

To: The Prime Minister of the Czech Republic

Dear Sir,

We are sorry to hear during the ECCB2009 congress that there is a strong pressure for a human intervention in the most valuable parts of the Sumava mountains, the mountain spruce stands – salvage logging of trees attacked by the bark beetle. This is a mistake. These unique biological communities, which now exist only in a few places in Europe, and which took thousands of years to develop, will be devastated by human action and heavy machinery.

What most people see here, are dead spruce trunks, which look ugly. From the scientific point of view, however, disturbances like bark beetle outbreaks are natural phenomena, intrinsic to these ecosystems for thousands of years. Wind and bark beetle disturbances are an integral part of their dynamics and any human intervention only interferes with natural feedback processes, which enable persistence of these fragile ecosystems. Scientific evidence exists that salvage logging may have an even stronger negative effect on these ecosystems than the original disturbance.

Spruce is not an endangered species and its population will easily recover here after some years, if left alone, as exemplified by the case of the Bavarian NP. The problem is, however, that these unique mountain ecosystems contain many thousands, possibly millions, of less conspicuous bacteria, fungus, small plant and invertebrate species, which will be severely damaged by human intervention. We, as scientists working in nature protection, know very well that the damage caused on these seemingly inconspicuous species will have a global effect on the whole ecosystem because of the role such species play in recycling nutrients and maintaining a healthy balance in the ecosystem. It has been clearly proven scientifically that salvage logging had negative effects on species composition of the spruce forests and delayed the forest recovery.

We are aware that the bark beetle spreading from the protected core zones, if left untouched, will negatively affect the surrounding forests in the buffer zones. However, this effect will be negligible compared to the loss of biodiversity caused by human intervention in the core areas. In addition to this, we know that bark beetle is now spreading all over the Central Europe and not all affected trees are immediately dealt with. Therefore, we are firmly convinced that a thorough and immediate removal of all trees attacked by bark beetle in all commercial forests in the Czech Republic will have a much larger effect on reduction of this pest than removal of trees from an incomparably (thousand or more times) smaller set of protected areas. Both empirical scientific evidence from similar situations and mathematical predictive models of bark beetle population dynamics lend a strong scientific support to this claim.

In our opinion, human intervention in the most valuable parts of the Sumava mountains is not only negatively affecting biodiversity, but also – and maybe even more importantly – is against the interests and prestige of the Czech Republic, as maintenance of local jewels – including biodiversity – for future generations belongs to the most important tasks of any country. The actions taken or not taken now and during the next few decades will determine how many of the world's species, ecological communities, and natural areas will survive. People may someday look back on the early decades of the twenty-first century as a time when a handful of determined people saved numerous species and entire biological communities. You may or may not belong to this handful.

With our best wishes

Participants of the Sumava special session of the 2nd European Congress of Conservation Biology in Prague, Sept. 1-5, 2009.

(The Congress was attended by 1200 participants from 65 countries and this text discussed during a special session on Sept. 4, at 13 a.m.)