



FOREST CAPERS

Newsletter of the BirdLife Forest Task Force

#2 February, 2006

BirdLife European Forest Task Force

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BIAŁOWIEŻA CERTIFICATION CASE

More than three quarters of the Polish Białowieża Primeval Forest is managed by the Regional Directorate of State Forests in Białystok - the organisation responsible for managing the forest sustainably. Since 1999 its management is voluntarily subjected to regular checks by Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) accredited certifier SGS QUALIFOR. Was certification devaluated?

EU FOREST STRATEGY – A NEW WAY FORWARD

In March last year the European Commission took on a goal-directed approach to implementation of the EU Forestry Strategy and successfully proposed development of a Forest Action Plan. The new Action Plan is expected to come out in June 2006. BirdLife Forest Task Force is working to influence the preparation of the Action Plan urging for better forest protection.

FINNISH ENGOs CONVEY THE NEED FOR BETTER PRESERVATION OF THE FEW REMAINED BIOLOGICALLY IMPORTANT FORESTS IN SOUTH FINLAND

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NEW LEADER OF FTF CERTIFICATION GROUP STARTED IN JANUARY

Sini Harkki (sini.harkki@sil.fi) from Finland is the new leader of the FTF's working group on forest certification. She has worked in Finnish NGOs for the last six years on various forest issues. "Our most important task in the working group is the ecological assessment of FCS's impacts. I'd also like BirdLife to be more active in the plantation issue. We need to share our expertise more effectively." she says.

4TH FTF WORKSHOP

One of BirdLife Forest Task Force aims is to find ways in which ecotourism and enhanced community involvement can assist forest conservation. In October 2005 FTF gathered more than 60 people from 14 European countries to share experience and discuss this topic.

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DESPITE BEING THE ONE AND ONLY

Białowieża certification case

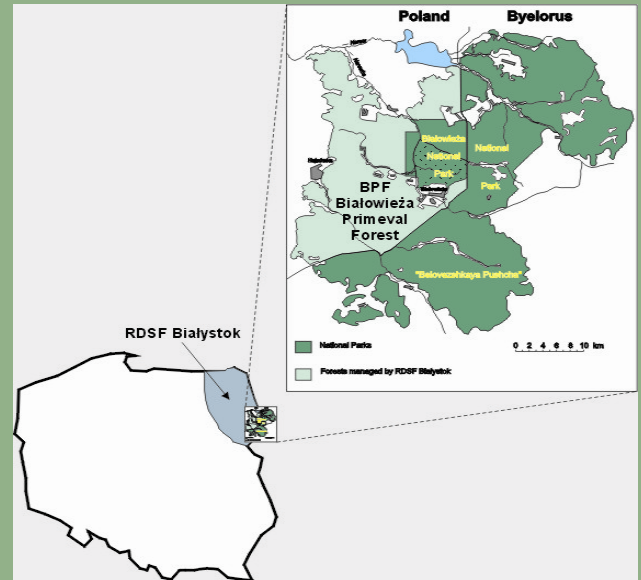
The uniqueness of Białowieża Primeval Forest has been widely recognized and is undeniable. However, few realize that mere 17% of its Polish part is left aside as Białowieża National Park, the other 500 km² being managed by the Regional Directorate of State Forests in Białystok (RDSF Białystok, see map.) The 500 km² comprise 3 out of a total of 31 superintendencies managed by the RDSF - the organisation responsible for managing Białowieża sustainably. Since 1999 its management is voluntarily subjected to regular checks by the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) accredited certifier SGS QUALIFOR, which monitors that forestry practices maintain FSC standards.

What happens in reality?

In 1998 the Minister of the Environment launched the "Contract for Białowieża Forest", a program aimed at extending the national park to cover the entire Polish part of the BPF. As a result SGS, when reviewing the FSC eligibility of Polish State Forests, stated in its final report of 2000: "Contract for Białowieża Forest" process is already underway independently of the certification process ...SGS QUALIFOR will issue a certificate to Białystok RDSF covering all areas except the three superintendencies within the Białowieża Forest area pending a resolution to the issue of their management".

However, in 2001- the year by which the entire Polish part should have become a national park - the minister withdrew his project for the park's extension and the regular forest inventory began to create a new BPF management plan for the period of 2002-2011. The concerned NGOs' appeal for preservation of the old-growth stands was rejected by the plan's committee. In spite of its numerous flaws, full of inconsistencies and serious errors revealed and put in a formal notification by a group of NGOs, including WWF Poland, OTOP/BirdLife Poland and TOPB (Society for Protection of the BPF) the plan was enacted. It invalidates the 1998 ban on cutting in old growth and allows increased extraction of over 20% than the average of the previous decade.

As the park's extension was no longer being considered, the "compromise" FSC certificate issued by SGS in 2000 should have been withdrawn - but wasn't. In January 2004 five NGOs collectively issued a formal Complaint to SGS QUALIFOR concerning the continuation of Białystok RDSF's FSC certificate, accusing RDSF of failing to comply with several articles of the FSC statutes, especially article 9 concerning maintaining the integrity of High Conservation Value Forests (HCVFs). According to the signatories, the number and seriousness of the RDSF management failures identified, esp. in the BPF, undermined the validity of the certification. In its response SGS rejected any criticism, steadily defending the RDSF policy.



Between 2000 and 2005 this position continued despite annual SGS QUALIFOR surveillance visits of assessment. Even though several Major Corrective Action Recommendations (MCAR¹) were issued, they oddly enough hardly covered the conservation problems identified by - ENGOs.

In May 2005 the process reached new levels of irresponsibility when the audit for reissuing the certificate revealed four major and several minor CARs as well as a long list of "observations." This time the MCARs addressed the major ecological issues: unjustified operations in nature reserves, lack of assessment of the potential ecological impact of silvicultural operations - including the status of rare and endangered species, lack of the procedure monitoring ecological impact of silviculture, and failure in public consultation. Usually, when failures of this level are noted no certificate may be issued until they are corrected.

Despite ENGO evidence that the causes of the MCARs were systematic and long-term neglect, after the final audit meeting two of the four MCARs were downgraded to "minor" as a result of an "internal auditory team decision." The two other remaining MCARs then vanished, closed out by the Director of SGS International. With this decision SGS Poland issued an FSC certificate covering the entire Białystok RDSF unit. This process was kept secret and even the local audit expert was denied information until one week after the final decision. As of September 2005, the annual cut of 145,000 m³ extracted from Białowieża Primeval Forest can be sold as FSC certified wood.

¹ At the conclusion of the field evaluation, findings were presented to company management at a closing meeting. Any areas of non-conformance with the QUALIFOR Programme were raised as one of two types of Corrective Action Request (CAR):
- Major CARs - which must be addressed and re-assessed before certification can proceed
- Minor CARs - which do not preclude certification, but must be addressed within an agreed timeframe, and are checked at the first surveillance visit

Is certification becoming devalued?

Certification was conceived as a market tool, but the idea behind it addresses conservation problems. The Forest Stewardship Council certification scheme is by far the best one existing today. Involving specific criteria referring to preservation of biodiversity and HCVPs, and requiring co-operation with third parties, FSC certification can provide a very important ecological framework within the prevailing matrix of managed forests.

The FSC has received very strong support from a wide variety of organisations campaigning for more efficient preservation of forest biodiversity. The case of Białowieża shows that FSC is prone to defects at the local level where lack of genuine third party participation and transparency in decision making precludes quality certification. FSC cedes too much freedom of interpretation of its standards to certifiers.

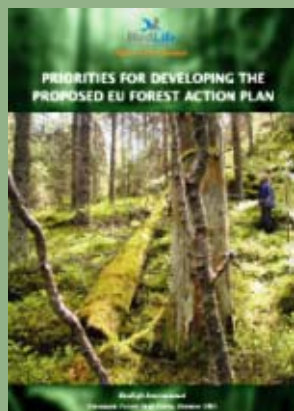
SGS QUALIFOR in Poland appears to be a classic example of applying wishful thinking to the interpretation of standards and protocols; this entails serious threats to

the integrity of the certification system itself, its reputation, and, above all, its ecological effectiveness. Certification is in danger of becoming devalued. The bodies responsible for issuing FSC certificates need to be obliged to enforce standards more objectively and rigorously, and the FSC needs to be able to assess, control and, if necessary, eliminate unreliable certifiers far more efficiently than is currently the case. To achieve this, the FSC will need the active participation of all forest conservationists.

By Andrzej Bobiec, FTF Forest Biodiversity Research Officer and BPF local expert.

Whole story at www.topb.most.org.pl/FSC_article.pdf

EU FOREST STRATEGY – A NEW WAY FORWARD



From the earliest days of European co-operation there has been debate about the need for a common forestry policy analogous to that existing for agriculture. So far, despite some published objectives and guidelines, such proposals have not prospered.

The legal basis of forest management across the EU today is spread across policies defined under agriculture, environment, trade, development, energy etc. Different strategies and action plans as well as ratified conventions and resolutions all affect directly or indirectly EU forestry². In recent decades controls on the health of the forest environment have mainly been concerned with protection against fire and atmospheric pollution, with forest biodiversity only recently recognised through the creation of the Forest Focus regulation on monitoring and information gathering.

In 1998 an EU Forestry Strategy was adopted. It was supposed to bring about a stronger and more coherent EU forest policy, but its evaluation in 2004, carried out by the Commission, revealed that implementation had not been very successful.

The Commission took on a goal-directed approach to implementation of the strategy and successfully proposed development of an EU Forest Action Plan (FAP). The focus for FAP development is on three planes - socio-economic, ecological and coordination mechanisms between Community actions and forest policies of the Member States. Three small working groups have since been named by the EU's Standing Forestry Committee (SFC) covering the above aspects.

In September 2005, invited experts (which include a biodiversity specialist) convened at two workshops to outline the vision for the FAP. In March the SFC and the working groups are expected to present suggestions for comment to a wide range of stakeholders.

The target date for adoption of the FAP is as soon as the end of June 2006, which means we see a FAP of general guidelines rather than specific details. Nevertheless, BirdLife Forest Task Force hopes that the implementation of this new political instrument will be rigorously followed up by the Commission so that Europe's forests will start to be managed with an eye to safeguarding their rich natural heritage much better than hitherto.

The Forest Task Force's set of proposed guidelines and recommendations to the EU Forest Action Plan and to using the Rural Development Regulation for forests can be downloaded at <http://forest.birdlife.org>. A briefing embracing the document's ideas has also been presented to the Standing Forestry Committee members and can be ordered at forest@birdlife.fi

² The first systematic overview of the activities related to forests within different Community policies was published by Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, Environment and Water Management of Austria – www.lebensministerium.at

PROTECTING FORESTS IN FINLAND

BirdLife Finland and a partnership of environmental organisations have launched a major new forest conservation website. Aimed primarily at highlighting the plight of biologically important forests in South Finland, the site contains information of interest to all boreal and temperate forest nations.

Seventeen forests in southern Finland are featured on the website, examples of species-rich habitats currently unprotected and threatened by commercial forestry in the future unless adequate protection is put in place now.

The website, available at www.etelasuomenmetsat.fi in Finnish, Swedish and English, details the location and natural history of the forests and provides pictures, maps and visiting instructions. Visitors to the site can send petitions to the forests' owners requesting that they protect their holdings' natural values. Petitions are not sent to individual private owners, who, however, can find at the site a wealth of information about how to safeguard the biological value of their forest.

Why protect more?

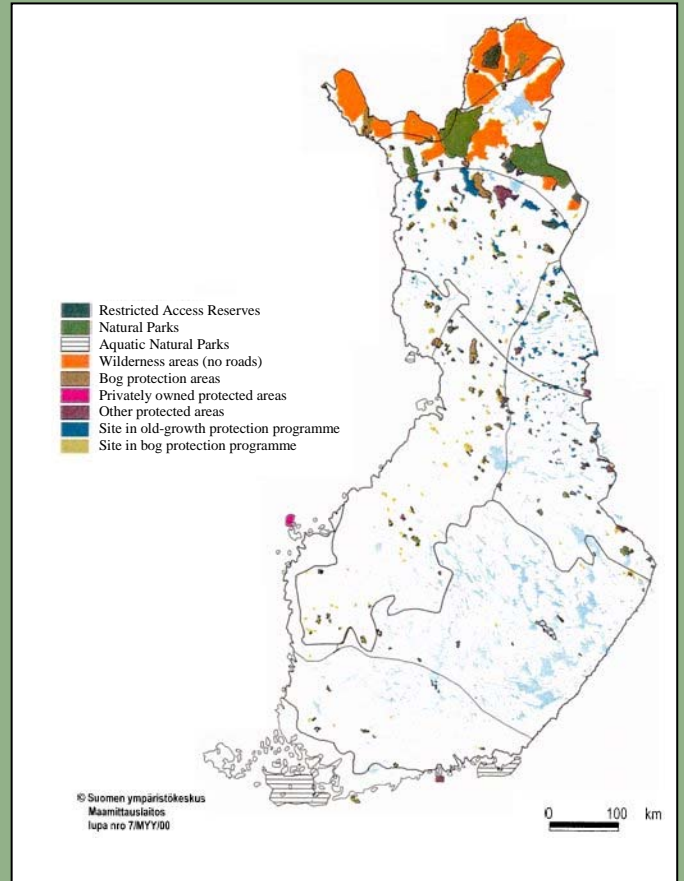
Southern Finland holds few truly virgin stands, but much forest remains of considerable biological value. Less than two per cent overall is strictly protected, largely isolated fragments whose remnant populations of endangered species face extinction. These sites urgently need to be enlarged through protection of nearby valuable sites and restoration of some commercial stands.

Clearcutting severs connectivity between habitats suitable for specialised species, making it unlikely they will spread or escape chance events such as fires or disease. This is why merely protecting Forest Key Habitats, often of only a few hectares, is not enough: forestry can cause the extinction of a species even if it is not directly responsible for the death of a single individual.

Finland's reputation at stake

Finland often represent itself internationally as a leading light of forest conservation, but in fact, has more endangered species in its forests than any other habitat. This is primarily because virtually all larger protected forest areas are situated in northernmost Lapland (see map), where the extreme climate is unsuitable for the majority of species. This is comparable to protecting lowland forest species by creating nature reserves on mountain tops.

Birds such as Siberian Jay *Perisoreus infaustus*, Capercaillie *Tetrao urogallus*, and the White-backed Woodpecker *Dendrocopos leucotos*, as well as hundreds of insects, plants and fungi have already become extinct or are rare in the region directly as a result of clear cutting and modern forestry methods that leave little room for wildlife or for visitors. Visitors to hinterlands outside of national parks are often horrified by the almost lunar



Map: Most non-aquatic protected areas are situated in Northernmost Finland, where forests hardly grow

Map source: Raimo Virkkala, Kari T. Korhonen, Reija Haapanen and Kaisu Aapala 2000: Estimating the conservation status of forests and bogs by vegetation zone according to the 8th Finnish National Forest Inventory. Suomen ympäristö 395 (in Finnish with English summary).

landscapes they find in Finland, especially in northern parts of the country. There are no restrictions on clearcut sizes and continuous cover forestry is generally not practiced.

A challenge to the Habitats Directive

Southern Finland's forest conservation network does not guarantee the conservation of a great number of its species, and is therefore in breach of the EU Habitats Directive's requirements. Ecological studies show that the area of strictly protected forest needs to reach at least 10 per cent – spread out over all forest types and strung out into a coherent whole – for any hope of long term stabilisation of forest biodiversity. The problem is not just a Finnish one, as the percentage of properly protected natural forest is extremely low everywhere. Indeed, a list of important forest sites needing protection and even restoration could be compiled for every European country.

In the meantime, readers are invited to visit the website and see for themselves the magnificent southern Finnish forests currently outside protection, which without urgent action, are destined to be clearcut in the next decades.

Send your petition to save your favourite site at www.etelasuomenmetsat.fi

4TH FTF WORKSHOP

Nature conservation is often in conflict with economic development. In the past, value was given to nature's bounty only insofar as they served human needs. Nowadays our link to nature is being reconsidered. Birdwatchers are classic nature lovers and travellers; one of BirdLife Forest Task Force aims is to find ways in which ecotourism and enhanced community involvement can assist forest conservation. In October 2005 FTF gathered people from around Europe to share experience and discuss this topic. The event took place in Bulgaria, at Central Balkan National Park.



Central Balkan is one of the largest and most valuable protected areas in Europe. The park was established to conserve the unique natural scenery and heritage of this area and protect the customs and livelihood of the local population. Local history and culture are organically linked to the park. It provides a range of opportunities for tourism and recreation, and to implement scientific research and educational programs. In addition to the rich natural heritage, the Central Balkan National Park area abounds in historical and ethnographic treasures and mineral springs. The Park Directorate collaborates with local entrepreneurs from the gateway communities to develop and promote ecotourism.

Until recently CB was one of Europe's five existing PAN Parks. The PAN Parks Foundation is forming the network of national parks combining good management of nature and benefits of local people. Among its goals are promoting wilderness and visitor management in Europe's national parks, increasing awareness as well as public and political support of Europe's national parks, developing and marketing high quality nature-based products. The benefits for local people are small business promotion, international recognition, new jobs and increased employment.

Source: Central Balkan National Park Directorate

Using market ideas to address environmental problems

The forests of Europe can provide economic benefits which are currently under-developed. It is a challenging fact that many of the social and economic benefits which forests provide are not easy to measure in immediate monetary value. The future maintenance of our forest resources requires long-term forest exploitation. Forests are an increasingly popular attraction to people who visit them for their aesthetic qualities and for the enjoyment of wilderness areas. The attraction to such people is enhanced where the number of species of plants, birds and other creatures is large. Therefore, the economic benefit is closely linked to biodiversity; the greater the latter, the larger the economic rewards from visitors.

Environmental policy that does not address local peoples' needs is prone to failure. It is crucially important while planning conservation activities to envisage the potential benefits for local people at the very early stage of any project. Local people may see conservation regimes as a restriction and threat to their existing exploitation of the forest - and indeed that may be the case. Good communication in this respect is essential.

Tourism is a huge industry in Europe. Facilities for visitors who seek sunshine and beaches are already well-provided, but there is still considerable scope for growth in ecotourism. Forests can be expected to play an important role in this future business. The potential customer base for nature tourism is weighted towards the better-educated and high-income sector.

Vitaly important is the requirement that visitor numbers and development of facilities do not destroy the very nature of the attraction. For example visitors cannot be permitted to roam freely near to the most sensitive wild creatures. A managed system of trails and viewing hides is essential to minimising disturbance.

Local people often lack first-hand skills at turning protected forests into revenue-making initiatives, but so also do environmental and forestry officials. Good product design and management is a key to avoiding damage to natural values as well as designing programmes that will induce visitors to return. Experience in the UK and elsewhere shows that well-designed reserves can accommodate large visitor numbers with good yields for both people and wildlife.

Find more about the FTF workshop as well as speakers' presentations on http://www.birdlife.org/action/change/europe/forest_task_force/workshop.html

In 2006 the BirdLife Forest Task Force workshop will be part of a bigger event co-organized with a number of other NGOs, including Forest Ethics, Boreal Songbird Initiative, and The World Conservation Monitoring Center:

The Global Importance of the Boreal Forest: - Boreal Birds - Paper consumption

10 – 16 September 2006

Clare College, Cambridge University
Cambridge, UK



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Sini Harkki (sini.harkki@sl.fi) from Finland is the new leader of the FTF's working group on forest certification. She has worked in Finnish NGOs for the last six years on various forest issues and her most important campaign was the protection of old-growth forests in North Finland. Sini is one of the authors of two reports on Finnish PEFC-certification and has also participated in the development of the Finnish national FSC standard. "Our most important task in the working group is the ecological assessment of FCS's impacts. I'd also like BirdLife to be more active in the plantation issue. We need to share our expertise more effectively." she says.



LIST OF EVENTS FEBRUARY-MAY

- February**
13-24th 6th United Nations Forum on Forests, UNHQ, New York, <http://www.un.org/esa/forests/>
20-26th Voluntary Tools for the Implementation of Environmental and Social Responsibilities in Forestry with Special Reference to Balkan Region Brasov, Romania, <http://www.tesaf.unipd.it/Winterschool/index.htm>
22-24th Final conference of COST Action 27- Protected Forest Areas in Europe - Analysis and Harmonisation (PROFOR), Barcelona, Spain, www.ctfc.es/coste27finalconference/webeng/index_eng.htm
- March**
1-2nd Forest Leadership Conference "The Sustainability Challenge", Toronto Canada, <http://forestleader ship.com>
15-16th Climate Change and Forest Genetic Diversity: Implications to Sustainable Forest Management in Europe, Paris, France; http://www.mcpfe.org/me/m06/gdp/index_html/document_view
27-20th MCPFE Seminar on Policies Fostering Investment and Innovation in Support of Rural Development, Zvolen, Slovakia; <http://www.efi.fi/events/2006/>
- April**
3-7th Managing Forest Ecosystems: The Challenges of Climate Change, Palencia, Spain, IUFRO <http://www.palencia.uva.es/iufro2006/>
24-25th Ministerial Conference on the Protection of Forests in Europe Round Table Meeting, Wroclaw, Poland, <http://www.mcpfe.org>
- May**
1-12th Fourteenth Session Of The UN Commission On Sustainable Development, UNHQ New York, <http://www.un.org/>
15-17th HCVF Conference. International partnership for HCVF protection: from identification to implementation, Vladivostok, Russia, http://www.panda.org/about_wwf/what_we_do/forests/news/events_/index.cfm?uNewsID=57120
23-26th 33rd European Forestry Commission, Zvolen, Slovakia, FAO <http://www.unece.org/trade/timber/>