

WORLD HERITAGE NOMINATION - IUCN SUMMARY

: BELOVEZHSKAYA PUSHCHA STATE NATIONAL PARK (BELARUS)

Summary prepared by WCMC/IUCN (April 1992) based on the original nomination submitted by the Government of the Republic of Belarus. This original and all documents presented in support of this nomination will be available for consultation at the meetings of the Bureau and the Committee.

1. LOCATION

In south-west Belarus, on the border with north-east-central Poland , Brest Region, Kamenetsky and Pruzhansky Districts, Grodno Region and Svislochsky District. Approximately 87,600ha

2. JURIDICAL DATA

Declared a state national park in 1991 on the former state hunting reserve farm of the same name. The first recorded piece of legislation on the protection of the forest dates back to 1538. The pushcha is protected under Decision of the Union of People's Commissars, 1944; Order of the USSR Council of Ministers, 1957; and Decree of the Byelorussian SSR Council of Ministers "On Reorganisation of the State Reserve Hunting Farm Belovezhskaya Pushcha" of 1991. The adjacent Polish National Park (5,316ha) was designated in 1932, approved as a biosphere reserve in June 1976 and inscribed on the World Heritage list in 1979.

3. IDENTIFICATION

Situated in the hydrological divide between the Baltic and Black Seas, the area is covered by glacial formations with deposits composed of deep sands overlaying clays, and clays and loams overlying the cretaceous bedrock.

The park is 88% forested by mixed broad-leaved and conifer forests of "old growth" virgin stands. The pushcha is represented by 12 main forest associations, the major type being *Tilio-Carpinetum* in contrast to the typical central European *Quercus-Carpinetum*. Over 900 vascular plant species have been recorded, including 26 species of tree and 138 of shrub. In the entire forest complex there are also 210 lichen species, 80 liverworts and more than 1,500 fungi.

Represented by typical European forest fauna communities, with 55 species of mammal, 212 of birds, 11 amphibians and 7 reptiles. There are over 8,000 insect species throughout the entire forest complex. Notable mammal species include European bison (V), wolf and European lynx, otter and large populations of red deer, roe and wild boar. European bison was exterminated in Bialowieza forest in 1919 and reintroduced there in 1929. To date the number of bison in the pushcha is 315. Birds include capercaillie, eagle owl and large numbers of raptors.

4. STATE OR PRESERVATION / CONSERVATION

The park protects a major proportion of the Belovezhskaya pushcha which is found on both sides of the Polish/Belarus frontier. The responsible management agency is the Forest Department of the former Byelorussian SSR. Protection is by means of cross-country patrol vehicles, and air patrols occur during high fire-risk periods. There is no management plan, although one has been recommended which will parallel and complement the Polish Bialowieza National Park management plan. It has been recommended that management zones should be divided into strict protected zones, partially protected zones and zones for tourism, traditional farming and outer buffer zones. The authorities have indicated that they also plan to increase both domestic and foreign tourism under the guidance of special excursion guides. To date there is limited cooperation between the two national park authorities on either side of the frontier. However, since January 1991 the Director of the Byelorussian Park has been nominated as a member of the Scientific Council of Polish Bialowieza National Park. There have been two meetings of the transfrontier park Polish-Soviet Committee on Environmental Problems.

There is practically no threat to the site, as no large industrial complexes, railways or major roads are located nearby. However, there is a significant number of potential threats to the site, chief of which are pesticide and fertilizer run-off from state farms in or near the park buffer zone, free-ranging cattle and wild deer grazing in the forest, disturbance to the hydrological balance of the forest by land reclamation programmes (90km of canals constructed since the 1960s), and threats from economic changes leading to an increase in the use of timber for the park's saw mill if inadequate regulations are approved. The transfrontier fence has caused major disruption to wildlife movements through the forest.

5. JUSTIFICATION FOR INCLUSION ON THE WORLD HERITAGE LIST

The nomination, as presented by the government of the Republic of Belarus, provides the following justification for designation as a World Heritage property:

Natural property

- (iii) **Contains unique, rare or superlative natural phenomena, formations or features.** The state national park is an unique natural complex, the only one of its kind in Europe least subjected to human influences. It is a large massif of old age virgin forest with a protected population of threatened animals and plants.

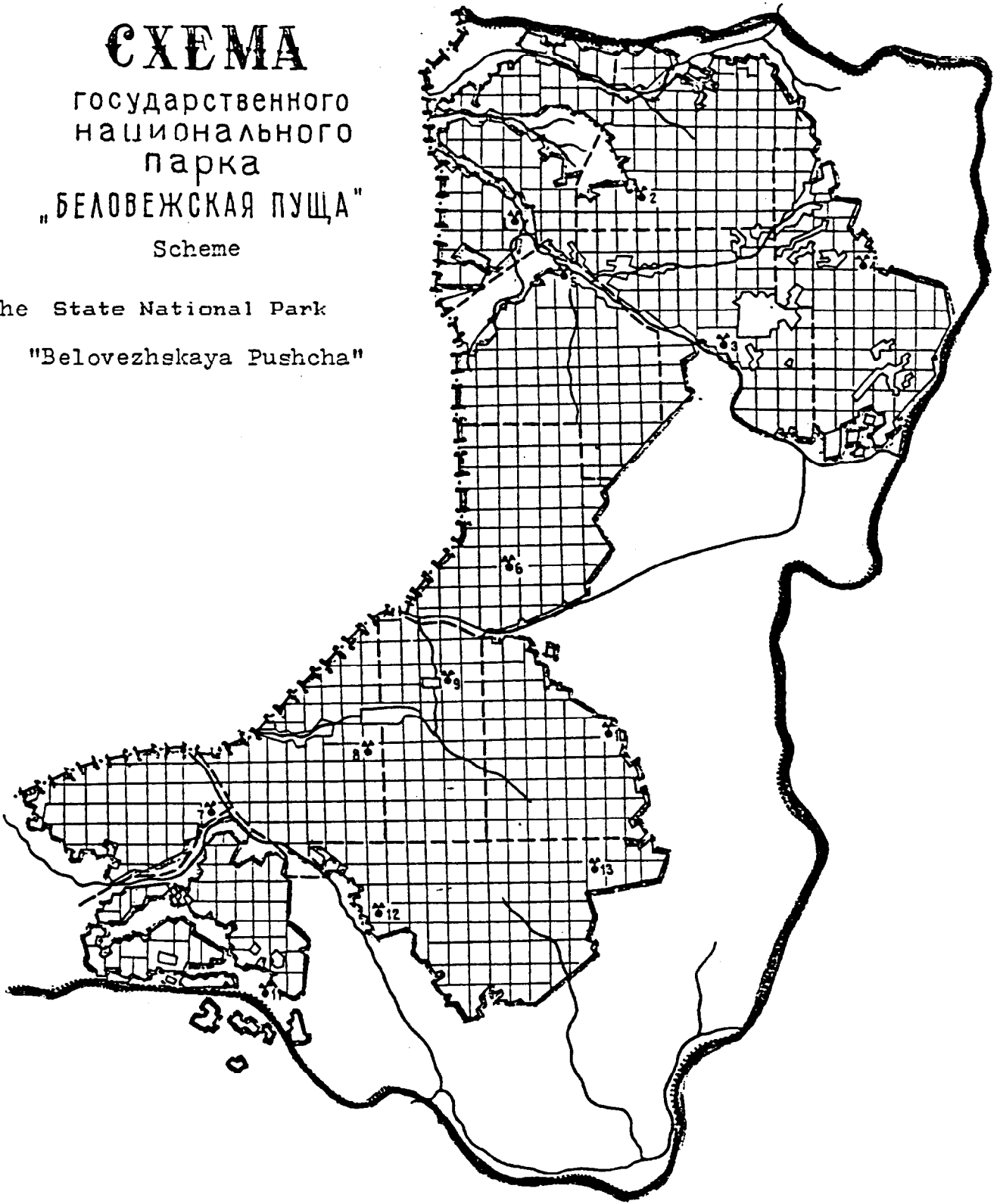
СХЕМА

государственного
национального
парка
„БЕЛОВЕЖСКАЯ ПУЩА“

Scheme

of the State National Park

"Belovezhskaya Pushcha"



Госграница с Польшей State border with Poland

граница Беловежской пушчи Border
of the Belovezhskaya Pushcha

граница буферной зоны Border of the buffer zone

WORLD HERITAGE NOMINATION - IUCN TECHNICAL EVALUATION

628: BELOVEZHSKAYA PUSHCHA STATE NATIONAL PARK (BELARUS)

1. DOCUMENTATION

- i) IUCN/WCMC Data Sheet (12 references)
- ii) Additional Literature Consulted: WWF-Austria, 1990. Ecological Bricks for our Common House of Europe.
- iii) Consultations: L. Kuleshova, P. Gunin, A. Nikolski, K. Braden, C. Okolow, T. Wesolowski
- iv) Field Visit: None

2. COMPARISON WITH OTHER AREAS

The Bialowieza Forest complex of which Belovezhskaya Pushcha (BP) is a part, is distinct among forest areas in the western Palearctic. Its uniqueness stems from its relative biological richness and its largely undisturbed nature. BP's free-ranging herd of European bison is its third major feature and led to the World Heritage inscription of the Polish portion of the forest in 1979. The extent of old growth virgin forest found here is the largest in lowland Europe. The location of the site in central Europe mixes elements from Scandinavia/Siberia and southern directions and consequently it has a higher diversity of species than other reserves in the Middle European Biogeographical Province.

3. INTEGRITY

The legal status of BP was upgraded in 1991 but it is not clear if all former USSR laws have been rescinded. Details about staffing levels and budget are also lacking and the impact of activities being conducted within the reserve by local residents is not known. An urgent need is for a management plan which should be coordinated with the one prepared for the park on the Polish side. This plan should take into account the activities that are being undertaken in the buffer zone of BP that are affecting the park (e.g. use of pesticides and water reclamation activities).

Although there is now a Polish/Soviet Committee for environmental protection, cooperation between both parks is still only symbolic. A game-proof fence along

the border is still in place. The addition of BP to Bialowieza has the potential to greatly improve the integrity and viability of the wildlife populations and to promote coordination of management. (note that BP is approximately 18 times the size of its Polish counterpart).

4. ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

The Bialowieza forest complex is one of a network of 24 transfrontier protected areas proposed in the European NGO initiative called "Ecological Bricks". Two other World Heritage sites in this proposal that are also proposed for extension into the neighbouring country are Pirin (Bulgaria) and Danube Delta (Romania).

5. EVALUATION

Although there are a number of management details lacking and much work to be done to strengthen management of the site, the forest habitat of BP is largely still intact. It would substantially add to the integrity of the existing site particularly if the fence between the two parks was removed. A sharing of experience between the Polish and Belarus sides is essential and a beginning has been made to foster cooperation. The management planning process should thus involve both sides and be seen as a priority activity.

It is also not entirely clear in the nomination that the area being nominated is only the contiguous core of the forest and not the buffer zone nor the isolates in the south-west corner.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

The old growth forests and associated fauna of BP clearly meets criteria (iii) and its inclusion on the World Heritage as an extension of Bialowieza National Park in Poland is recommended. The Bureau should request the Belarus authorities:

- to confirm their understanding that the boundaries of the site only include the core zone;
- to undertake (with assistance from the World Heritage Fund if necessary) a management plan for the area which would be coordinated with that for the Polish side;
- to coordinate and share management experience with their Polish counterparts; and

- to state their willingness to remove the fence between the two parks if the management plan determines that this would lead to enhanced viability.

In addition, the Governments of Poland and Belarus should be asked if they would agree to designating the Bialowieza Forest as one single transfrontier site on the World Heritage List.

