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AND NATURAL HABITATS

**GROUP OF SPECIALISTS -EUROPEAN DIPLOMA OF PROTECTED AREAS  
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**Belovezhskaya Pushcha National Park (Belarus)**

**Appraisal report  
Mr Eckhart Kuijken (Belgium)**

*Document prepared by  
the Directorate of Democratic Governance, Culture and Diversity*

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## 1. Chronology of the Diploma award, conditions and recommendations

The European Diploma was awarded to BP in 1997 with the following conditions :

*"1. a management plan be drawn up within three years, dealing in particular with:*

- *the management of herbivores,*
- *the use of the park by the public, inter alia the plan should define the objectives pursued, the principles and criteria underlying the development of the area and the types of activities that could be undertaken there;" ;* (a list of recommendations was also formulated).

In November 2002 the Diploma was renewed until 30 September 2007 with a list of attached recommendations, the first one reformulating the request of a management plan:

*"1. implement, before the end of the European Diploma renewal period and by 1 January 2005 at the latest, a ten-year national park management plan drawn up in line with the directives for the plan for biodiversity conservation and planning for the Belovezhskaya Pushcha National Park proposed by the GEF project;" (followed by another 8 recommendations).*

In 2006 we were appointed as an expert for the on-the-spot appraisal in view of advising the possible renewal in 2007; our visit was combined with the parallel expertise in the Bialowieza National Park in Poland, forming one transboundary complex of ancient forest and peatbogs. Most attention was paid to the follow up of both 1997 and 2002 resolutions, as some of them still remained of crucial importance indeed before considering the renewal of the European Diploma in October 2007. In our expert report of 2006 we concluded that a number of positive actions were undertaken indeed, but that the requested 10 year management plan to come in force in 2005 was still not available. Also problems of logging, hunting, tourism etc. were still actual.

In 2007 the Committee of Ministers followed the advice of the Specialists Group and decided not to renew the European Diploma to the Belovezhskaya Pushcha National Park *"... until the following condition has been met: establish and implement, before the end of 2008 a peer reviewed 10 year management plan for the Belovezhskaya Pushcha National Park, including the adjacent zones with internationally recognised nature values, with due regard to the conclusions of the "Forest of Hope" appeal be prepared and implemented;..."* (from PE-S-DE (2007) 5).

The recommendations (both from 2002 and 2007) illustrated the needs of steering the management of Belovezhskaya Pushcha in the way that the National Park functions at the highest level of protected sites in Europe as a part of the European Ecological Network and as a World Heritage Site (UNESCO).

The draft 10 year management plan has to be established on sound scientific basis and needs to find balances between biodiversity and ecosystem protection, forestry, hunting, tourism, agriculture and some other activities of local residents. It has to be subject of public consultations and must be officially accepted by the authorities. This plan had to be finalised in 2008. At the Standing Committee meeting of November 2007 a requests of Belarus was examined concerning the possible revision of the decisions of the Group of Specialists concerning the non-renewal of the European Diploma to the Belovezhskaya Pushcha National Park. (see T-PVS/Inf (2007) 14).

In 2008 it was decided not to renew the European Diploma until the following condition has been satisfied: *"that a peer-reviewed ten-year management plan for the Belovezhskaya Pushcha National Park, including adjacent areas of internationally recognised natural importance, with due regard to the conclusions of the "Forest of Hope" appeal be prepared and implemented"...*(followed by recommendations).

Also in 2008, the National Park administration reported the following on the World Heritage status (responding to UNESCO recommendations; see also ANNEX 5):

*"In 2009 the public will celebrate 600-years anniversary of introduction of protected status in Belovezha forest. In this connection The plan of measures which dated to celebrating anniversary and directed on development of national park and improvement of its nature protection and ecological-educational activity, is created and starts to be carried out. In particular, by 2009 it is planned the creation of a new*

*administrative building, the Museum of the nature and the Center of ecological education, and also reconstruction of demonstration open-air cages with wild animals and their reduction to international standards. Besides the network of tourist routes and ecological tracks, a construction of a viewing tower will be expanded. These works will be spent in recreational and economic zones of the national park".*

In order to stimulate the further elaboration of the draft management plan by the Park Administration, the Council of Europe organised an expertise from 15th September until 15th November 2008, granted by Swiss authorities. This mission with Ms Lyudmila DIMITROVA (Bulgaria) as an expert aimed to endorse a balanced preparation of a management plan for the National Park.

In that mission contract specific outputs were envisaged :

1. To check the elaboration and structure of the draft management plan prepared by the Administration of the Park;
2. To verify that the proposed management plan complies with European standards' requirements in the field of protected areas management and corresponds to the protection requirements of the Park;
3. To prepare the final interim plan (action plan);
4. To develop the vision and objectives of the Management Plan.
5. Provide a Mission Report by 15th November 2008 outlining activities undertaken and providing a series of recommendations.

The first draft of the management plan became available in 2008 (in Russian). The document T-PVS/DE(2009)15 'Management plan for Belovezhskaya Pushcha National Park (Belarus)' was discussed in the Group of Specialists on the European Diploma of Protected Areas at the Meeting of 2-3 March 2009. At this Meeting the report of L. Dimitrova was tabled and discussed in the light of the expert report of the on-the-spot appraisal in 2006. (see also D-PVS/DE (2009) 21 Ann XV).

Having regard to the proposals of the Standing Committee of the Bern Convention, it was again decided in 2009 not to renew the European Diploma until the following condition has been satisfied: *that the prepared management plan be peer-reviewed.* For that purpose an English translation of the plan was requested .

In September 2009 the secretariat of the Council of Europe appointed us as a consultant for the peer review of the draft management plan, which was only available -partly translated- in December 2009. The peer review (although incomplete, as no full translation was available) was presented at the Group of Specialists in March 2010 (document T-PVS/DE (2010) 13).

The general appreciation of the plan was fairly satisfactory. However, a number of concerns remained crucial and needed clarification or adaptations of the document:

- the change in zoning,
- the cutting of old trees,
- the organization of hunting,
- the drying out of peat bogs,
- the presence of zones of intensive agriculture,
- the bypass road scheme, and
- the budget, 75% of which was allocated to setting up tourist infrastructures.

***An unsustainable use of resources and a failure to consider the carrying capacity of the forest as a whole are to be avoided and reviewed. As economic considerations seem to dominate, additional guarantees should be obtained from the government.***

Renewals of the European Diploma for both Bialowieza and Belovzhskaya Pushcha were to be re-examined at the request of the Standing Committee of the Bern Convention. The Specialist Group was in favour of a visit in 2011 to analyse the content and the implementation of the management for Belovezhskaya Pushcha, with a view to re-consider the renewal of the European Diploma in 2012. Pending that visit, the Group proposed that the decision not to renew the European Diploma be maintained.

In 2010 the decision not to renew the European Diploma of Protected Areas awarded to Belovezhskaya Pushcha National Park was maintained, until the following condition has been satisfied: *that the prepared management plan be peer-reviewed.*

Further also 8 recommendations were added (see § 3).

It is clear that the European Diploma has only been suspended in order to encourage the authorities for the finalization of a better balanced management plan. After the peer review discussion (although incomplete by lack of full translation) the Group of Specialists decided that the on-the-spot appraisal for the renewal should take place in 2011. It was regretted that this visit could not be combined with the Bialowieza National Park, as the Polish authorities could not yet present the requested ten year management plan.

## **2. On-the-spot appraisal September 2011: summarizing report**

Following the decision of the Group of specialists of the European Diploma of Protected Areas, the on-the-spot appraisal was carried out in September 2011 in order to analyse the content and the implementation of the management plan of the national park.

### **a) Detailed programme**

During the visit by the Council of Europe's experts to the Belovezhskaya Pushcha National Park the following activities took place:

- 21th Sept.      Arrival in Minsk airport; minibus transfer to Kamenyuki.  
Accommodation at the hotel.
  
- 22th Sept.      Presentation of the Management Plan of Belovezhskaya Pushcha NP in the Director's  
office. Discussion on the main aspects of the national park.  
Meeting with representative of the Bialowieza National Park (Poland).  
Afternoon field excursion to the central part of the strict protected area.
  
- 23th Sept.      Field visit of the facilities for monitoring of forest ecosystems (permanent scientific plots,  
geobotanic profile, habitat of rare species, ornithological routes) in central and southern  
parts of the park.  
Review of the objects of tourism infrastructure.
  
- 24th Sept.      Excursion to the Wetland complex "Dikoe bog" followed by discussion and exchange of  
publications at the office.  
Afternoon workshop with representatives of national and regional authorities, the  
Academy of Sciences, NGOs, other stakeholders and the media.
  
- 25th Sept.      Return to Minsk for most participants.  
Start of our private tour to several protected areas to compare conservation status  
(Berezinsky NP, Prypjat, Yelnia bog in Mijory district, and others).

Participants: mrs Françoise Bauer (secretariat Council of Europe), dr Ludmila Dimitrova (Bulgaria) expert, Eckhart Kuijken (Belgium) expert, (accompanied at private basis by mrs Christine Kuijken-Verscheure for assistance during discussions and field trips).

Staff members: dr Alexandr Bury, General Director, dr Wasili Arnolbik, Deputy Director of Scientific Researches of NP, dr Dzmity Bernatsky vice director and Eugenius Sukalo (interpreter).

We are most grateful to all persons mentioned above for the fine cooperation during the well organised and interesting visit. The permanent presence and input from the interpreter was an important added value. In particular the open spirit and the commitment of the recently appointed Director and his core staff members is strongly appreciated.

## **b) Some summarising notices from the detailed programme of meetings and field trips**

### 22.09: first meeting with Director and staff: overview of most critical items

- Director A. Bury welcomes the delegation and remembers that he only recently appointed as successor of N. Bambiza.
- Mrs F Bauer clarifies the importance of the European Diploma as a recognition of conservation achievements, but also as a tool to help improvements ;
- the aims of the present visit are discussions on the content of the management plan (MP), its implementation and measures taken to fulfil the goals; meetings with staff and stakeholders and field visits to different zones of the NP must inform the experts about the actual situation and future potentials for conservation.
- Ms Dimitrova stressed the importance of the SMART approach for the MP and mentions the good follow up of her input in 2008
- the non-renewal of the Diploma did not negatively influence the efforts for nature conservation so far.
- there is transboundary cooperation with Poland (agreement 2009, signed 2010 and approved by parliament of Belarus); also related to UNESCO (World Heritage)
- rezoning : functional zoning with location of settlements (beneficial of local inhabitants) and tourist infrastructure; rezoning is related to the provisions of the new law; the Presidential Decree is under preparation
- zones of special significance for specific habitats: 5500 ha also outside strict protected areas (and with specific state budgets)
- we congratulate the authorities with the increase of the strict protected zone: in 1994: 15000 ha, in 2004: 40000 ha, proposed in 2011: 57000 ha (this area will include ca 90% of old aged forest). see map in ANNEX 3
- some important nature sites are not in strict protected zone because this does not allow restoration works
- e.g. Dikoe: open peatbog landscape where shrub has to be removed; Narev canals from 1960s subject to hydrological restoration. This can affect zone of low agricultural importance (former peat digging); 1900 ha will be converted in protected area.
- Diki-Nikor (partly in NP since 1994) restoration of water level started; restoration of historic peatland from the 1950s before reclamation is not possible; marsh habitats can gain nature values in actually abandoned land
- the recategorisations of abandoned agricultural land mentioned above have been agreed by stakeholders (following an official procedure?)
- the game forestry Shereshevskoe and other hunting zones are not part of the NP but the activities can have effects on the nature values of the BP in general; *this is in contradiction with some maps (see Annex 3, WH sites) where game forests are included in the NP legend.*
- the construction since 2009 of the new bypass ring road (184 km, officially open November 7th) and linked with the Polish border was discussed: 80% of the road is outside the NP, connecting local settlements, and is not in contact with core areas of the NP (check points at entrance roads to NP). This new road can stimulate recreation and attract more visitors, connecting local tourist roads; but also aims development of economic activities (tourism investments etc.). Impact on migration movements of animals is studied by the Academy of Sciences: underground passages are constructed: 10 for Amphibians and only 2 for large mammals. (see also ANNEX 4)

### Meeting with Bialowieza National Park Management authority from Poland: dr Renata Krzysciak-Kosinska and Belovezhskaya Pushcha staff

Discussion on conditions and recommendations (non-renewal decision of 2010).

1. After 4 years of preparation with scientific community the draft MP was sent to the Ministry in November 2010, was approved by the department of Nature Conservation and its Minister. At present it is discussed in other Departments and will then become open for public consultation. The final signature is expected in mid 2012. No translation available before that date.
- 2 All ancient forest to be protected. Bialowieza forest proposed: 30000 ha in the NP 9000ha, in Nature reserves 12000 ha (for each reserve a MP is prepared).

Corridors between NR are not foreseen in conservation law and need to be included in landscape plans.

People is against strict reserves as they need forests (mushroom picking, cutting etc.)

The new law on Nature Conservation (2008) appointed responsible General Director for Environmental Protection.

3. renomination of World Heritage and cooperation: in Poland whole state forest proposed.

Joint common *structure* Pl/By cannot be realised, but a joint common *framework* is in force (steering committee).

Agreement on transboundary cooperation was established in 2009 and signed in 2010

Conclusion on the effect of the European Diploma: helps to put pressure on processes and improves the image of nature conservation (but general public has low knowledge of international distinctions).

#### Site visit 22 09

- bufferzone not under management of NP, but for several activities permissions needed
- Lake Liadskoye: dammed river, resident of the President; limited tourism at the riparian zone allowed (10-20 persons?);
- need of local inhabitants to pick berries and mushrooms is not allowed in strict protected areas: control possible?
- near-nature forest part of strict reserve; no cuttings allowed, so also exotic species such as *Quercus rubra* cannot be removed: problem of spreading and seedlings: exceptional management needed for combat against invasive exotic species (World Heritage Commission also urges specific measures; this is EU priority too)
- discussions on fight against bark beetle (*Yps*): spruce is killed, but pine and oak survive.
- the number of very old oak trees is rather low, even in strict zone (some of 300y along trail);
- feeding areas of Bison: mais fields in former agricultural enclave along Hwozna river.
- network of drainage channels will be managed for conservation (abandoned sluices since 15 years) but water level is at -1,5m: too low for conservation (with effects up to 2 km in strict zone as well); restoration of mineralised peat is difficult and restoring high water levels could affect forest trees adapted to lower water level. Proposed partial restoration with water levels at -30cm and -50 cm and flooded meadows as feeding grounds for bison (without extra grain etc.).
- observation of a free roaming herd of almost 65 Bison is a welcome experience for our group; however, we doubt the need and motivations of feeding large herbivores so that an un-natural high population level is maintained and increasing (deer, bison) and then shooting is said to be necessary; at the other hand these high herbivore densities are blamed to disturb the natural regeneration of the forest: this is a considerable contradiction in the management, except when the economic purpose (hunting is an important income!) is of higher priority than ecological management principles.

#### Site visit 23.09

- regulated zone; visit to some pristine forest parts that will be designated as strict zone
- research is important : 60 y of monitoring, individually marked trees in 150 permanent plots of ca 1 ha (here no economic activities allowed) for study of growth speed, regeneration, rebuilding dynamics and species composition; defoliation as indicator of environmental factors (incl. climate change); we inform if measuring aerial deposition (dry and wet) is included in the monitoring
- history of exploitation after World war I by Germans, afterwards Polish, through 360 km narrow gauged railroad (not more in BP, still present in Poland); harvest stopped in 1920: first strict reserve and start of restoration.
- 10% of old aged forest are replanted (80-90y ago) and succession is compared between original and reforested stands; history of giant trees is followed
- regulated zone: less dead wood. Visit to zone that has been included in strict protection 7years ago. Also historical, archaeological and cultural importance of forest parts is investigated (medieval populations: burial sited, ceramics etc.).
- crossing Narevka river and visit to Rudnia village; talks with local inhabitants; former agricultural land is not replanted and included in the regulated zone (spontaneous regeneration of forest).

- visit to monumental restored old forestry guest house (Count Tyszkewicz estate house) in economic activities zone
- regulated zone in the N: hunting of wild boar, forest type almost boreal, with good trees age structure to be included (together with Polish part) in World Heritage; here less bark beetle;
- new bypass ring road: 80% is constructed on existing roads, no entrance to protected forest except via check points; crosses hunting zone (40y old plantations) without check points; heavy transport of logging trucks is obvious (!); contradictory effects are to be expected ?
- south of Noyy Dvor : partly asphalted road through large and important peat bog complex
- in old settlements a huge new tourist initiative is developed: recreational complex in Kletnoye including sport complex, horse farm etc.: employment of 26 people; 600 visitors/mth; cooperation with NP (passage to protected areas only via check points?); sustainable? further permissions in future for expanding activities? road P47 crosses NP;
- Dikoe peatbog and marshes (and mineral islands) belongs to NP since 2004 now in regulated zone to make management possible; restoration and management of bogs is more costly than forests, so increase of budget needed (actually only for personnel, not for maintenance or restoration of nature values in practice); Dikoe is important for hosting several boreal species; management of peatbogs is in line with priority habitats of EU;
- budgets also important also for studies on hydrological regimes in order to prevent deterioration (?) of forest after restored flooding of former Diki-Nikor bogs into marsh: models to be developed and applied in the field; sluice restoration is ongoing; water level raise is to be established gradually (e.g.10 cm/y during period of 10 y) allowing adaptation of tree root systems in nearby forest .
- transformation of land into agriculture (2000ha excluded from protected area): in our view this needs compensation elsewhere in zones actually outside NP; also extensivisation of agriculture increases nature values (is possible in regulated zone). There is need for land-use studies on the status of agricultural use and the potentials for nature restoration; this is necessary to choose exchange of agricultural land abandoned elsewhere. Giving up 2000 ha risks to increase fragmentation of the NP instead of designating more compact boundaries (including semi-natural agricultural zones with potentials for slow nature restoration)
- visit to Manor of Father Frost (situated 12 km from main entrance and buildings, bus transport obliged); discussion on possible impacts of 100-200.000 visitors: almost no free walking in surrounding NP?; impact study by technical University, but difficult to evaluate parameters used; recommendation on relocation to less central site is considered by authorities to make no sense because too expensive (?); 40% of NP budget is from tourism income; however, more educational efforts towards visitors is recommended in order to actively raise awareness not only to importance of forest, but of biodiversity and conservation in general (to be combined with similar comments an available documentation during Museum visit); specific conservation leaflets with information on biodiversity but also on management of important habitats need regular update (and adaptation when new zoning and regulations are agreed).

#### Evening discussion 23.09 with NP staff

Comments and questions on the condition and recommendations from 2007 (see below);  
We stress the importance of developing a higher ambition level concerning the territorial expansion and coherence of the national park. We support the need for research budgets but more focus on 'translation' of results towards practical management in the field is recommended, including a more ambitious programme for increasing coherence of marginal or isolated parts of the NP.

#### Saturday 24.09 morning

- a) visit to Museum (seasonal diorama's, leaflets etc)
- b) excursion to Southern part of NP without checkpoints: economic and recreation zones;
  - bypass ring road (prestige project) through drained agricultural land and economic zone, valley of river Belaya; several Amphibian tunnel passages near Asinki where forested parts are crossed
  - Cvirki village: traditional structure and living: potential for agro-tourism need respect for authenticity of these settlements!
- c) meeting with staff at NP office: review of findings and further questions

- discussions on new research structure (regroup experience on NC in this NP? )
- presentation of recent scientific reports, documents, maps etc. (i.e. the trend to prepare alternative plantations in forest parts damaged by storms)
- talks with Petr Kozlo, Michael Nikoiforov, Igor Kachanovski, a.o.
- discussion on bypass road: is currently being built around the National Park to decrease the anthropogenic load on the National Park, as well as to make the Park more appealing for tourists(=contradiction?). The said road is primarily based on the existing roads and passes through protected areas that are not a part of the National Park
- discussion on unbalanced budgets for tourism and research: the MP required external state investments (non-recurring: only in 2009) for development of tourist infrastructure, dedicated to the 600th anniversary of Belovezhskaya Pushcha's protection. Out of the entire allocated amount, about 7 million US dollars was spent on construction of the administrative and environmental centre with a museum of nature, reconstruction of food facilities, hotels and wildlife enclosures, improvement of the population centres located within the National Park and development of tourist routes.
- discussion on the zoning, incl. regimes; the delegation of the Council of Europe convinced the park authorities, that the regulation for the BPNP has to be included as a key element in the Management plan. The functions for each of the zones have to be defined, as well as the possible range of regimes, related to the access, construction or use of resources in the Park and in each of the zones. It was agreed that L. Dimitrova would assist in adapting the chapter 8 of the management plan in that sense.

Saturday 24.09 afternoon : meeting with stakeholders

- a well organised meeting with some 20 participants, chaired by the Director dr A. Bury .
- present representatives: see list in Annex I
- Discussed were, a.o.: regional zoning plan, sustainable development and the implementation of the management plan, finances, future actions, Diploma renewal etc.
- The Director stressed the fact that the Management Plan, adopted in 2008, is a real pioneer example in Belarus, that is recently followed by some other nature reserves and NPs. He repeated that the new zoning was in the interest of nature but also of local inhabitants. He also announced that the new zoning plan and corresponding law with regulations is likely to be approved at highest level in November 2011
- From the Council of Europe Mrs F. Bauer confirmed that the plan was contributing to sustainable development and that after the peer review the actual visit was aiming to get informed about the implementation of the plan in the field, as requested for the Diploma renewal.
- Then we summarised our findings during this expertise and started with the positive experience during these days, being informed about the enlarged protected areas and other measures and intentions in favour of nature conservation. The opinion of stakeholders, delegates, local authorities and NGO in this process is of crucial importance, but authorities must take decisions that sometimes are quite difficult. The final management plan needs to be further analysed with regard to budgets, improving application of scientific research results, control on new strict regulations and especially the follow up of effects of activities such as tourism, agriculture, hunting etc. We concluded that the international reputation of the National Park (European Diploma, World Heritage) needs the highest standards to be maintained and in that regard the new management plan delivers a positive contribution.
- In her intervention dr Ludmila Dimitrova remembered the endorsement she could give to establish the management plan. The qualitative improvement is the result of translating visions into clear objectives of the plan, which was developed with the core team of specialists. Most important is the need to include regulations concerning the re-zoning, which will be added in chapter 8 of the Management plan (see below).
- From the audience several remarks and questions came up in a constructive atmosphere. Items were multifunctional approach, need of buffer zones, transboundary cooperation with Poland, status of national park, implementation of recommendations, need of further action after 600y anniversary, balance between

conservation, hunting and logging. Interesting is the system of specific state budgets allocated to programs for areas of preferential protection. Most interventions stressed the importance to renew the European Diploma, after the positive response to the recommendations.

- In our concluding statements and congratulations we stressed the importance of good understanding and positive collaboration between the authorities at different levels, the scientists, the local communities and the specialised conservation NGOs.

The workshop meeting was closed by the Director who thanked the participants for their interventions and constructive contributions. He invited the audience for a reception and banquet.

A final evening meeting with the Director and his co-workers was an occasion to sincerely thank himself and his staff for all their efforts that made this visit a most positive, interesting and pleasant experience. We expressed our hope that soon after the approval of the functional zoning plan by the President of the Belarus Republic later this year and the new Conservation Law coming into force, the NP will get new energy for the future.

#### Sunday 25.09

In Minsk - F. Bauer and L. Dimitrova had a meeting with Zoya Mechkovskaya, Director NGO "Euroregion Belovezhskaya puscha". She presented the long-term ambitions of the NGO in the field of to BPNP nature conservation, and the efforts made for future cross-border cooperation with the Polish partner. As a lector on ecology at the University of Minsk, she shared the main perspectives for the students, related to BPNP.

We leaved the group heading to Minsk on Sunday morning and started our private guided trip to several protected areas and national parks in Belarus, in order to better understand some of the unique characteristics of the Belovezhskaya Pushcha. We could visit Berezinski and Prypjat National Parks and the peat bog area of Nyë'ri with roosts of large flocks of Cranes.

In order to see more of the NPBP and its surroundings, we returned to Bakuni and stayed at the almost deserted settlement of Zalesse. We could visit the Dikoe peatbog area (regulated zone), following a most interesting didactic route starting from the former Jozefin farmhouse.

This educative trail was marked with nice information panels; an observation tower allowed to look over the impressive peatbog landscape. We noticed vegetations with several indicator species of European importance in gradients from forest to open bog systems and fens. An active management of these large peat bogs is crucial in order to prevent them from further spontaneous forestation. The most effective management measure which is burning needs to be subject of experimental research. Together with the maintenance of high water levels, good water quality and the prevention from disturbances (critical and red list species of birds etc.) these items seem to be the most important but urgent challenges for the NP authorities.

### **3. Follow-up of former conditions and recommendations**

During the visit we have been informed about different steps that have been undertaken by the NP authorities for meeting the condition and recommendations that were put forward by the Council of Europe during last few years.

The experience in the field, the many discussions with staff and the availability of many scientific documents and maps, together with the annual reports since 2007 did give a good view on the progress made.

Some weeks before the visit took place, we did receive the full translation of the management plan (MP). During our expertise we got answers on some of the fundamental remarks that were formulated in our peer review presented in 2010 (see summary in ANNEX 2).

Unfortunately, we could not evaluate in detail the follow-up of the peer review and the way this has changed the MP in the English version available now.

Therefore we propose that the NP staff is invited by the Council Secretariat to react on some of the remaining questions and items that are still considered as priority conflicts.

In the following paragraph we try to summarise our analysis and findings and we include some of the reactions written down in the annual reports.

**a. the condition: *the prepared management plan must be peer-reviewed.***

In principle this condition is fulfilled; the plan was elaborated for 10 years in 2008, approved in 2009 and implementation has started (mainly concerning the 600th anniversary); however the required peer review of 2010 (see summary in ANNEX 2) could not cover the plan in detail and some relevant items are still subject to doubts; others have been clarified by the NP staff during the expertise.

In the peer review, the *descriptive part* of the MP was already estimated of sufficient high quality, offering a good basis for the *prescriptive part*.

Some statements in Part 1, however, do not always give the required priority to conservation, e.g. when the balance with forestry, tourism and hunting is discussed or when the priority needs for hydrological restoration are handled.

The formulation of the objectives and long-term management goals were criticised as some of these focus too much on applied economic use of the NP, rather than ensuring its intrinsic values by reducing economic activities. In the chapter 7, however, the constraints and risks, including their impact on long-term goals are tabled in an acceptable and clear way.

As agreed during our visit, L. Dimitrova will draft an alternative text for chapter 8 on the functional zoning as more complete reference to the functions and regulations must be added. This new text has already been proposed in November 2011 together with the English translation of the BPNP regulations was received (21 items in 4 chapters). Chapter 8 will explain what is allowed and forbidden in each NP zone :strict protected, regulated, economic and recreation zones. Further we strongly recommend that NP authorities receive competence on activities/permissions etc. also in the buffer zone and that this buffer zone will be included in the NP boundaries, with specific regulations to be formulated.

On the zoning plan itself we had comments during the visit concerning the exclusion of an agricultural area (2000 ha) from the NP. This is in contradiction to the fact that elsewhere agricultural land is abandoned (but former drainage systems still threaten the NP ecosystem).

Some consequences of zoning nature values outside strict or regulated zones were explained (with NP having competence for allowing specific permissions for a number of actions). Some of the activities (projects) in chapter 9 and the work plan of chapter 10 can give the required solutions if executed in due time and with the priorities (and budgets) needed.

Finally the revision of the plan is scheduled for 2013-14.

We propose to envisage this timing before a provisional and temporal renewal of the Diploma so that the first implementations of the MP can be evaluated as requested. (This also could offer an opportunity for the parallel evaluation of the Polish MP for Bialowieza National Park).

**b. the further recommendations 2007**

**1. existing forestry policy and practices be reviewed with a view to maximising biodiversity, in particular by considering a ban on felling old trees and providing for a significant increase in the volume of dead wood in all old-growth forest stands;**

the major part of old-aged forests of the Belovezhskaya Pushcha will be incorporated into the protected area, which means that any economic activity will be stopped, including collecting of dead trees, still practiced in some parts of the park. This approach is ongoing but still needs attention; collection of data to control and evaluate this new regulation are needed

**2. monitoring and applied research on the ecology of old-growth forests and the external impact of the drying out of peat-bogs and marshes be intensified and coordinated with a view to integrated management and habitat restoration;**

some actions in the MP foresee a raise of water tables in abandoned agricultural zones, but this restoration will be slow in order to allow forest trees to adapt to new hydrology; a permanent follow up and monitoring is requested. The National Academy of Sciences has prepared a project for restoration the hydrological regime in 20 disturbed bogs located in the National Park

**3. core areas of the park's wilderness protection zone be further enlarged, that functional ecological corridors be established between fragments of old-growth forest and that the policy of acquiring ecologically sensitive marshes and peat-bogs around the park be stepped up;**

the new zoning plan will cover 90% of the old growth forest; however, more attention to non-forested habitats is to be stimulated (the inclusion of large bogs in 'regulated zone' makes sense as they need active management for preventing from growth of spontaneous forests) ; corridors to link non-forested marsh and bog habitats are essential and need further hydrological restoration; land acquisition could mitigate the problem of fragmentation and at the same time enlarge the National parks with some smaller nature zones (not only forests).

**4. research be undertaken regarding the possibility of removing parts of the artificial barrier inside the main areas (world heritage sites), so that bison and other large mammals have total freedom to spread out beyond the barriers;**

Research has been achieved but discussions learned that establishment of transboundary corridors is probably not realistic. It is the exclusive prerogative of the Committee of the Border Guards of the Republic of Belarus to make final decision on the matter. The findings that Bison population in both countries are genetically different must be subject of further research, with application of results if relevant (as Bison only recently originate from a few introduced animals, it is hard to understand that in some decades significant genetic differences developed)

**5. efforts to monitor compliance with the total hunting ban inside the national park (except for the culling of sick herbivores) be stepped up, and that wolves be afforded full protection; tally figures should be submitted for the Shereshevo hunting reserve;**

the hunting reserve Shereshevo does not belong to the NP, but unless partly fenced, the effects of hunting activities at population level can influence the NP and thus need careful monitoring, including record of bag statistics; wolf populations are supposed to be at stable level; if this is also an ecological optimum is not clear. The possibility to manage the increasing populations of herbivores by reducing (or abandon) winter feeding and growth of feeding crops is to be envisaged, also in favour of spontaneous forest regeneration. The motivation of maintaining artificially creating high population levels (bison, deer etc.) suitable for hunting is not compatible with the overall aims of a NP or at least its strict protected zone.

**6. a critical study be undertaken regarding the hydrological and ecological impact of lake deepening on features of natural interest, and that the advisability of fishing (and restocking) be reviewed; in addition, disturbances incompatible with the zone resulting from active water sports (such as water skiing) should be strictly avoided;**

the essentials of this recommendation have been answered: no further activities in this sense are going on

**7. an environmental impact assessment be carried out in respect of mass tourism in the very heart of the national park, including a reappraisal of the boundaries, location and zoning of “Father Frost’s Manor”;**

impact studies are planned in the MP; the relocation of the father Frost Manor does not seem negotiable for economic reasons, although we are still convinced that a more optimal location further from the centre of the NP in less vulnerable zones could be envisaged (and closer to the new bypass road, thus avoiding heavy traffic along forest roads and providing potentials for mere nature education facilities (ponds for observing aquatic flora and fauna etc.)

**8. a bilateral conservation agreement between the competent Polish and Belarus ministries be ratified by the end of 2008, confirming the necessary principles and budgets for cross-border cooperation between the Białowieża and Belovezhskaya Pushcha National Parks with regard to priorities for research, management, tourism and education, coupled with ecologically healthy forest management, bearing in mind the “Forest of Hope” appeal, the conclusions of the 2000 Kamenyuki Conference and the recommendations of the UNESCO World Heritage Committee.**

It is impossible to create a common *structure* because of differences in legislation, but a joint common *framework* is in force (steering committee).

A long-term agreement on cooperation in nature conservation and in science has been signed between the Belovezhskaya Pushcha National Park and the national park of Białowieża Forest (Poland) in 2010.

An international agreement has been signed between the corresponding ministries of Poland and Belarus on transboundary cooperation in the sphere of nature conservation.

#### **4. Experts opinion and conclusions**

**After the draft of the report we receive additional information on 3 important topics: drainage, Father Frost and bypass road.**

**This made a revision of the first draft and its conclusions necessary (see red fonts).**

The exceptional importance of the BPNP needs a collaboration of national and international authorities to agree on visions, common priorities and management goals. Therefore we strongly recommend that the conditions and resolutions formulated by UNESCO (World Heritage Commission) and the European Diploma (through its Specialist Group and the Bern Convention Standing Committee) are subject of consultations and -if frequency and timing allows- of joint on-the-spot appraisals.

The Management Plan is an important step forward for better conservation of nature values and includes considerable potentials for further improvements in the field. The availability of budgets for research, management, education and other conservation related objectives needs to be guaranteed on long-term basis, even when economic incomes of the NP are decreasing. The supplementary state programs with supplementary finances for 'areas of preferential protection' is a most welcomed initiative.

The proposed new zoning plan that is in the process of final adaptation at the highest Belarusian levels is a considerable improvement for the NP; we hope this achievement will also enable to include most of the old growth forests (>100years) and important peatbogs into the nature protection schemes.

Indeed, the ecological uniqueness of the NP requires further adaptations of visions, goals and programmes, still shifting from some short term economic benefits and gains into more sustainable goods and services. Contemporary conservation needs creativity in a new sustainable economy concept.

As an example a gradual extensivisation of agricultural activities could be promoted, leading to an increase of semi-natural habitats (mown hayfields and/or meadows with low grazing intensity and only moderate use of fertilisers) in the regulated, economic and buffer zones. These practices belong to the traditions and skills of the local communities and could be stimulated also for historical reasons in the interest of touristic attractiveness.

We have been informed about initiatives for alternative approach of storm destroyed woods (replanting with indigenous seeds or spontaneous forestation), but still the equilibrium of the ecosystems misses the

required amount of dead wood that is removed for economic purposes or for so called sanitary or safety reasons.

Other contradictions are the management of large herbivores, where artificial winter feeding allows the increase of surplus population levels (bison, deer). As these high numbers of animals are blamed to prevent rejuvenation of forests in all zones, and to cause damage to agriculture, they are subject to shooting and culling. This concept needs to be reviewed with significant reduction of winter feeding crops and forage with hay. The consequences of lower hunting income are to be evaluated in view of the prevailing ecological carrying capacity.

Also the recently increasing attractiveness (and internet propaganda) of the whole region for future urban-industrial or touristic developments (and consequent social changes) as a result of the new bypass road; this is a matter of concern that requires careful monitoring and weighing in view of -again- carrying capacity.

The management plan 2008-2018 (2011-2021?) therefore needs specific changes or adaptations as well as new commitments of the NP staff, scientists and national authorities in order to neutralise or balance some current pressures caused by the traditional activities in the field of forestry, agriculture, tourism and hunting, including the many future challenges. In this approach the Beloveszhskaya Pushcha area has to be considered as a coherent whole, including the buffer and game zones, the areas of preferential protection and surrounding landscapes.

Some of the maps of the BP area show contradictory boundaries of zones (see Annex 3 below) that need to be clarified. The document for the World Heritage includes the 4 game forests zones and part of excluded agricultural zone in the legend unit "NP territory out of WHP project"! In the discussions with NP staff it was repeatedly stated that Shereshovskoe game forestry zone does not belong to the National Park.

As the transboundary cooperation with Bialowieza NP (Poland) is a historic fact offering added value, a parallel evaluation of both final management plans could materialise and encourage the agreed cooperation of the responsible authorities and lead to a joint follow-up. The corresponding designation of habitats and areas with full protection status on both sides of the border is to be ensured. The commitments and processes already going on (joint common framework and steering committee) are to be continued and encouraged in view of the international recognitions and awards (European Diploma, World Heritage, Natura 2000 etc.).

We are convinced that a renewal of the European Diploma could encourage the positive steps to be undertaken and put pressure on core processes. At the same time we need to keep a finger on the pulse for the follow-up of this new approach. Where necessary, adjustments of the Management Plan must be formulated after careful evaluation (cfr. annual reports).

It is essential to secure all the necessary guarantees preventing any further impact on the Park by activities and developments mentioned above before renewing the Diploma. The recent decision of November 17th on drainage schemes is a matter of great concern and need further explanations by the NP staff. (see footnote below \*)

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\* DECISION OF THE COUNCIL OF MINISTERS OF THE REPUBLIC OF BELARUS  
November 17, 2011 No. 1549

Amending the decision of the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Belarus, October 11, 2010 No. 1481

The Council Of Ministers Of The Republic Of Belarus DECIDES:

1. the State programme for the renovation and repair of irrigation systems, the maintenance of the hydrological regime of the lands of Belovezhskaya Pushcha National Park and its buffer zone in 2011 –

2012 years approved by the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Belarus dated October 11, 2010 # 1481 (national register of legal acts of the Republic of Belarus, 2010, no. 249, 5/32648), the following changes:

- 1.1. part two of Chapter 7 "41.8" and "8.2", replace the figures "respectively 38.7" and "5.1";
- 1.2. Annexes 1 and 2 to the State program of the redrafted (attached).
2. this decision shall enter into force after its official publication.

Prime Minister of the Republic of Belarus                      m. Miasnikovich

Further information concerns the economic effects of the bypass road (.

Referring to the press release concerning the new bypass road, we propose that all measures to safeguard the NP from external pressure are included in the management plan and the related new regulations. (Belovezhskaya Pushcha-already reality ring; Victor KARPIK, website "Transport Newsletter, no. 34, 25.08.2011)  
see ANNEX 6

Important contradictory activities in the very centre of the National Park of great concern is the touristic pressure of the Father Frost Manor. It is clear that mainly economic motives are the driving force and that the potentials for nature education (both children and adults) are not envisaged and not fully practiced. (see ANNEX 7).

We therefore recommend a provisional renewal within a two or three year period, that can be extended to a final decision, when the first experiences and the evidence of the planned rezoning are clearly visible, as well as the efficiency of the related new regulations.

Compliance with the contemporary principles of nature conservation and ecological restoration will remain a crucial criterion for earning the European Diploma, which is to be re-evaluated in 2014/15. This makes a joint evaluation of both Belarussian and Polish part of the Diploma area Diploma possible.

## **5. Proposed draft recommendations**

After having carefully considered the different elements mentioned above, we recommend the Group of Specialists the following proposal for a conditional and temporary renewal of the European Diploma after adaptations of the management plan and introduction of practical measures in the field.

### **a) Condition (draft)**

we propose a provisional renewal within three years be awarded to the BPNP on the conditions

- (1) that some of the priority activities mentioned below are undertaken within this period, confirming the application of the new conservation law and showing clearly visible evidence of the new zonations and their relevant conservation management in the field.
- (2) that the announced developments of agriculture, notably the restoration of drainage schemes are abandoned when influencing the NP and that the necessary measures to be guaranteed are included in a revised report (see reference in footnote).
- (3) that the revised management plan -including the remarks made in relation to the Diploma renewal and the required guarantees- is accepted at the highest governmental levels.

### **b) Recommendations (draft)**

1. continue the shift from economically to more ecologically driven management by reducing the forestry activities in the regulated zones and special habitats in other parts, excluding parcels with old trees from logging; the required data on harvested or removed wood volumes are to be presented in the annual reports;

2. initiate official initiatives and regulation changes for the designation and inclusion of (a) zones of special significance for specific habitats outside strict protected areas, (b) buffer zones and (c) game zones into the boundaries of the National Park, in order to enable and elaborate a balanced overall management under the responsibilities of the NP authorities;
3. start discussions with the Ministry of Agriculture to compensate an agricultural area of 2000 ha recently excluded from the NP, by including supplementary abandoned agricultural areas elsewhere, and by promoting a gradual extensivation of agricultural activities leading to semi-natural habitats (hayfields and low intensity grazed meadows with only moderate use of fertilisers);
4. increase budgets for both applied ecological research and nature conservation activities in view of the principles of sustainable management present or to be included in the management plan; special attention is needed for hydrological restoration of all bog and marsh ecosystems surrounding the forest, including water and soil quality in river valleys and semi-natural traditional or abandoned farmland;
5. reconsider the management of large herbivores in view of reducing the winter food supply to prevent abnormal high population densities (overpopulation), rather than reducing excess numbers by continued or increased hunting practices motivated by and aiming to alleviate possible damage to forestry and agriculture; continue research on genetic aspects of Bison populations, applying the results to further investigate the restoration of transboundary migration corridor with Poland;
6. carry out an environmental impact assessment concerning the mass tourism in the very heart of the national park, including a reappraisal of the boundaries, location and zoning of "Father Frost's Manor", the effects of traffic, pollution etc. and taking into account the increased reachability of the NP
7. monitor and evaluate the ecological side-effects caused by the new bypass road and the consequences of the expected regional economic investments, the increasing agro-touristic development and the additional recreation initiatives in the outskirts of the national park; also monitor the efficiency of the established fauna passages;
8. intensify the monitoring and evaluation of actual activities such as agriculture (drainage, water quality, use of chemicals), forestry (logging, removal of dead wood, bark beetle effects) and hunting (introduced species, hunting bag statistics), including neighbouring zones outside the NP, in order to adjust the Management plan where needed, or to substantiate environmental impact assessments;
9. consider a specific adaptation of the prohibition of all activities in the strictly protected zones concerning the combat against exotic species, thus enabling the felling of old *Quercus rubra* trees and seedlings that disturb the natural forest ecosystems (cf. WHC resolution);
10. prepare a new detailed topographic map (1/50000) of the NP and surroundings, indicating the functional zoning (with the bufferzones, game areas, checkpoints, educative trails etc.) and including the location of the bypass road (with legend in different languages);

**ANNEX 1 List of the participants of the meeting on 24 September**

<b>Name</b>	<b>position</b>
Dr. Kachanovski Igor	Head of department of natural complexes and agricultural administrative department of the President of the Republic of Belarus
Dr., prof. Nikiforov Mihail	General director of "research and production center of NAS (National Academy of Science) of Belarus for biological resources"
Minchenko Natalia	Head of department of biological and landscape diversity of the Ministry of natural resources and environmental protection of the Republic of Belarus
Kolesov Yri	Deputy head of department of foreign economic relations of Brest regional executive committee
Mozgova Elena	Chairman of the village council of Kameniuki
Pisarik Andrei	Chairman of the district executive committee of Kamenets district.
Radkov Vladimir	Head of the regional inspection of natural resources and environmental protection of Kamenets district.
Dr. Yrgenson Natalia	Leading researcher of the "SPC of NAS of Belarus for biological resources"
Dr., prof. Kozlo Petr	State "research and production center "SPC of NAS of Belarus for biological resources"
Heidarova Elena	Scientific-production association "SPC of NAS of Belarus for biological resources"
Yalkovskaya Tamara	Chairman of the regional committee of natural resources and environmental protection of Brest region.
Romanovski Roman	Head of department of european cooperation Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Belarus
Savin Aleksei	Head of the State boarder guard service border guard group of Brest
Cherkas Nikolai	Member NGO "Protected Birds of Belarus"
Vinchevski Aleksandr	Chairman NGO "Protected Birds of Belarus"
Valasuk Viacheslav	Member NGO "Protected Birds of Belarus"
Mechkovskaya Zoya	Director NGO "Euroregion Belovezhskaya puscha"
Dobich Tamara	Mass media «Forest Newspaper»
Vaikun Andrei, Sinuk Elena	TUT. BY . The belarusian information portal
Ivanenko Petr	Mass media "The Belarusian Radio"
Sadovskaya Elena	Journal "Wild Nature"
Bury Aleksandr	General director NP Bialowiezhskaya pushcha
Arnolbik Vasili	Deputy director on scientific researches NP Bialowiezhskaya pushcha

## **ANNEX 2 Summary of Peer review Belovezhskaya Pushcha Management Plan**

### **Expert report by E. Kuijken presented at Specialists Group - Meeting 4-5 March 2010**

#### **Management plan analysis:**

**Part 1 chapter 3** gives good descriptions of ecol. characteristics etc. but the origin of scientific data is not always clear (NGO? own research Institutes?) → difficult to evaluate

- Basic ecological processes are sometimes ‘overruled’ by economic interests (e.g. bark beetle, grazing impact herbivores, function of wolves )
- Forestry seems to be considered as most basic interest, not conservation
- Planned introduction of fallow deer and horses: not ecologically sound!
- Hunting as population regulation or economic interest is difficult to assess  
→ information on hunting and forestry activities are weak;
- Red listed flora and fauna species need more attention as biodiversity indicators

#### **Chapter 4:** socio- economic aspects and cultural history

- data on the economic importance of logging: Kameniuki industrial saw mills need increasingly intensive cuttings
- sections follow on agriculture (no real evaluation of effects on biodiversity)
- road and transport network amelioration, local settlements and human population: the improvement of local tracks with asphalt (‘ring’ around NP) is rapidly ongoing but not mentioned in the MP:  
→ better entrance for tourism, hunting and logging vehicles  
→ most remote parts become now open to public, but control (patrolling) on activities fail (aim would be to stimulate economic activity up to 250km around NP)
- the importance of the long-term scientific research is well illustrated and the function of the Belovezhskaya Pushcha as an open field laboratory is stressed.
- the results of manifold investigations are quite impressive and represent a firm basis for future management options indeed

#### **Chapter 5: evaluation of the old grown forest as a management object**

- In some sections of this chapter the goods and services delivered by the National Park as an ecosystem are discussed. They deliver an important argument for well planned conservation, but the amount of disturbance by the economic use of these goods and services probably needs more careful analysis. How far can functions such as intensive tourism (Manor of Father Frost, Hotels), agriculture, hunting, fishing, collecting mushrooms etc. continue when situated in the core areas of ecosystems that need careful protection?
- Relocation of some activities (Manor!), volume of logging and other actual priorities must become subject of discussions and considerations for ecologically sound management. Also (eco)tourism needs to get restrictions, if not the line of least resistance will soon overtake nature conservation interests!
- Risks for neglecting the carrying capacity of the forest as a whole.
- Attention is paid to education as a driving force for changing human attitudes towards nature and in raising awareness among the local population (see further under ‘budget’)

#### **Part 2 The Policy part of the MP 2008 (Prescriptive part)**

**Chapters 6-11**, dealing with:

- Vision and long-term objectives
- Directions for implementation of projects
- Adjustment of functional Zoning
- Bottlenecks for achieving objectives

Five important **long-term objectives** are formulated:

1. Conservation of the natural heritage of BP
2. The development of sustainable recreation and tourism in the region of BP
3. Development of scientific research on forest and wetland reference ecosystems and their components

4. Formation of ecological consciousness among official residents and visitors of the National Park
5. The search for sustainable use of stress ecosystems of BP and their implementation in practice of work for the local population

For each long-term objective some specific tasks or 'tracks' are clearly listed.

- The completeness of this approach could not yet be assessed; we probably miss:
- the discussion on lowering forestry, fishing and hunting pressure
  - the considerations on relocation of activities with high ecological impact

#### **Chapter 8 discusses 'Adjust functional zoning'**

Unfortunately, it seems that the great need for a further significant extension of the 'wilderness zone' (after the 2004 decision) goes together with **extending the 'regulated using zone'**, which means that here nature is not the first aim, but again forestry interests can prevail under the cover of so called conservation. Again more clear and strict ecologically sound guidelines are essential.

#### **Chapter 9 (Directions for implementation of projects)**

- We cannot evaluate if principles and basic visions from previous chapters are fully respected in this approach.
- We see that again logging gets specific attention, which is comprehensible as a source of income, but we have no sight in which way this income is used for sustainable conservation.

#### **Chapter 10 discusses the operative work plan for 2009**

- The present work plan includes activities which are scheduled for implementation as of 2009.
- It concerns long-term objective 1, 2 and 4 but does not indicate the operations at the real long term (5 or 10y).

#### **Concluding remarks and proposals**

##### **BUDGET (ANNEX 2)**

- 1) Conservation only receives 12%, including the 6% for technical support (extra 3,7% is for study of mammal introduction: Brown Bear and Tarpan).
- 2) Tourism and recreation receive 75% of the total budget(!), which indicates the great risks for developments that will override the carrying capacity of the NP and its surroundings.
- 3) Research items are restricted to 5,4% with on top the 3,7% to be added for introduction studies; this ratio does not seem very justified as so many aspects of unique biodiversity need thorough studies and *species introduction* is only of subordinate importance (or even to be excluded)
- 4) Social aspects only receive 2% of the total budget ; changing human attitudes with respect to nature and environment needs consistent long-term education, specific actions at a broad basis →larger budgets needs
- 5) Sustainable use actions only are worth less than 1%; with this amount the badly needed 'alternative' agriculture with respect to the nature values present cannot be encouraged at all.
- 6) Development of special protection measures is considered of minor importance and receives <1%!
  - With a total National park area of 152.962 ha, this budget is far too low for making real progress in conservation, as this only represents on average 228.292 BYR/ha or an equivalent of 56,75 €/ha (or 83,2 CHF/ha)!
  - When 75% of the total budget would be exclusively spent on tourism outside the wilderness zone, a total area of 122.283 ha will receive support of 214175,3 BYR/ha, an equivalent of 53,2 €/ha (or 78,0 CHF/ha)
  - We do not know if these figures represent annual expenditures or total budgets for 5 years.
  - The proposed division among the chapters mentioned is not representing the priority needs for nature conservation of the NP:
    - the majority of funds will be spend on development that are only justified at a limited and rather local level, taking into account the vulnerability and unique ecological value of the NP and its surroundings

- in this budget, there are no figures given on income from forestry, hunting and fishing; these incomes need to be (partly) returned to the conservation needs of the NP;
- even more: the diminution of income from traditional or modern forestry is to be compensated through important temporary funding of adapted economic activities

**In conclusion**, we summarise the following remarks:

- The most important priority is restoration of hydrology: the budgets listed are not at all in line with the expected needs and the secondary social aspects (e.g. relocation of agriculture)
- It is not clear if specific labour costs (management staff, wardens, scientific personnel, educational staff etc) is included in the budget table (post 1.6 ?); this must be clearly specified as a separate item.
- We miss specific priority conservation projects worked out with realistic budgets.
- We therefore again refer to the conclusions of the 'Forest of Hope Appeal' in which priority actions are described which were agreed by all stakeholders

### **Evaluation of new zoning**

#### Strict wilderness zone: not changed??

Economic activity zone allows doing anything and is huge (34.7% of NP since 2004, before 4,5%). The government includes it in total square of protected areas of Belarus! By law it has not any protection status at all, only fact that it belongs to the NP.

One may hunt here any game and clear cuttings of old growth trees are allowed like in normal forestry; agriculture, trade, development, industry are allowed by law!

Control of administration activity is inexistent

Recreational zone now is 7739 ha (5.1%), but it was 10712 ha (12.3% before 2004).

Why is it decreased? It does not allow clear cutting of the forest, only picking up of mushrooms and berries; hunting and fishing is limited to some parts.

Regulated activity zone is similar to recreational zone, but sanitary cutting is allowed here, regulation of animal density and regulated tourism.

All zones where something is allowed risk mis-use. (e.g. keeping captive fallow deers)

Shereshovskoe game forestry zone has an enclosure where game is gathered for shooting. High density of game here practically destroyed Capercaillie lek.

*Relations with transboundary Bialowieza ?*

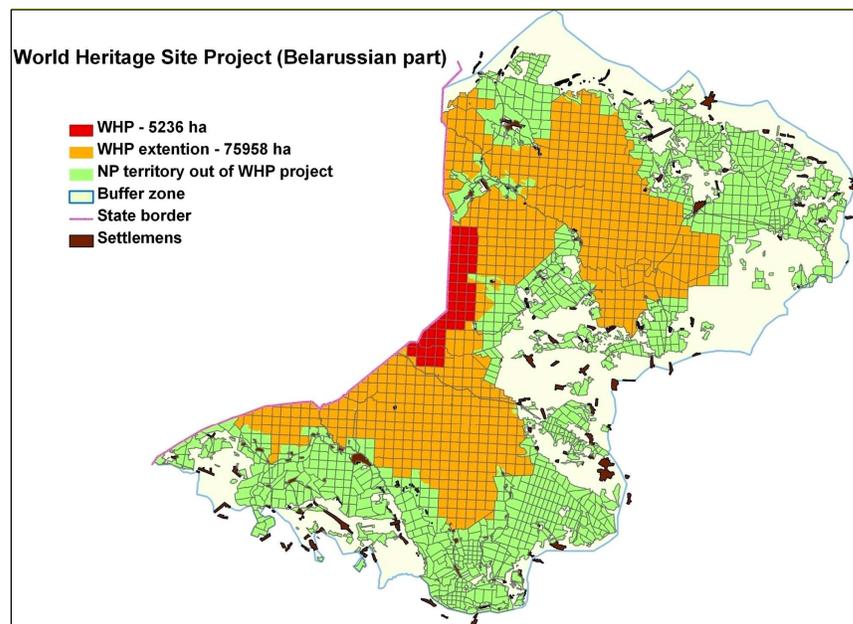
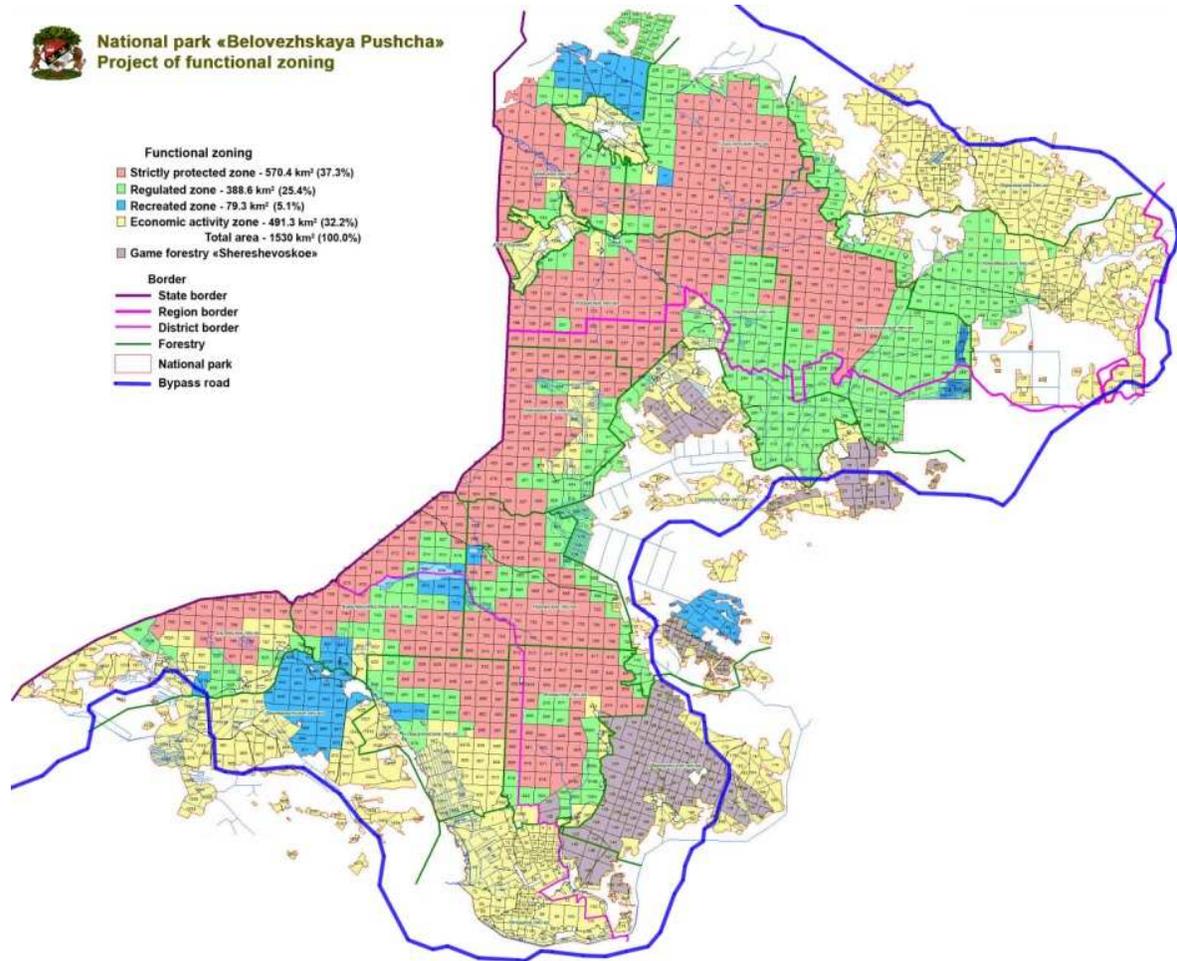
### **Recent threat: Ring road around the National Park**

#### **Recommendations**

- Mgmt plans of BP and Bialowieza are to be integrated before the final evaluation for renewal of Diploma
- BP must give more priority to conservation (cfr review of budgets) and reduce risks for neglecting carrying capacity by over-consumption of nature, forest, wildlife (no consequent balance between good descriptive part 1 and policy part 2 of mgmt plan annex budget)
- Highest priority is to be given to hydrological restoration (bogs, deepened lakes): start of concrete projects needed before renewal of European Diploma?
- Relocation of concentrated visitors attractions in core areas of NP (Manor Father Frost) is to be considered
- Financial income of the NP must have return to conservation

- Expanded 'regulated use zone' includes possibility of more intensive cuttings instead of ecological restoration
- Ongoing 'improvement' of infrastructure (asphalt forest tracks and towards remote housing) opens the entire NP for public, illegal hunting etc., and easy entry by logging vehicles
- Mass tourism needs more strict regulations in order to reduce disturbances
- Public awareness requires more efforts: participation of locals, NGO's etc !
- Joint approach with World Heritage (Poland and Belarus): specific on-the-spot appraisal before Diploma renewal

### ANNEX 3 Proposed Functional Zoning Plan



## ANNEX 4

## November 07, 2011 A road bypassing Belovezhskaya Pushcha is open today



November 7, an official commissioning of the new road "Bypass of the National Park "Belovezhskaya Pushcha" was announced. The road of the length of nearly 190 kilometers has many meandering turns. It crosses Kamenets and Pruzhany districts and ends in the south of the Grodno region, in the town of Svisloch. About half length of the highway passes through woodlands and even swamps. According to motorists who drove on the "Bypass", the road carpet is of high quality.

The construction project was conceived not only as transport links between cities of Brest and Grodno. The important aim was to increase the attractiveness of Belovezhskaya Pushcha as a tourism route. The total investment in the project amounted to about 331 billion Rubles - (~ \$ 110 million), at least this amount was called in the middle of 2010 when the construction started. By the way, the "Bypass" was built fairly quickly - in one and a half years. This project would not only take into account the terrain (forests, swamps) but also to minimize the negative impact to the natural processes of the Pushcha's fauna.

Author: Andrew Gomylyaev. Photo: virtual.brest.by



## ANNEX 5

### **Decision - 33COM 7B.24 - Belovezhskaya Pushcha / Białowieża Forest (Belarus / Poland)**

**(N 33-627) (Seville, 20.07.2009)**

The World Heritage Committee,

1. Having examined Document WHC-09/33.COM/7B,
2. Recalling Decision 32 COM 7B.20, adopted at its 32nd session (Quebec City, 2008),
3. Notes the report of the 2008 joint World Heritage Centre/IUCN reactive monitoring mission, and notes with concern that an area of 82,371 ha within the property in Belarus has not been managed in a way compatible with its Outstanding Universal Value;
4. Also notes that there are a number of threats to the property including fragmentation resulting from fencing of the border and vehicular trails, impacts of invasive red oak, and overgrazing of flora by deer and bison ;
5. Welcomes the expressed intent on behalf of both States Parties to jointly prepare a re-nomination for the transboundary property in accordance with Paragraph 166 of the Operational Guidelines;
6. Requests the States Parties to implement the recommendations of the reactive monitoring mission, and to:
  - a) Develop a joint management framework for the property to define a common overall conservation vision and objectives, joint management activities (such as monitoring, research, communications and strategies to address the issues raised by the World Heritage Committee), and a work plan,
  - b) Develop and implement an integrated management strategy for the whole forest complex within which the property is located, ensuring connectivity with neighbouring, related ecosystem components,
  - c) Ensure the participation of National Park management authorities in landscape level management processes to ensure the maintenance of the Outstanding Universal Value of the property,
  - d) Reduce, through a clear time-bound plan, the total length of the network of forest roads and trails and encourage cooperation between the Polish and Belarusian components of the property to achieve this,
  - e) Restore natural processes in drained marshes and bogs such as encouraging the role of resident beavers as well as human-based support by direct management activities,
  - f) Facilitate trans-boundary movement of wildlife, particularly large ungulates, across the fence separating both sides of the property to support the establishment of property-wide populations of various ungulate species,
7. Also requests the State Party to submit to the World Heritage Centre, by 1 February 2010, a report on the state of conservation of the property and on the progress made in addressing the above mentioned issues.

## ANNEX 6

(translated from Russian via Bing translation website)

Belovezhskaya Pushcha-already reality ring

Victor KARPIK, website "Transport Newsletter, no. 34, 25.08.2011

It outlines major contribution made by local road workers of the Brest region.

Last fall, the head of the State Alyaksandr Lukashenka during his inspection tour of a factory object to bypass the territory of the National Park "Belovezhskaya Pushcha" have to go on the site of the new roads of local significance N534 Hvalovo – Rovbick – White Lesok. And although the road was very interesting and beautiful, and could not suggest that this fact would notice the President himself. And Alexander not only drew attention to this fact, but also praised local road for professionalism. Moreover, when summing up the working visit to people object voiced the idea that we build and crawling. To make it attractive, secure and fabulously beautiful.

-New road totalling almost 200 kilometers passes through difficult terrain, the Director of the communal unitary enterprise "Brestobldorstroj" Peter Skorobogat'ko. – But it's typical to the West of our country, therefore, believe will be of interest to potential tourists will be able to fully enjoy the beauty of this unique region. Crawl, starting from the border crossing "Pesčatka" on the Belarusian-Polish border, is surrounded by national park along its perimeter. It runs mainly on forests, and at several sites in Belovezhskaya Pushcha. The road winds and fields, boldly goes through the swamps, where the depth of peat reaches several meters. Elegantly skips through quiet streams and insidious on the spring river. Overlaps with the areas of old road, but mainly built in new ways.

The modern route to improved coverage certainly will gulp for new life throughout the region. Only on obldorstroâ there are about 70 villages, with the advent of the road will open a new page of their biographies: economic activity is activated, it will be possible to accelerate the development of the social base of the SPC. More advanced forms of gain traffic flows. Real will be ecotourism, including foreign. And this is direct financial investment in the region.

Is certainly a complex because of its construction of the extremely compressed – recognizes Petr Andreevich. All released only 18 months. In November we have a highway to the head of State. The benefit that, pursuant to the Decree, we have the right to design and build in parallel. Sure, far more than would be the fact that over 70% of the design-budget documentation on crawl Pushcha performs branch obldorstroâ-PPD "Brestdorproekt."

As a customer responsible for more than 70 km bypass. We have about a dozen organizations contracting works. But particularly notable is the fact that 19.5 km bypass obldorstroj builds on its own.

We never doubted that such a task our structural units on the shoulder. I will not hide, this confidence was 100% when presidential score our humble Labour Minister Ivan Ivanovich is voiced by Šerbo. Agree, not every organization in the road sector can simultaneously act as a customer, proektanta and contractor.

Selected obldorstroû kilometers around, according to Peter Skorobogat'ko, build groups of affiliates in Brest, birch, Aleksandr, Žabinki, Lâhovičej, High Hantsavichy has, and Kobryn. It is encouraging that the local road workers demonstrate a clear, coherent and highly effective work. Their working day lasts, usually 12:0. Technique of staying where caught evening organized by sites, which are protected. For professionals working in the construction of machine operators, campuses and decent living conditions, where they can fully otdoh – lead. By the way, one of these complexes became the winner of the contest industry upgrading of domestic strojgorodkov.

Note that even last summer, obldorstroevcy quickly removed at 47.6 km future trails forest and shrubs, and this area of about 1000 hectares. Removed the fertile layer, vytorfovku, otsypali zempolotno. For this

to develop 12 quarries. By the way, to date, seven of them completed mining and technical recultivation as two-end improvements to the recreation area with a solid mirror watery.

Using only the favourable weather conditions, asfal'toukladočnye links assigned to the Pushcha was at its offices in the spring stretches almost the entire bottom layer coatings – from 71.1 km he attends 66.8 km. Local road workers were among the first to have a top layer of asphalt macadam-mastičnogo with the addition of cellulose and by mid-August to relay it on 58.8 km.

And so it happened that our organizations, "commented Peter Andreevich, were the most difficult sections of bypass: and on the field and forest and mire. If the field is necessarily meliorirovanna Earth. If forest-Belovezhskaya Pushcha. And if the bog-bog. There not that technology is not suneš'sâ, with nivelirovom without special training did not pass.

Honestly I have to admit that for the first time in its practice, our affiliates have had to perform under the special passageways for road bed artiodactyls. Such elements of complex engineering structures. Is the passage of 18 large reinforced concrete blocks, whose weight is 12 tons. The width of such a "framework" – 5 m, height of 2.5 m in places, where the bypass crosses the Pushcha's bison trail master, road workers on demand environmental expertise to erect for the bison example concrete tunnels. Such facilities on sites obldorstroâ-three. And, according to scientists, to benefit not only European, but also deer, roe deer, wild boars.

But Pushcha is not only the Kingdom of the beasts. Its marshes – a huge population of amphibians, which does not accept the settled way of life. Prone to migration and representatives of those species which are listed in red book. Therefore, in order to minimize the consequences of the invasion in this complex and fragile peace by NAN ordered only at our stations provide material in zempolotne of 25 passes for amphibians. This structure is not from the ordinary. In addition to concrete pipe with a special tray which is at the base of the road, along the roadbed to mount gallery guides. All had to be run on individual drawings, and then mount the more than three thousand of reinforced concrete structures, which have a distance of almost three and a half kilometres of bypass.

Preservation of existing ecosystems will contribute to the Elimination of the threat of flooding and flooding areas. The CAP device 107 culverts. All of them into the road already constructed. Installation of the seven trumpets to undertake further congresses. Ready to take the bridges across the rivers White and Left the forest.

The basic amount of work on the sections of the bypass, the responsibility of obldorstroj, according to Peter Skorobogat'ko, almost complete, of 169 billion roubles spent 118 bln rubles. Local road workers now lead the process of "finishing" its facilities. Finishing touches are applied to the congresses are road signs are mounted avtopavil'ony, is the markup. Two parking lots, one which is located in front of the village of Lyskovo, almost ready. Clearly visible contours and a second parking lot, where implemented partial stabilization of territory and the entrance to the future of the service object.

The village Lyskovo, an open-air museum, along the bypass, it transforms on the eyes. Road workers reached the central square and its improvements are underway. The other group involved in the reconstruction of the bulyžnoj bridge in the monastic complex of missionaries and the brick fence in front of the Church of the Holy Trinity.

Those objects to which is 100% manual MUE "Brestobl ñ dorstroj» brings the State Commission to surrender. The other top rated sites crawl were adopted, who built teams From affiliates, Berezovsky, Kobryn, Zhabinka DRSU.

This shows once again that local road workers are honored to cope with the most responsible tasks in the control of the Ministry and the head of State.

SEE ORIGINAL IN RUSSIAN + photographs : <http://bp21.org.by/ru/art/a110825b.html>

**Кольцевая Беловежья - уже реальность**

**Виктор КАРПИК, интернет-сайт "Транспортный вестник", № 34, 25.08.2011**

## ANNEX 7

From internet : <http://news.tut.by/newyear/265858.html>

### **Belarusian Grandfather Frost every day takes up to 10 thousand visitors**

**26.12.2011, 15:18 new year**

**Olga Kobyak, Belta**

Estate of grandfather frost in Belovezhskaya Pushcha daily visit up to 10 thousand tourists, BelTA learnt from the administration of the National Park "Belovezhskaya Pushcha".

Traditional pre-new year's days, and winter holidays-this is the season when guests Santa Claus particularly much. So, if it happens before the estate typically 10 tours and weekends-to 20-30, December weekends is almost 100 tours per day and increased the number of individual tourists. Also not become exception last weekend. Despite the early autumn, the winter weather, the estate was crowded: more than 10.5 thousand. people have been visiting the Belarusian Grandfather Frost on Saturday and about 8 thousand. people on Sunday. Until mid-January until the end school holidays, every day the grandfather frost painted literally minutes. During this period, the first visitors to his estates, and arrive at 10.00 on rest after his grandfather sent to 21.00.

Among the guests of the Lord of winter he mostly children. In December, along with sightseeing groups from Belarus, the estate of grandfather frost in Belovezhskaya Pushcha have visited the guys from Ukraine. It is worth noting that this year the visitors of the National Park "Belovezhskaya Pushcha" has more than 300 thousand. people, of whom one third of the guests of Santa Claus.

The first visitors to the estate of the Belarusian Grandfather Frost in Belovezhskaya Pushcha received in December 2003. The estate is located deep in the forest, Glade where bison in winter, come on. The total area of the estate is 15 HA. Here are the carved Terem grandfather frost, the House of his granddaughter Snow Maiden, Skarbica, and many other attributes associated with a fairy-tale hero. But, of course, the main attraction is the 120-year-old tree, which is the highest natural Christmas green tree in Europe.

Grandfather Frost's estate in the National Park "Belovezhskaya Pushcha" is open for visits all year round. On the eve of new year holidays updated programme of visits. For individual tourists increased the number of routes, leaving the estate from the Central Manor Park. Direct assistance to the grandfather frost Manor in the reception guests have guides-animators, as well as amusing big living dolls.

In article

Topics: holidays, Belovezhskaya Pushcha, tourism

Country: Belarus