both States Parties which are supposed to result in unification of management and conservation of the site
- A full-time coordinator is required to deal with issues related to the World Heritage property

4. Management Plan

- No management plan in Poland, but preparation will be completed in 12/2007
- Management plan in Belarus is being implemented; commenced in 01/1993; revision completed in 01/1996; it is considered to be adequate
- Responsibility for over-seeing the implementation of the management plan and monitoring its effectiveness: Ministry for the Environment of the Polish Government; President Affairs Management Office and Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment Protection in Belarus

5. Financial Resources

Financial situation

- Funding provided by: State Budget of Poland; no reported State Budget for Belarus; National Fund for Nature Conservation and Waters Management (Poland); Ecofund Foundation (ecoconversion of Polish debt into ecological infrastructure); 5th European Framework Programme; Danish Agency for Nature Conservation in Central and Eastern Europe; World Wildlife Fund; GEF Grant 05/28 631 BY "Belovezhskaya Pushcha Forest Biodiversity Conservation Project"
- Funding is insufficient in Poland, sufficient in Belarus

6. Staffing Levels

- Number of staff: no information for Poland, 37 in Belarus

Rate of access to adequate professional staff across the following disciplines:

- Conservation: Good
- Management: Average
- Promotion: Average
- Interpretation: Average
- Education: Good
- Visitor management: Average in Poland, Good in Belarus

- Ecological research and monitoring: Very good in Poland

7. Sources of Expertise and Training in Conservation and Management Techniques

- In Poland, every few years, a new edition of post-graduate studies "Protection of National Parks" is launched
- In Poland the National Park has within its structure a scientific research centre, whose staff substantively support the activity of the site staff and train the field staff
- In Belarus consultations are held regularly with experts from the National Academy of Sciences, the Ministry for Natural Resources and Environmental Protection, the Ministry of Forestry and other agencies. The research staff can attend post-graduate courses at the National Academy of Sciences and universities

8. Visitor Management

- Visitor statistics: 18,287 in 2004 in Poland (based on the number of tickets sold and individual permits given); no information for Belarus
- Visitor facilities on the Polish side: wooden gate and rain shelter at the entrance to the site, wooden foot-bridge protecting the soil on the tourist path against damage; in the Palace Park: museum, Natural Education Centre, two hotels, nature paths, animal park; in Białowieża there are several hotels, boarding houses and rooms for rent, altogether for over 1000 visitors
- Visitor facilities on the Belarusian side: Museum of Nature; enclosures with wild animals; conference hall; tourist routes and ecological trails; Belarusian Grandfather Frost (Santa Clause) Estate; guide services; hotels; guest houses; transport services; bicycle, sport and tourist gear rental; parking lot for cars; barbecue; sauna; riding in carriages; etc.

9. Scientific Studies

- Risk assessment, studies related to the value of the site, monitoring exercises, condition surveys, archaeological surveys, visitor management, forest ecosystem condition, state of protected plant and animal species populations
- Practical results of research are put into practice outside the area of the site. They also form the basis for the management plan

10. Education, Information and Awareness Building

- Not enough signs in Poland, an adequate number of signs in Belarus referring to World Heritage site
- World Heritage Convention emblem used on all publications in Poland, on some in Belarus
- Need of awareness raising of World Heritage site amongst visitors, local communities and businesses in Poland; adequate awareness among visitors, local communities and businesses in Belarus
- Special events and exhibitions concerning the site's World Heritage status
- Web site available
- Involvement of local population in development of agro- and ecotourism in Belarus; an information campaign has been launched to stop nature-protection legislation violations in Belarus; alternative options for economic uses of lands adjacent to the WH site have been proposed to local population in Belarus

11. Factors affecting the Property (State of Conservation)

Reactive monitoring reports

- World Heritage Bureau sessions: 21st (1997); 22nd (1998); 23rd (1999); 25th (2001)
- World Heritage Committee sessions: 20th (1996); 22nd (1998); 23rd (1999); 24th (2000); 25th (2001); 26th (2002); 27th (2003); 28th (2004); 30th (2006)

Conservation interventions

- On the Polish side 400 meters of a wooden foot-bridge was built along the main tourist trails over the most swampy sections in the years 2004-2005
- In Belarus, an extension of the total area of the National Park, its core and buffer zones has been undertaken. Now activities are underway to contribute to the forest fire safety, mitigation of natural cataclysms and aftermath (including those leading to the reduction of bark beetles mass reproduction which occurred over a number of years causing destruction of spruce forests). An entire complex of measures for organization and establishment of migration corridors on the border with the Polish side are being developed
- Present state of conservation: good

Threats and Risks to site

- Development pressure, environmental pressure, natural disasters, visitor/tourism pressure
- Plans to construct big hotel and recreational complexes in the village of Białowieża in the vicinity of the site
- Inflow of contaminants due to their transboundary transfers by air from Western Europe
- Natural cataclysms (droughts, temperature changes) causing mass reproduction of pests
- Serious danger of fire in dry periods
- An increased pressure by wild animals
- Forest harvesting in the area of Białowieża Forest and outside the Białowieża National Park

Measures taken/proposed

- In Poland the Białowieża commune's authorities work on a spatial development plan, but the works are truly slow and the authorities of the Park are not entitled to speed up the process
- In Belarus a new management plan will be developed with establishment of migration corridors for animals on the border with Białowieża National Park in Poland
- In Belarus certain measures have been taken for water regulation in the territories adjacent to the World Heritage; activities to mitigate negative consequences of bark beetles on spruce woods are undertaken

12. Monitoring

- No formal monitoring programme in Poland; formal monitoring programme in Belarus
- Main topics covered with monitoring include: Dynamic changes of the age structure, species composition and spatial structure of forest stands; Trends in succession and restitution processes in forest phytocoenoses; phenological observations; survey of the ground water table and the level of water in main rivers and streams; meteorological surveys; registration of the number and the dynamics of change of small rodents population; registration of the number and the dynamics of change of bird population; registration of changes in the distribution and species composition of daylight butterflies; monitoring of the degree of natural environment pollution with industrial emissions; monitoring of the number of visitors in the Białowieża National Park

13. Conclusions and Recommended Actions

- Main benefits of WH status: conservation, social and management
- Strengths of management: In 1992 UNESCO enlarged the boundaries of the Polish World Heritage site to encompass a part of the Belarusian national park "Belovezhskaya Pushcha" which was adjacent to the Polish Białowieża National Park; in 1996 the area of the park was further enlarged; in 1996 the Natural Education Centre and in 2004 the new museum with a modern exhibition were opened on the Polish side. In 2004 the site was included into the Natura 2000 Network; in Belarus additional measures for conservation of the World Heritage property were taken, tourism and ecotourism were promoted, more emphasis was put on property preservation and its study by scientists and specialists, awareness and popularity of the WH property was enhanced among broad sections of population
- Weaknesses of management: still existing fence on the state border on the Belorussian side; poor cross-border cooperation; lack of officially delimited buffer zone in Poland; low level of funding which makes it difficult to carry out integrated monitoring of the site and research and to develop international cooperation; rather small area of the WH property as compared to the entire forest area

Future actions:

- Crossborder cooperation, joint management plan
- Extension of the site
- Increase funding for the site, especially from international sources; development of international projects
- Exchange of experiences with other sites of similar character (especially on the climatic change taking place, the lowering of the ground water table, the increasing number of visitors and other forms of human pressure); programme of European Bison recovery