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CONVENTION ON THE CONSERVATION OF EUROPEAN WILDLIFE
AND NATURAL HABITATS

Standing Committee

37th meeting
Strasbourg, 5-8 December 2017

REPORT

**ON THE SPOT EXPERT APPRAISAL OF THE
DOBROČSKÝ PRALES NATIONAL NATURE RESERVE
(SLOVAK REPUBLIC)**

6-8 June 2017

*Document prepared
by Mr Robert Brunner (Austria)*

PREFACE

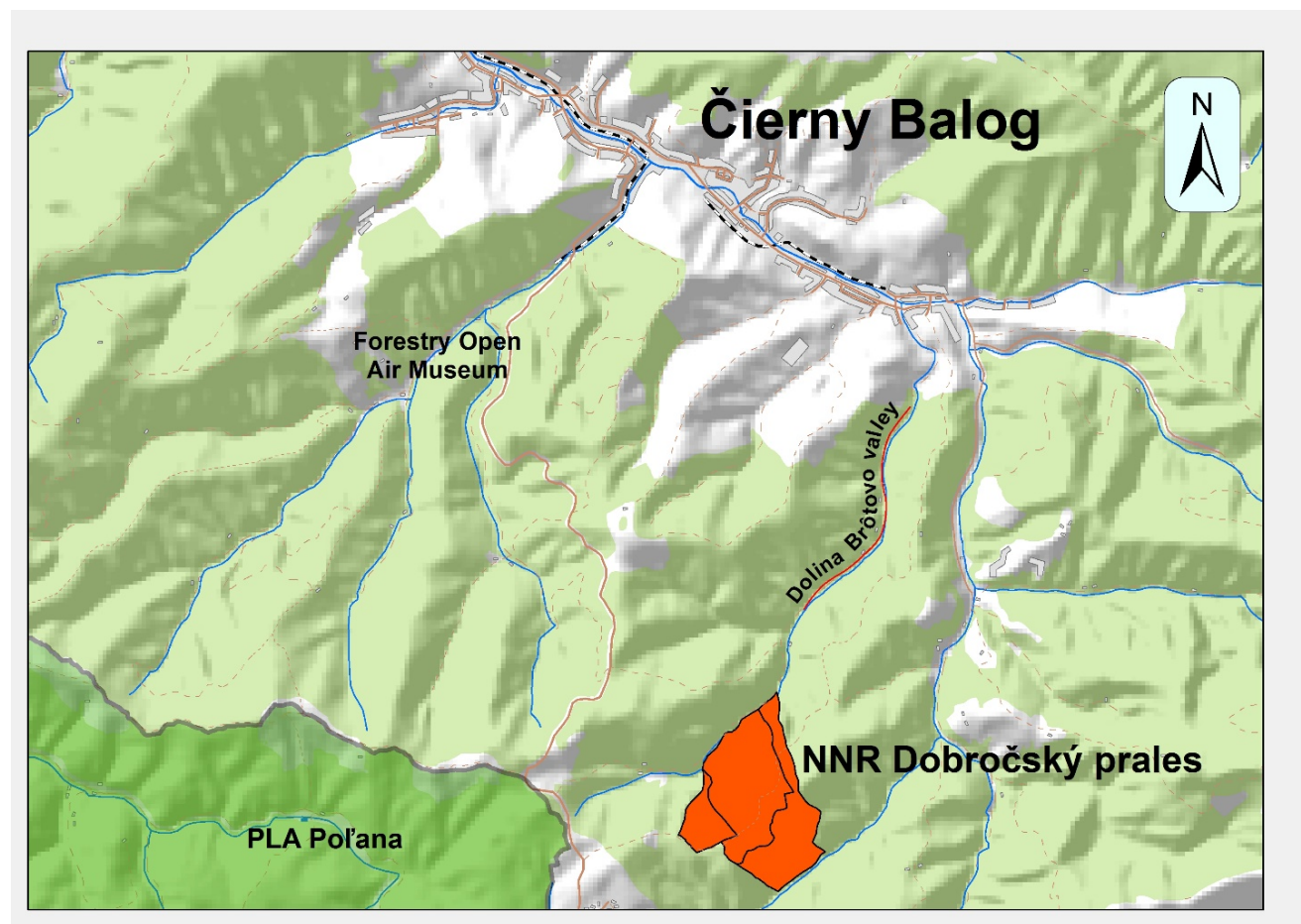
The on-the-spot appraisal was carried out in June 2017 for the first time since 2002. The latest Diploma for the Dobročský Prales National Nature Reserve (NNR) has been granted until September 2018 (Resolution CM/ResDip(2012)11, adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 20 June 2012). The visit of the area took place from 6 to 9 June 2017.

AVAILABLE DOCUMENTS

Official documents concerning the European Diploma include the expert's report on the application 1997, the on-the-spot appraisal report 2002¹, the resolution on the renewal 2012 and the annual reports for the years 2015 and 2016. An excerpt of the management plan was made available in English and sent to the expert in electronic form. The representatives of the visited area provided other information material like brochures and maps.

SITE DESCRIPTION

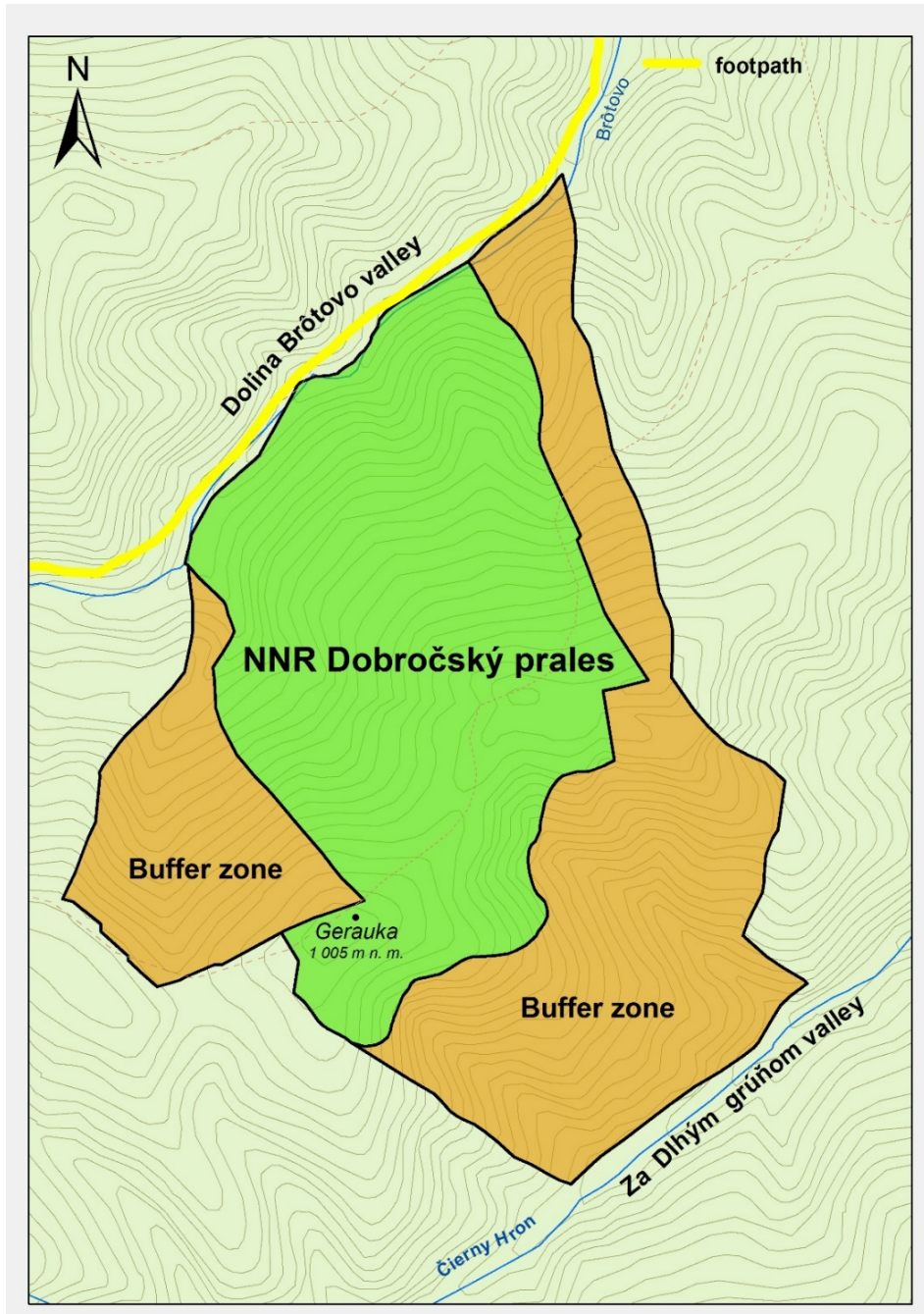
The Dobročský Prales NNR is situated in central Slovakia, approx. 50 km east of Zvolen and 20 km south of Brezno in the Slovakian Rudohorie Mountains. With an area of 103.85 ha protection zone (zone A) and 100.44 ha buffer zone (zone B), totalling 204.29 ha, it is one of these small sites that were awarded the Diploma for their valuable ecosystems. IUCN categorises the core area (zone A) as wilderness area (Ia).



The area is administrated by the State Nature Conservancy Banská Bystrica, administration of the Protected Landscape Area – Biosphere Reserve Poľana, and managed in cooperation with the State Forest Enterprise of the Slovak Republic, branch Čierny Balog. The cooperation between both organisations can be described as excellent.

¹ Report PE-S-DE (98)67 and PE-S-DE (2002)9

Parts of the area were first designated as protected site in 1913 during the time of the Austrian-Hungarian Empire. Therefore, the Dobročský Prales NNR is one of the oldest protected areas in Slovakia. Later, in 1972, the core area was doubled by another 50 ha to about 100 ha. Whereas most parts of the regional forests were used for mining industry development in the 16th and 17th century, this small remnant of primeval forest remained in its unaltered form. Tree planting in the region started at the end of the 18th century regardless of the original species composition. At present, most woodland in the region is dominated by spruce.



Map 2: The buffer zone does not fully encompass the core zone, an enlargement of the buffer zone could be considered.

The Decree No. 83 of the Ministry of Environment of the Slovak Republic dated 23 March 1993 declared the Dobročský Prales NNR “a fragment of primeval forest – climax stage of Carpathian natural forest in fir-beech vegetation degree”. Zone A is strictly protected on level 5 of 5 in the Slovak system, zone B falls under level 4.

According to the Slovakian legislation for the protection of nature, the site has a management plan², elaborated by the State Nature Conservancy, and at the same time a forest management plan of the State Forest Enterprise. A revised management plan is under preparation.

Nature

Geology and geomorphology

The geology consists of granite, slates, granodiorites and siliceous diorites. The terrain relief is created by regular, convex or concave slopes on both sides of the main ridge. Western and north-eastern slope orientations prevail. The inclination ranges from 5° to 25°.

Climate

Dobročský Prales NNR ranges between 700 and 1000 meters a.s.l. The climate is cold. The average annual temperature is about 5.8 °C with peaks of 14.7 °C in July, the warmest month, and -4.9 °C in January, the coldest. The annual precipitation is 905 millimetres in average. It rains on approx. 150 days annually with a maximum in June and a minimum in January. The snow cover lasts about 110 days.

Habitats and species

The area is entirely covered by forests. The most wide spread are fir-beech woods (*Abieto-Fagetum*), which alternate with beech-maple woods (*Fageto-Aceretum*). Beech-fir woods (*Fageto-Abietum*) are scarcely present in the protection zone of the reserve. According to PAROBKOVA et al. (2016)³, fir, which dominated in 1978 with 41 %, retained its share over the decades. Beech had the lowest share in 1978 with 22 % and reached about 35 % in 2015. Since 1998, spruce decreased from 34 % to 23 %, mainly due to a bark beetle outbreak. Bark beetles as well as windfalls are classified as calamities in the terminology of forestry. As natural processes are not a disaster for nature it could be recommended to avoid the term “calamity” in connection with nature protection, especially in leaflets and brochures disseminated to the public.



The core zone

There are no management interventions taken in core zone A. In buffer zone B, there is a gradual modification in the composition of wood species in favour of location-suitable species of trees, in particular by reducing the unsuitably high representation of spruce. These interventions require a forest infrastructure in the buffer zone, which can be seen as a threat to the ecosystem. Pro and cons will be discussed further down.

Recently, no occurrence of non-native (invasive) plant species was recorded, which could cause a threat to the habitats.

² State nature Conservancy of the Slovak republic Banská Bystrica (no year), Management plan National Nature Reserve Dobročský Prales. Excerpt, draft version

³ Parobeková S., M. Saniga, J. Pittner, St. Kubcel and P. Jaloviari (2016), Štruktúra, distribúcia dendromasy, disturbančný režim a regeneračné procesy Dobročského pralesa. Zvolen (Abstract in English)

61 taxa of mosses have been identified, among which the green kobold moss (*buxbaumia viridis*) is vulnerable.⁴

Although, the territory of large carnivores is usually much larger than the site's 204 ha, the presence of grey wolf (*Canis lupus*), brown bear (*Ursus arctos*) and Eurasian lynx (*Lynx lynx*) is regularly recorded. Other smaller beasts of prey include the European pine marten (*Martes martes*), red fox (*Vulpes vulpes*), stoat (*Mustela erminea*), the European badger (*Meles meles*) and the wild cat (*Felis silvestris*).

The number of nesting birds for primeval forests in central Europe is high, 44 of them were identified in the reserve.



Left: *Bielzia coerulans*, a snail, endemic in the Carpathians

Right: *Buxbaumia viridis*, a moss species, indicator for naturalness and primeval forest

RESEARCH AND STUDIES

With the neighbouring University of Zvolen both researchers and students show a great interest in the site. A number of studies have been elaborated and published over the last ten years. However, there is no clear strategy for scientific research that clearly indicates, which type of studies could be of interest to the site management. Although at present the area is not under stress because of too much research work, for the sake of its protection and for the needs of further development, it could be recommended to add a scientific programme to the management plan, clearly outlining the demands of the area management.

The University of Zvolen or scientific institutes or organisations regularly publish various studies on the Dobročský Prales ecosystem.

INFRASTRUCTURE

Forests

As no interventions take place in the core zone A, no forest infrastructure can be found there. In the buffer zone B, management is foreseen mainly to eliminate spruce. As the representatives of the State Forest Enterprise explained, the construction of a forest road in the western part of the buffer zone is necessary as otherwise the transport of logs (dragging) could do more damage. Dragging on a steel cable requires the felling of trees to create a straight stretch; dragging by horse or by man would cause a long-lasting disturbance and more damage to the ground. The forest road would be about 1000 meters long and three meters wide and unpaved. It would be periodically used over the next 50 years.

⁴ Kubinská, A., K. Janovicová, K. and R. Šoltés (2001), Red List of bryophytes of Slovakia, In: Baláž, D., K Marhold, K. and P. Urban P. (Eds., 2001), Red list of plants and animals of Slovakia. Bratislava

From the expert's point of view, the construction of the forest road could be tolerated, assuming that:

- An interdisciplinary concept verifies the necessity and guarantees a least-intervention solution;
- The impacts of the road on the environment are minimised;
- The construction is not carried out in the vegetation period and in the breeding season;
- The felling itself does not involve heavy machinery;
- A natural re-cultivation of the road is foreseen after the forestry measures have been implemented.

Tourist infrastructure

The only tourist infrastructure is a nature trail "Dobročský Prales primeval forest" leading to the edge of the nature reserve. The trail comprises seven information panels. On the way to the nature reserve, a former worker's home in Skalica contains a small exhibition, which is only open to the public during guided tours. Guided tours to the reserve but not into it are organised by the civil association VYDRA. The number of visitors is limited. In 2016, VYDRA guided 20 groups with 311 visitors. Therefore, no specific visitors' management is required.

A forestry museum near Čierny Balog provides information about protected areas as well as comprehensive information about all aspects of forestry. A replica of the torso of a large fir from Dobročský primeval forest is shown in the open air. Visitors there are not necessarily interested in visiting the Dobročský Prales NNR itself.

Tourist information

Beside the infrastructure mentioned above the administration provides information material like leaflets, brochures and a DVD. The European Diploma logo can hardly be found, neither on sign posts in the nature reserve nor on various publications. In some places, the logo appears in its old format. An explanation of the European Diploma and the reasons for awarding it to Dobročský Prales NNR is also missing.

FURTHER PROGRAMME

The nature reserve administration organised a short field trip to Badinsky Forest Nature Reserve (situated between Zvolen and Banská Bystrica east of the Pol'ana Biosphere Reserve), another type of primeval forest.

COMMENTS ON THE 2012 CONDITION AND RECOMMENDATIONS⁵

Condition 2012

- *pursue the process of transforming anthropogenic forests into semi-natural forests, mainly in the buffer zone of the Dobročský National Nature Reserve, in compliance with the management plan;*

The process continued over the last years as laid out in the annual reports, mainly processing wood after bark beetle or wind calamities. In the surrounding forest management measures according to the forestry management plan were implemented, especially sanitary measures in forest stands with bark beetle occurrence.

The need of a new forest road to allow such interventions was discussed above. It should be noted that the buffer zone is not totally encompassing the core zone A.

Recommendations 2012

1. *promote awareness-raising activities, mainly:*

- *updating the exhibition on the Dobročský National Nature Reserve in the Pred Skalickou cottage;*

⁵ Resolution CM/ResDip(2012)11

- in co-operation with the forestry authorities, installing an information point on the Dobročský National Nature Reserve in the Forestry Museum in the Vydrovská Valley, near Čierny Balog;

As already mentioned, the Skalickou cottage is not accessible at fixed hours. Although the exhibition was up-dated with information about the European Diploma, the information does not really reach visitors. Furthermore, the number of visitors is not adequate to justify regular opening times.

The Forestry Museum in the Vydrovská valley is the most important address in the area where people can get all information on forests, including primeval forests. A replica of the torso of the largest fir in the Dobročský Prales NNR is displayed in the open air.



Left: Exhibition in the Skalickou cottage

Right: Torso (copy) of the Dobročská jedl'a (silver fir) in the open-air forestry museum

2. implement other activities listed in the management plan, particularly research and monitoring.

Monitoring is ongoing. As far as research is concerned, a clear scientific programme is missing. However, a significant number of studies are published every year.

CONCLUSIONS

The visit was accompanied by numerous representatives of various organisations, experts, managers and staff. All people working in any form either in or for the nature reserve are motivated and dedicated to the aims of protected areas. The State Forest Enterprise fully considers the objectives of the Dobročský Prales NNR and the management plan. This is not necessarily the norm in other protected areas. The management plan, as translated for the expert, shows a good approach, but additional aspects should be considered as laid out in the recommendations.

The site itself offered an impressive insight into a primeval forest, which are rare in central Europe. The absence of any intervention in nature and the strict regulations for visitors help protect the area, its nature and its wildlife. There is a clear will and an engaged programme from politicians as well as from the regional and local managers to maintain the area in its status. Moreover, there is a good co-operation with local stakeholders, who support the protection.

European interest

Primeval forests are rare in central Europe. Their size is limited and impacts from surrounding forests are often obvious. Dobročský Prales is an excellent example of how nature conservancy and

forest authorities can work together to protect a valuable area. It is distinguished by biological diversity as well as aesthetic value. The forest in the core area remained untouched, although it is easily accessible and not far from settlements. It is not only the territory of large and protected carnivores as well as a habitat for endemic species and endangered bird species. The European interest is further confirmed by the designation as NATURA 2000 site.

Renewal of the Diploma

It is recommended to renew the European Diploma for Dobročský Prales National Nature Reserve for the period 2018 to 2028, taking into consideration the following conditions and recommendations:

Conditions

1. Carefully observe the revised regulations for the European Diploma of Protected Areas (Resolution CM/ResDip(2008)1, Article 6, paragraph 4) and place the logo of the European Diploma wherever useful e.g. on signposts, information panels, brochures and other publications including DVDs (cover and presentation). Set up information panels on the European Diploma itself as well as on the reason for awarding it to the Dobročský Prales National Nature Reserve.
2. Elaborate an interdisciplinary concept, which verifies the necessity of a new forest road into the buffer zone and guarantees a least-intervention solution to minimise the impacts of the road, taking into consideration that the construction is not carried out during the vegetation period and in the breeding season, and that the felling itself does not include heavy machinery. A natural re-cultivation of the road should be foreseen once the forestry measures have been implemented. Report to the Council of Europe before starting the roadworks.

Recommendations

1. Add a chapter on scientific research to the management plan defining clearly the needs of the management of the nature reserve and including a timetable to avoid surveys that are not directly connected to the further development of the area.
2. Develop a precautionary concept on how to deal with invasive species to be prepared in case of their appearance.
3. Prepare a study on the effects of climate change and global warming both on the nature reserve itself and on the regional forests, including a strategy on how to manage the surrounding forest to avoid negative impacts in the nature reserve.
4. Examine possibilities either to extend the opening hours of the exhibition in Skalickou cottage or to relocate the exhibition to the Forestry Museum.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The visit was perfectly organised by the State Nature Conservancy of the Slovak Republic, PLA BR Administration Pol'ana. Special thanks go to Ms. Vladimira Fabriciusová and all the numerous participants who shared their experience in various meetings and during the field trips. The open discussion was highly appreciated.

The programme as well as names and functions of the participants are attached.

Annex 1

EURÓPSKY DIPLOM – DOBROČSKÝ PRALES
REVIEW MISSION 6TH – 9TH JUNE 2017 (MR. ROBERT BRUNNER)
PROGRAMM:

Date/time	Content	Place	Participants
6.6.2017			
15:30 – 17:30	Meeting with representatives of scientific institutions	Technical university in Zvolen	Staff of Administration of PLA-BR Poľana, Technical university in Zvolen – Faculty of Forest, Faculty of ecology, Institute of Forest Ecology, NGO Prales, Prof. M. Saniga, Prof. V. Pichler, Mr. Krištín, Mr. Wieszik, Mr. Vysoký, Mr. Kunca, Mr. A. Krištín, Burkovský, Mr. Slávik
18:00 – 19:00	Welcome to the Administration of PLA-BR Poľana - Introduction with the European Diploma of Dobročský primeval forest - Results of cooperation - Presentation of Care Program Dobročský primeval forest,	Administration of PLA-BR Poľana in Zvolen	staff of Administration of PLA-BR Poľana Mr.J. Burkovský - ED proposes to grant processor, Ministry of environment of SR
19:20	Accommodation	Masarykov dvor, Pstruša	
7.6.2017			
7:30	Departure from Masarykov dvor		
8:30 – 9:30	Meeting in Forest enterprise in Čierny Balog	Forest enterprise Čierny Balog	Ministry of environment of SR SNC of SR staff of Administration of PLA-BR Poľana State enterprise Forests of Slovak Republic Municipality Čierny Balog Forest enterprise Čierny Balog Civic association Vydra Civic association Prales

10:00 – 14:00	Field inspection with Stakeholder participation - Tour of the educational trail in the buffer zone of primeval forest Visiting the permanent display Skalica - Summary of the results, action proposal and comments by the evaluators	NNR Dobročský prales Open-air forest museum Vydrovo	Ministry of environment of SR SNC of SR staff of Administration of PLA-BR Poľana State enterprise Forests of Slovak Republic Municipality Čierny Balog Forest enterprise Čierny Balog Civic association Vydra Civic association Prales
14:30 – 15:30	Lunch with stakeholders	Open-air forest museum Vydrovo	
16:00 – 18:00	- Visit the open-air forest museum Vydrovo - a replica of the torso of a large fir from Dobročský primeval forest		Ministry of environment of SR SNC of SR staff of Administration of PLA-BR Poľana State enterprise Forests of Slovak Republic Municipality Čierny Balog Forest enterprise Čierny Balog Civic association Vydra Civic association Prales
8.6.2017 9:00 – 13:00	- Visit NNR Badínsky Forest - Preview quality cooperation with forest users and the scientific community in managing the buffer zone of NNR	NNR Badínsky prales	Ministry of environment of SR SNC of SR staff of Administration of PLA-BR Poľana Forest enterprise Slovenská Ľupča
14:30 – 19:30	Meeting in the Administration of PLA-BR Poľana - Summary of the results, action proposal and comments by the evaluators	BR Poľana	Ministry of environment of SR SNC of SR staff of Administration of PLA-BR Poľana Members of Coordination Council of BR Poľana

Annex 2

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

Meeting with representatives of scientific institutions			
06/06/2017			
List of participants			
	Name	Organization	Contact
1.	prog. Viliam Pichler	Faculty of Forestry, Technical University in Zvolen	pichler@tuzvo.sk
2.	doc. Ing. Vladimír Kunca, PhD.,	Faculty of Ecology and Environmental Sciences, Technical University in Zvolen	kunca@tuzvo.sk
3.	Doc. Stanislav Kucbel	Department Forest Growing, Faculty of Forestry, Technical University in Zvolen	kucbel@tuzvo.sk
4.	Doc. Karol Ujházy	Department of Phytology, Faculty of Forestry, Technical University in Zvolen	karol.ujhazy@tuzvo.sk
5.	Mr. Anto Krištín	Department of Animal Ecology	kristin@savzv.sk
6.	Mr. Juraj Vysoký	Specialist for nature forest ecosystems	juraj.vysoky@pralesy.sk
7.	Mr. Július Burkovský	Former worker of State Nature Conservancy	jburkovsky@centum.sk
8.	Dušan Slávik	Exdirector of PLA BR Poľana	dusan.slavik@gmail.com
9.	Ivan Rybár	Administration of PLA Poľana	ivan.rybar@sopsr.sk
10.	Peter Potocký	Administration of PLA Poľana	peter.potocky@sopsr.sk
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12.	Miroslav Jarný	Administration of PLA Poľana	miroslav.jarny@sopsr.sk
13.	Vladimira Fabriciusova	Director of Administration of PLA Poľana	vladimira.fabriciusova@sopsr.sk

Meeting in Forest enterpriner in Čierny Balog			
07/06/2017			
List of participants			
	Name	Organization	Contact
1.	Michal Wiezik	SNC of SR	wiezik@tuzvo.sk
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6.	Michal Kofira	Forest enterprise Čierny Balog	michal.kofira@lesy.sk
7.	Róbert Hlaváčik	Municipality Čierny Balog	prednosta@ciernybalog.sk
8.	Michaela Heretová	Civic association Vydra	vydra@vydra.sk
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11.	Ivan Rybár	Admnistration of PLA Poľana	ivan.rybar@sopsr.sk
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15.	Vladimira Fabriciusova	Director of Admnistration of PLA Poľana	vladimira.fabriciusova@sopsr.sk
16.	Michaela Mrázová	State Nature Conservancy of the Slovak Republic	michaela.mrazova@sopsr.sk
17.	doc. Ing. Vladimír Kunca, PhD.,	Faculty of Ecology and Environmental Sciences, Technical University in Zvolen	kunca@tuzv.sk

Visit NNR Badínsky Forest			
08/06/2017			
Listo of participants			
	Name	Organization	Contact
1.	Vladimír Masica	Forest enterprise Slovenská Ľupča	vladimir.masica@lesy.sk
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3.	Jana Ďurkošová	Ministry of environment of SR	jana.durkosova@enviro.gov.sk
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5.	Ivan Rybár	Admnistration of PLA Poľana	ivan.rybar@sopsr.sk
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