

Greenpeace protests Polish logging of Europe's last primeval forest

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Poland's environment ministry last month gave the go ahead for large-scale logging in the Bialowieza forest—despite protests from scientists, ecologists and the EU—to combat a spruce bark beetle infestation

Greenpeace activists Tuesday called on Poland's environment ministry to "save" the Bialowieza forest, Europe's last primeval woodland, by safeguarding it against planned large-scale logging.

The environment group hung a massive banner across the ministry building that read "Entire Bialowieza Forest should be a [national park](#)", a move that would give the site protective status.

"This is the very last moment to save Bialowieza Forest," Greenpeace Poland head Robert Cyglicki said in a statement, as only part of the Polish woodland is currently a national park.

Poland's [environment](#) ministry last month gave the go ahead for large-scale logging in the [forest](#)—despite protests from scientists, ecologists and the EU—to combat a spruce bark beetle infestation.

"We're acting to curb the degradation of important habitats, to curb the disappearance and migration of important species from this site," Environment Minister Jan Szyszko said at the time.

Under the new plan, loggers will harvest more than 180,000 cubic metres (6.4 million cubic feet) of wood from non-protected areas of the forest over a decade, dwarfing previous plans to harvest 40,000 cubic metres over the same period.

Greenpeace however took issue with the government's rationale, saying "there's no need to protect the primeval forest from the beetle. The beetle is a natural and very important part of the forest... It plays a key role in the forest's ecosystem," Greenpeace Poland spokeswoman Marianna Hoszowska told AFP.



Sprawling across 150,000 hectares, the Bialowieza forest reaches across Poland's border with Belarus

Sprawling across 150,000 hectares (around 370,650 acres), the Bialowieza forest extends over the Polish border with Belarus, where it is entirely protected as a nature park.

The forest, which was designated a UNESCO World Heritage site in 1979, is home to 20,000 animal species, including 250 types of bird and 62 species of mammals, among them Europe's largest, the bison.

Europe's tallest trees, firs towering 50 metres high (160 feet), and oaks and ashes of 40 metres, also flourish here, in an ecosystem unspoiled for more than 10 millennia.

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