

## Breaching of Bern Convention by extensive logging in Retezat National Park (short report)

Râul Alb is a river having the origin in Retezat Mountains, Romania, under Vârful Mare peak (2463 meters elevation). All his course and river basin is in national and natural park (Retezat National Park and Hațeg Country Dinosaurs Geopark) and it is considered the last relatively undisturbed river in Romanian Carpathians.

The upper reaches of the valley of Râul Alb, the part in Retezat National Park, above ca. 990 meters of altitude, was until a few years ago an area of pristine, untouched wilderness. This was due to the inaccessibility of the valley. Below there was only a "tractor path", as forestry workers call it, which ended in a talus field, off the 950 m contour line on the river course.

So, all the river basin of Râul Alb in Retezat National Park was an area of genuine wilderness, with virgin forest, continued above by compact *Pinus mugo* bushes, and free flowing river. Having such a large pure, pristine wilderness in Central Europe was a miracle, and it should have been listed as Outstanding Universal Value. The glacier sculpted valley, with the terminal moraine cut by the riverbed at the elevation of 1050 meters, adds spectacular landscape to the vegetation cover.

It was the only large and completely wild valley in Retezat National Park, lacking even any tourist trail.

In the PIN-MATRA project 8 polygons of virgin forests were identified here, representing most of the forest in the national park side of the valley. They are delimited with red line, in figure 1.



Figure 1: PIN-MATRA polygons

But it is obvious that the PIN-MATRA project could not perfectly cover all the forest area in Romanian Carpathians, so not all the virgin forests were mapped by it. Since the valley of Râul Alb in the national park had no access road and the river was never used for timber rafting, plus the buffer effect of the huge area of forest between the national park and the first village, Coroiști, we have all the reasons to presume that, back in 2005 (the time of the PIN-MATRA project), all the forests in the valley of Râul Alb included in the national park, namely the reaches above 990 meters of altitude on the river course, was virgin forest. By 2013, only the forest high on the right slope of the valley, near the lower reaches of the national park, was affected by a small logging.

We know that we owe the wilderness preserved here to the former local forest ranger, which opposed to the forestry engineers willing to log the forest, and then to the national park. But "the spell broke" when the increasing corruption and demand for timber grew stronger than the conservation status of the area.

The tractor path mentioned above was prolonged, was cut through the talus field and further up through the virgin forests, up to the subalpine zone. It happened in 2013-2014. Then logging began, at the beginning to a small extend. In figure 2 is visible the area around the talus field before, and in figure 3 the area after the illegal tractor path was cut, destroying the wilderness.



Figures 2: the zone of the talus field before



Figure 3: the zone of the talus field after



In the figures 4 and 5 you can see satellite views before the logging and recently, on March 27, 2021. The recent image is from Sentinel satellite and the accuracy is lower, but good enough to see to what extent the forest was logged, to see that holes appeared in the forest cover. The area in the image, the most impacted one, is in the spruce side of the forest.



Figure 4: the core of the upper valley before

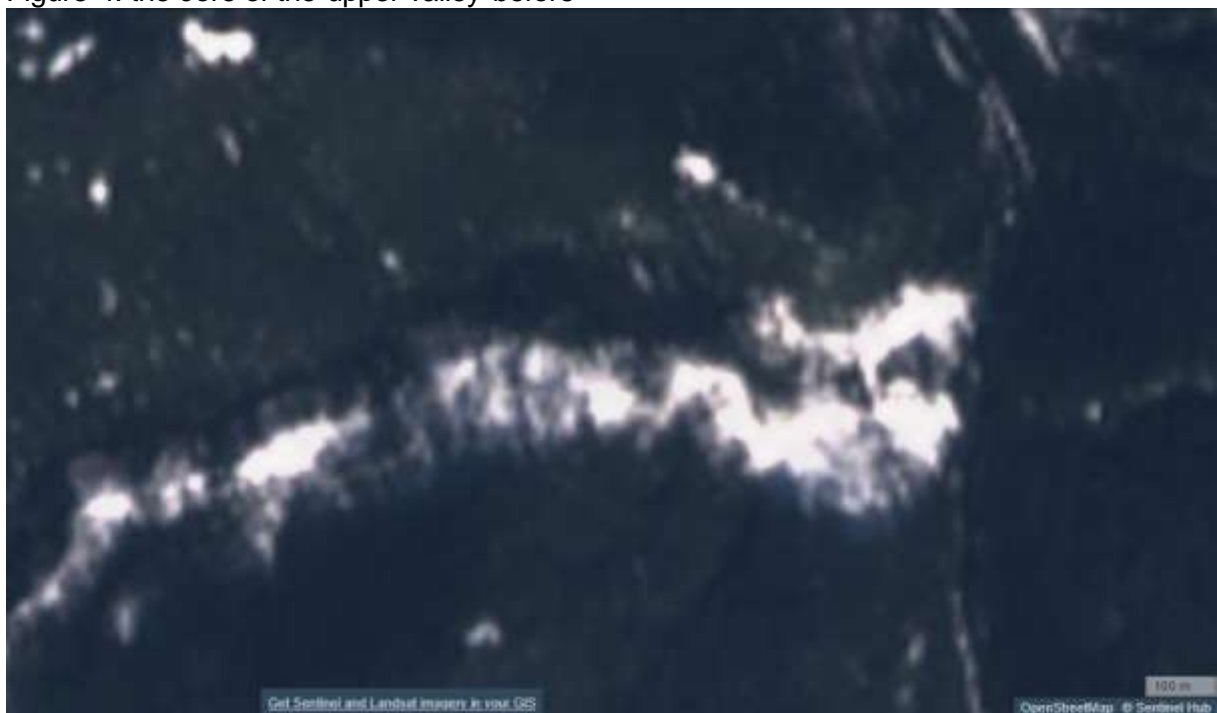


Figure 5: the core of the upper valley after

Now the logging is accelerating and all the data and signals suggest that it is a premeditated did.

The logging is illegally approved by Romsilva, the national forest exploitation company which, under an obvious conflict of interests, manages Retezat National Park. The administration contract should have been cancelled by the National Agency for Protected Areas, because the administration did not realize the management plan in the two years span required by law. The

logging appears on the so called governmental "Forest Inspector" portal. For example, in the week 22-28 of March, 10 trucks full of timber descended from the national park, from two logging areas on the valley of Râul Alb. On the same portal also appear trucks loaded with timber descending from other valleys in Retezat National Park.

It must be stressed that the most outrageous fact about this large scale commercial logging in this national park is that it is a park which was awarded with the European Diploma of Protected Areas:

[https://search.coe.int/cm/Pages/result\\_details.aspx?ObjectId=09000016805d3083](https://search.coe.int/cm/Pages/result_details.aspx?ObjectId=09000016805d3083)

The valley of Râul Alb, being the only large completely wild valley in Retezat National Park, with no roads, no trails, no buildings and no historical logging, was the best habitat, the perfect refuge for all the species protected under Bern Convention, present in Retezat National Park. This is why this extensive logging, which is amplifying now on the valley of Râul Alb, represents a clear breaching of the Bern Convention. Not to mention that this is the oldest national park of Romania, regarded with veneration by the nature lovers in Romania, so his demise is the opposite of promoting "education and disseminate general information on the need to conserve species of wild flora and fauna and their habitats", as the Convention requires.

Retezat National Park is the habitat of tens of species protected under Bern Convention, most of them bird species. Disturbing their previously completely wild habitat on the valley of Râul Alb has a significant negative impact which is stronger perceived by the large mammals protected under Bern Convention: *Ursus arctos*, *Lynx linx*, *Canis lupus*, *Rupicapra rupicapra* and *Cervus elaphus*. Smaller protected mammals also had a perfect habitat here, like *Lutra lutra* and *Martes martes*. Logging these old growth forests also has a significant negative impact on protected species depending on the old trees for nesting, as *Glaucidium passerinum* and *Aegolius funereus*.

The forest which is now hacked is not just a value in itself. As IUCN documents stressed before, deforestation has a concerning impact on freshwater habitats.

<https://www.iucnffsq.org/freshwater-fishes/major-threats/>

And the river in this case as very important, being considered the last ecologically complete and near-natural river in Romania.

<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1002/rra.3770>

Last but not least context in which this obviously increasing of logging takes place increases the seriousness of the case. The administration of the national park has a project, financed by EU funds, in which it has to write a management plan (the park does not have a management plan into force). According to the Romanian law of protected areas (Emergency Ordinance 57/2007), the valley of Râul Alb, being a wild zone, with scientific value, in which the human intervention was very reduced, has to be included in the strict protection zone. But in the draft of this new management plan (already posted on the site of the Hunedoara County Environmental Agency even before the simulacrum of public consultation to set it down ended) the valley is placed in the so-called sustainable conservation zone, so they can log it in the future. And they are logging the valley now to make it not suitable anymore to be included in the strict protection zone, not even in the integral protection zone.

Thousands of Romanians have signed a petition demanding for the logging on the valley on Râul Alb, in the national park, to cease:

<https://campaniamea.declie.ro/petitions/cerem-stoparea-imediate-a-taierii-padurii-din-parcul-national-retezat-de-pe-valea-raului-alb>

But logging continues, while Romsilva is putting forth a disinformation, declaring that the logged area is in the sustainable conservation zone, so it is legal. In reality, the park does not have an approved management plan, so there is no sustainable conservation zone, there is no zone.

<https://www.g4media.ro/ecologistii-cer-stoparea-imediate-a-taierilor-de-paduri-virgine-din-parcul-national-retezat-de-pe-valea-raului-alb.html>

Thousands of Romanians have signed a petition asking for the logging in the national park to stop, but it continues.

<https://campaniamea.declic.ro/petitions/cerem-stoparea-imediate-a-taierii-padurii-din-parcul-national-retezat-de-pe-valea-raului-alb>

There is urgent need for an international intervention in order to stop it until it is too late, until this valley becomes an ordinary anthropised valley, like all the others.

biol. Călin Dejeu  
member of the IUCN WCPA

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of stylized, cursive letters, likely representing the name Călin Dejeu.