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European Commission launches infringement case against Polish government for logging in Białowieża Forest

Today, the European Commission announced the start of an infringement procedure against Poland relating to plans that would see an increase in logging in the Białowieża Forest – one of Europe’s largest expanses of primeval forest, and a Natura 2000 and World Heritage site.

The Commission’s decision to begin the infringement procedure was in response to a complaint filed by a coalition of seven NGOs, including ClientEarth, WWF, Greenpeace and Birdlife. This is the first step of a procedure that could result in Poland being taken to the European Court of Justice for breaching the EU Habitats Directive.

The environmental groups – reflecting the views of a large proportion of the Polish scientific community with expertise on forest biology and ecology – argued that logging at this scale would have a significant impact on the integrity of the site and be especially damaging for species dependent on dead wood such as rare saproxylic beetles, White-backed Woodpeckers, Three-toed Woodpeckers, Boreal Owls and Pygmy Owls, plants and fungi. It is estimated that around 50% of biodiversity within the Białowieża Forest is dependent on dead wood.

The NGOs commented:

“We are glad that the Commission has decided to take serious steps to ensure the protection of Białowieża. The decision by the Polish government is a massive threat for one of Europe’s last remaining wildernesses and a breach of EU law. The Polish government has the responsibility to protect this ancient forest that is home to thousands of plants and animal species – cutting down trees is no way to safeguard it for future generations.”

The environmental groups call on the Polish Government to abide by the compromise reached in 2012 after the intervention of the European Commission, which had resulted in limiting logging to save the most valuable species and habitats, while enabling small-scale felling to provide wood for local people.

The Polish government is expected to respond to the Commission within one month.

Contact:

Dariusz Gatkowski, WWF Polska, +48 785 851 401, dgatkowski@wwf.pl

Stefania Campogianni, WWF EU +32 499 539736, scampogianni@wwf.eu

Rose Orlik, ClientEarth: +44 203 030 5954, rorlik@clientearth.org

Marke Breddy, Greenpeace EU+32 (0)496 156229, mark.breddy@greenpeace.org

Ariel Brunner, BirdLife Europe, +32 491 90 46 53 Ariel.Brunner@birdlife.org

Notes for the editor:

Joint NGO Briefing on Bialowieza: [here](#)