



## Society for Conservation Biology

A global community of conservation professionals

### *Europe Section*

Mr. Jan Hamáček  
President of the Chamber of Deputies  
Parliament of the Czech Republic  
Sněmovní 4  
118 26 Praha 1 - Malá Strana  
Czech Republic

18 Sept 2014

Dear Mr. Hamáček,

I am writing you on behalf of the Society for Conservation Biology – Europe Section (SCB-ES). SCB supports and facilitates the creation and dissemination of conservation science, and seeks to see increased application of scientific evidence in management and policy that affects the maintenance, loss, and restoration of biological diversity. SCB membership comprises scientists, resource managers, educators, government and private conservation workers and students, making up more than 5,000 members world-wide.

SCB-ES focuses its attention on human-nature conflicts across Europe, and particularly those that characterise the entire region. A key issue of human-nature conflicts in Europe, and globally, is the continuous and intensive intervention of humans in forest ecosystems. Beyond the loss of natural- and old-growth forests, as well as their fragmentation, we see with great concern the tendency to intervene in forest ecosystems with overly intensive management and development.

Within this area of activity, SCB-ES has already expressed its concern about the unfavourable conservation status of forest in Šumava National Park (NP), which is one of the most important sites of old-growth forests still remaining in Central Europe. SCB-ES has raised the issue in official statements on several occasions: 1) a letter sent to Czech Prime minister Jan Fišer on 5 September, 2009, 2) a resolution concerning the preservation of the Šumava National Park in 2012, 3) a letter sent to Czech Prime minister Petr Nečas on 27 March, 2012 (see attached documents).

The 2012 letter to the Czech Prime minister Petr Nečas followed a visit to Šumava National Park by the SCB-ES Policy Committee in 2012. In this letter we concluded that the measures taken for bark-beetle control are not only intensive, but likely also ineffective, while damaging the forest ecosystem and the protected species within it. We have also been informed of plans to build ski resorts in areas of high biodiversity, and we see these plans as a severe, additional threat to Šumava NP.

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Large parts of the Šumava NP (about 50% of its area) are unspoiled habitats<sup>1</sup>, which justify its designation as a National Park (IUCN category II). Broad scientific evidence from the field of forest ecology indicates non-intervention as a key means to maintain the dynamics of natural forests, their biodiversity, and their unique – and often legally-protected – species. Natural processes of disturbance and rejuvenation are necessary for maintaining a healthy ecosystem, while removal of material impedes these processes. This holds true also for mountain spruce stands and peat bogs – important habitats of the Šumava NP – and the scientific evidence explicitly rejects salvage logging in cases of bark beetle outbreaks<sup>1,2</sup>. Thus, in the Šumava NP, it is our contention that habitats that should not be intervened by humans cover about 50% of the NP area<sup>1</sup>.

We understand that the law proposed by the Senate allows human intervention, especially salvage logging against bark beetle anywhere in the NP, while defining the “non-intervention” zone as less than one half of the area proposed by scientists<sup>1,3</sup>. It also lacks legal protection required for Natura 2000 species by allowing a unrestricted access to the entire national park, including core zones of strictly protected species, like capercaillie (*Tetrao urogallus*). Furthermore, we remind the Parliament that Šumava was declared a biosphere reserve in year 1990; consequently, allowing human access likely conflicts with the requirements for the core zone of a protected area in this category.

It should go without saying that the establishment of new human infrastructure explicitly conflicts with the very basic requirement of a protected area (IUCN Category II). The law proposed by the Senate, to allow building for tourism, agriculture and sport in two thirds of the NP not only violates of the basic principles for which the protected area was established, but also – according to a range of scientific evidence – will lead to severe fragmentation and extension of human impacts (noise, light pollution, human access) far into the core zone, further deteriorating the remaining core zone area.

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<sup>1</sup> Bláha, J., Romportl, D., Křenová, Z. (2013): Can Natura 2000 mapping be used to zone the Šumava National Park? Eur. J. Environ. Sci. 3: 57-64.

<sup>2</sup> European Commission DG Environment (2012): Draft Wilderness Management Guidance Document for Natura 2000 managers. European Commission, Brussels.

Kun, Z. (2011): Biodiversity management strategies for mountains: Active or passive management practice? EcoMont Journal 3: 63-67.

Mueller, J., Noss, R.F., Bussler, H., et al. (2010): Learning from a "benign neglect strategy" in a national park: Response of saproxylic beetles to dead wood accumulation. Biol. Conserv. 143: 2559-2569.

Lindenmayer, D. B., Noss, R. F. (2006): Salvage logging, ecosystem processes, and biodiversity conservation. Conserv. Biol. 20: 949-958.

<sup>3</sup> Křenová, Z. and Hruška, J. (2012): Proper zonation – an essential tool for the future conservation of the Šumava National Park. Eur. J. Environ. Sci. 2: 62–72.





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Considering the known impacts on a range of protected species under the Birds and Habitats Directives (e.g. capercaillie), this is not only worrying, but also conflicting with EU legislation.

The Czech Republic is a signatory of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). Decreasing the non-intervention zone of Šumava contradicts several principles of the CBD including Target 5 of the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity, as well as the Aichi Target 5, which requires parties to reduce the loss of all natural habitats, including forests.

In conclusion, we hereby express our opinion that the newly proposed law should be carefully reconsidered with reference to the obligations set by Czech and EU legislation and the commitments made to the CBD.

We invite the government and the Parliament to examine the relevant scientific evidence attached hereby, and stand ready to provide professional advice to inform the necessary discussion on the future of the Šumava National Park within an international context. We respectfully recognise that the Czech Republic has shown its care for its natural and cultural heritage in other regions of the country, and hope to see this care also in the case of Šumava National Park.

Yours sincerely

András Báldi  
SCB ES president

Copy to: European Commission, DG Environment, Brussels

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.)



# Resolution

## concerning the preservation of the Šumava National Park (Czech Republic)

The Bohemian Forest, with its two national parks (Šumava NP and Bavarian Forest NP), forms a unique forested zone in Central Europe and one of the largest forested areas between the Atlantic ocean and the Ural Mts. The large size of the Bohemian Forest allows long-term persistence of natural ecosystems. Nowadays, mountain spruce and mixed forests in all life stages, together with peat bogs and mountain meadows create a unique mosaic of biotopes, affluent by rare and endemic as well as endangered species like lynx, otter, pearl mussel, capercaillie, owls, woodpeckers and hole-nesting songbirds.

The Šumava NP, established in 1991 to protect the most valuable parts of the Czech side of the Bohemian Forest – together with the neighboring Bavarian Forest NP – forms the largest non-intervention area in the Central-European cultural landscape. Therefore, the first transboundary Central European Wilderness Area of international importance – Europe's Wild Heart – has been established here in 2008. The Šumava NP was included in the list of World Biosphere Reserves in 1990 and Šumava peat bogs are an important Ramsar site. The whole region of the Šumava NP is a Natura 2000 protected area – both in terms of the bird directive and the habitats directive).

Because of long-lasting disputes regarding its proper management, several international expert missions (IUCN, Ramsar, European Council, Europarc Federation, PAN Parks) visited the area several times and expressed their recommendations. Based on these and on many years of extensive on-site studies, an important body of Czech scientists from the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic and several prominent Czech universities, defined those areas in the Šumava NP (available at [www.infodatasys.cz](http://www.infodatasys.cz)), which should be left untouched by any human activities (especially logging), in order to preserve their unique ecosystem processes and associated biological communities, still existing only in a few places in central and western Europe. Recent activities supported by the Czech national government and regional bodies seek to open Šumava NP for development and reduce the extent of non-intervention zones below the area previously defined by experts. Concretely, the draft of the new law that we have received from our Czech colleagues would imply an imminent risk of a couple of activities that would compromise the area's biodiversity, such as salvage logging in areas proposed as potential core zones, building touristic infrastructure within the NP (i.e., Modrava, Horská Kvilda, Prácheň), opening new trails in the most sensitive areas (peat bogs, capercaillie), canoeing on the Upper Vltava river (pearl mussels), establishing new tourist attractions in the most sensitive parts of the NP core zone (new winter pub in Břežník, new restaurant & exhibition – Roklanská chata), reestablishing or repairing old roads in core zone areas, or privatization of land close to the villages inside the NP converting them from meadows to land for construction. This is expected to result in irreversible losses of precious natural areas with high conservation value of European relevance, which would be in disagreement with the current international and national legislation.

The Society for Conservation Biology (SCB) Europe Section urges the Czech government to halt any further human interventions and disturbances, at any sites defined by the above-mentioned national and international experts as non-intervention areas. Especially, construction of a new chairlift in the Hrást-Smrčín area (a current core zone of the NP), any privatization of state properties around villages inside the NP, building new roads/trails or reconstruction of old forest roads in the above-defined core zones of the NP, are considered to be potentially detrimental. Other means for economic development of local communities and ways, how these communities might profit from the existence of the NP, must be developed. This will require a shift of economic activities from the current exploitation and hard tourism infrastructure projects to a diverse economy, which will be compatible with both sustainable standard of living of local human communities, and maintenance of vital ecological processes, levels of biological diversity, and continued existence of endemic and/or threatened species. The SCB Europe Section is prepared to offer their experts to help in looking for these ways.

The Society for Conservation Biology Europe Section urges the EU Commission, national governments, the scientific community and the general public to express their desire for continued protection of the Šumava NP as an important component of European natural and cultural heritage. Both the EU and European governments are challenged to help in providing the means for the Šumava NP to become a model for simultaneous implementation of nature conservation and development of local communities.





Petr Nečas  
Prime Minister of the Czech Republic  
Office of the Government of the Czech Republic  
Nábřeží E. Beneše 4  
118 01 Praha 1  
Czech Republic

Society for Conservation Biology

Europe Section  
President

27 March 2012

Dear Prime Minister Nečas,

The Society for Conservation Biology (SCB) is an international organization of conservation professionals. Its ranks include scientists, resource managers and educators. The society is dedicated to preserving biological diversity through science and education, and comprises over 5,000 members from more than 60 countries. The SCB Europe Section membership extends to almost every country in Europe, and the Section has organized thus far three European Congresses of Conservation Biology (ECCB), the second of which (Prague, 2009) received close to 1,500 conservation professionals attending it.

The SCB Europe Section has the duty to alert policy-makers when activities are likely to hinder biodiversity and ecosystems in Europe. The approach we take draws on sound scientific knowledge and understanding of the problems relating to the conservation of biodiversity. In this context, we hereby raise concern about current developments that threaten the conservation status of the Šumava NP, one of the largest well conserved transboundary areas in Central Europe. The importance of Šumava NP has been acknowledged by its designation as a Natura 2000 site, its inclusion in the list of world biosphere reserves, and the listing of its wetlands as a Ramsar site. At the Conference of Parties to the Convention of Biodiversity (CBD) in Nagoya 2010, world governments have agreed that at least 17% of the land area should be set aside as protected areas, with particular emphasis on a need to apply effective and equitable management, ecological representativeness and protection of well-connected systems of protected areas, especially when areas of particular importance for biodiversity and ecosystem services are involved. This global target must translate into regional activities, and clearly, Šumava NP is an important contribution to this target for the Czech Republic.

Led by the government of the Czech Republic and under the Czech Republic EU Presidency, a conference on wilderness and large natural habitat areas was held in Prague in 2009. The meeting concluded that the remaining areas with wilderness or rewilding potential in Europe should be regarded as unique asset and benefit from the highest level of protection. Recent developments in Šumava are in strong disagreement with these conclusions. According to information obtained through Czech members of SCB Europe Section, new laws would compromise the area's biodiversity by promoting various development activities not compatible with the national park's objectives.

The SCB Europe Section is deeply concerned about these developments. A targeted resolution on this topic has been published informing European conservation professionals and the general public about recent developments.

In light of the rigorous internationally-ratified legal requirements for safeguarding natural resources from local to global, SCB Europe Section asks for affirmation from the appropriate Czech authorities that Šumava NP will receive the full protection against such harmful development or other anticipated forms of human disturbance.

We welcome your response and will be happy to engage in a dialogue on how to achieve the protection requirements of Šumava NP.

Yours sincerely,



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