

Greenpeace steps up protest against Polish forest logging

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Nearly 150,000 people have signed an online letter supporting protesters against Bialowieza logging

Some 50 environmental activists blocked logging equipment and vehicles Thursday in Poland's ancient Bialowieza forest, as authorities continued to fell trees despite an EU injunction to stop, Greenpeace said.

The right-wing government has vowed to continue [logging](#) in the forest

that includes Europe's last primeval woodland following last month's ruling from the European Court of Justice (ECJ), the bloc's top court.

"Around 30 people blocked the road to trucks transporting chopped wood, thus joining those who for three days now have been blocking harvesters in another part of the forest," Greenpeace Polska spokeswoman Marianna Hoszowska told AFP.

"The brutality of the logging supporters is counterproductive. There are more and more of us and the scope of our activity will increase," Greenpeace Polska director Robert Cyglicki added in a statement.

Cyglicki later reported that one of the trucks had "unloaded its wood and left it in the forest" but qualified the success by adding that it was owned by "just one of the 120 companies that buy wood cut down in Bialowieza".

"That's the extent of the devastation," he said.

Bialowieza, which straddles the border with Belarus, includes one of the largest surviving parts of the primeval forest that covered the European plain ten thousand years ago.

The vast woodland is home to unique plant and animal life, including some 800 European bison, the continent's largest mammal.

The Polish government began logging in May last year, saying it was clearing dead trees to contain damage caused by a spruce bark beetle infestation, fight the risk of forest fires and preserve road traffic.

Scientists, ecologists and the European Union protested and activists now allege that it is being used as a cover for the commercial logging of protected primeval forests.

An online letter in support of the "Defenders of the forest" protesters has so far been signed by nearly 150,000 Europeans on the website of the citizens' movement We Move Europe.

The ECJ said its decree "ordering the immediate halt to the [forest's](#) exploitation" was temporary pending a final court ruling in the case, which could take months or possibly years.

The court was acting on a July 13 request by the European Commission, the 28-nation EU executive, for "interim measures" to stop the large-scale logging.

Polish Environment Minister Jan Szyszko has said he would appear in person before the ECJ on September 11 to "defend the honour of Polish science, Polish rangers and residents" of the area.

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