

Poland to keep logging in ancient forest despite EU order

31 July 2017



The ancient forest of Bialowieza straddles Poland's eastern border with Belarus

Poland will keep logging in the ancient forest of Bialowieza despite an order from the EU's top court to halt the practice, the country's environment minister said Monday.

The Court of Justice of the European Union last week ordered Poland to suspend logging operations there pending a final judgment on its dispute with the European Union.

But Environment Minister Jan Szyszko told journalists that operations would continue and that they were preparing a response to the Court, to be sent by Friday.

Polish television station TVN24 showed footage of machines felling trees in the forest, which has been listed as a UNESCO World Heritage site.

And Greenpeace's Polish spokesman told AFP: "The felling is continuing, even if it is at a lower intensity."

On Saturday, a cameraman trying to establish if

the felling operations were continuing was assaulted by employees of one of the logging companies, an incident that was condemned Monday by the authorities.

The European Union took Poland to the Court on July 13, arguing that the operations were destroying a forest that boasts unique plant and animal life, including the continent's largest mammal, the European bison.

The Polish government said it had authorised the logging, which began in May last year, to contain damage caused by a spruce bark beetle infestation and to fight the risk of forest fires.

But scientists, ecologists and the European Union have protested and activists allege the logging is a cover for commercial cutting of protected old-growth forests.

The forest, which straddles Poland's eastern border with Belarus, includes one of the largest surviving parts of the primeval [forest](#) that covered the European plain 10,000 years ago.

The UNESCO committee overseeing the world heritage sites project has joined the EU in calling on Poland to halt the logging operations.

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