

Poland ready to end extensive logging in pristine old forest

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In a Sunday, Aug. 13, 2017 file photo, people take part in a protest against large-scale government logging in the Bialowieza Forest, Poland. Poland's environment authorities say that a decision has been taken to officially stop the extensive logging in one of Europe's oldest forests that has been declared illegal by a top European Union court. The Environment Ministry said Tuesday, May 15, 2018 that Minister Henryk Kowalczyk has ordered the 2017 permission for the increased felling of trees in the Bialowieza Forest to be lifted by the top forestry official, a move expected still this week. (AP Photo/Czarek Sokolowski, File)

Poland's environment minister has decided to stop the extensive logging in one of Europe's oldest forests that has been declared illegal by a top European Union court, authorities said Tuesday.

Environment Minister Henryk Kowalczyk has ordered the government's 2017 permission for the increased felling of trees in the Bialowieza Forest to be halted by the top forestry official, a move expected this week.

It was the Polish government's official reaction to a ruling last month by the European Court of Justice that said the increased logging was against EU environmental laws. Poland has vowed to abide by the ruling.

Environmentalists have welcomed the move, but also urged the waiving of a 2016 decision by then-minister Jan Szyszko that laid the ground for increasing the logging in Bialowieza.

"This is a step in the right direction, but we are waiting also for the other annulment" that should close the matter, said Agata Szafraniuk of ClientEarth.

She said that the logging in one of Europe's last pristine forests has stopped.

The logging was ordered by Szyszko, who argued it was to stop a bark beetle infestation. Environmentalists questioned that, suspecting profit motives.

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