

STATE OF CONSERVATION REPORT

BIAŁOWIEŻA FOREST – POLAND (BELARUS) - 33ter

1. Executive Summary of the report

[Note: each of the sections described below should be summarized. The maximum length of the executive summary is 1 page.]

The State Party is aware of the value of the Białowieża Forest World Heritage Property and its place on the world map. At the same time, it is aware of its responsibility to preserve it for future generations. Protection of the Białowieża Forest is one of the priorities of the Minister of Climate and Environment.

The geopolitical situation has forced Poland to build a border barrier crossing the Transboundary World Heritage Property. The barrier has a negative impact on the integrity of the Property, but thanks to the commitment of scientists, nature conservation services and NGOs, the barrier's impact on nature is monitored and the Government is making efforts to mitigate it. A partial scientific study on the impact of the barrier on mammals and invasive plant species was commissioned in 2024. The next stage will be the formation of a team comprising representatives of the Property's managers, the Ministry of Climate and Environment, the Border Guard, the military and scientists, whose task will be to develop the assumptions of a programme of comprehensive monitoring of the Białowieża Forest ecosystem and a corrective action plan for mitigating the impact of the barrier and the activities of the Border Guard and the military on the biodiversity and ecological and biological processes in the Property. Some problems are being solved on an ongoing basis - identified locations of alien plant species in the border strip and in the vicinity of the tourist infrastructure are being eliminated to prevent their spread and penetration into the areas of a higher protection regime.

The draft Property Management Plan is being verified. The Institute of Environmental Protection is finalising the update of the Forest Fire Prevention and Extinguishing Plan for the Polish part of the Białowieża Forest Transboundary World Heritage Site, the zoning of the Property and the assessment of the impact of the border barrier on the Białowieża Forest ecosystem. The Institute carries on stakeholder meetings and dialogue with various stakeholder groups, in particular representatives of the local community and local authorities.

The managers of the Narewowska road are considering introducing, in addition to the 30 km/h speed limit already in place, further measures to reduce the potential negative impact of this road on forest ecosystems. Among the measures being considered are speed bumps and a radar speed display.

The protection of the Białowieża Forest is a priority task of the Minister of Climate and Environment. At the same time, the Government of the Republic of Poland is concerned with improving living conditions and community development. Taking into account the ecological needs of local government units in the distribution of the general subsidy for local government units, starting from 2025, is an important measure in this respect. The municipalities in the Białowieża Forest region will receive additional funds this year: the Białowieża municipality – over PLN 1,839,033; the Hajnówka municipality - PLN 8,179,535; the Narewka municipality - PLN 2,466,440. In subsequent financial years, the subsidy will be valorised, which would lead to its increase.

The resumption of cooperation with Belarus in the field of protection of the Białowieża Forest within the framework of the Transboundary World Heritage Property may take place when political relations between Poland and Belarus are repaired and, at the same time, the Belarusian Party ceases its hostile actions towards Poland, inter alia, by permanently and effectively blocking all channels for unauthorised persons to enter the Property and its buffer zone.

Poland declares its willingness to invite a reactive monitoring mission in accordance with the recommendation of the World Heritage Committee.

2. Response to the Decision of the World Heritage Committee

In response to the individual points of Decision 46 of the UNESCO World Heritage Committee, Poland provides the relevant explanation:

Ad. 5. Urges the State Party of Poland to develop and implement mitigation measures to reduce the impact of the border barrier in Poland, including via:

a) Urgent implementation of technical measures to address the localized impacts on the hydrology and allow for a restoration of natural peak water flows, for example by adding more and larger culverts under the barrier wall foundation and adjacent service road, and putting in place dedicated monitoring and human capacity to ensure the culverts function under peak flow conditions,

Nature conservation services and scientists identify emerging threats and attempt to minimise the barrier's negative impact on the nature of the Białowieża Forest by analysing individual factors, which are subject to change depending on the season and atmospheric phenomena. In the riverbeds that are crossed by the border barrier, at the stage of its construction, appropriately sized culverts with gratings were created to prevent the culverts from being used by people trying to cross the Polish border illegally. The grates are installed in such a way that they can be opened so that they can be cleared, if necessary, of any water-borne material blocking the free flow of water. These culverts are regularly monitored and, if necessary, cleaned by the nature conservation services with the assistance of Border Guard and Polish Army officers, which prevents water piling up on the eastern side of the border. In addition, the Białowieża National Park has requested the Border Guard to add additional large culverts under the barrier in places where it is apparent in the spring that the existence of the barrier foundations is disrupting the flow of water manifesting itself as flooded areas on only one side of the barrier. In addition, the services of the Białowieża National Park and the forest districts of the Białowieża Forest regularly monitor the area along the State border noting the places that require additional measures to mitigate the impact of the border barrier on the hydrological connectivity of the Property.

Poland was forced to erect the border barrier in response to a threat to the security of Poland and the European Union. Due to the gravity of the threat and the need to urgently implement border security measures, not all aspects of the barrier's impact on the unique universal value of the Białowieża Forest World Heritage Property were addressed to the extent and in a timely manner. Thanks to the involvement of scientists, nature conservation services and NGOs, the defects of the barrier and its negative impact on hydrological conditions are constantly monitored, and the State Party makes the efforts to mitigate them and preserve the integrity of the Property.

b) Development and timely implementation of a set of actions to support the Polish lynx population in the property to improve habitat quality for increased prey availability combined with reduced noise, light, and road use, and also develop contingency plans to supplement/reintroduce the Polish lynx sub-population as warranted,

The analysis of the situation of the lynx in the Polish part of the Białowieża Forest requires looking at data from the last few decades and paying attention to the historical context of the population dynamics of the species in this area. During the winter of 1993/94, 29 individuals were recorded (including 6 females with cubs), in 2015 9 individuals were recorded (including 2 females with cubs), and in 2023 7 individuals were recorded (including 1 female). No sightings of females with young were recorded between 2016 and 2022 (unpublished data from the Mammal Research Institute).

Since 2023, WWF Poland and the Mammal Research Institute of the Polish Academy of Sciences in Białowieża have been implementing the project 'Assessment of conservation and protection status of local lynx populations in north-eastern Poland'. As part of the cooperation, all information concerning lynx sightings or traces of lynx presence is collected and transmitted to the Mammal Research Institute. During the winter of 2023/24, lynx monitoring was carried out in the Białowieża Forest and nearby forest complexes located on the border with Belarus: Knyszyn Forest and Augustów Forest. In Białowieża Forest, 7 individuals (including a female with 3 cubs) were recorded, and the animal observation sites were evenly distributed throughout the forest area. In the Knyszyn Primeval Forest (an area almost 2 times larger than the Białowieża Forest) 2 specimens were found (on its outskirts), while in the Augustów Forest (an area almost 2 times larger than the Białowieża Forest), 7 specimens were found (including a female with 2 cubs). The cited data shows that the situation of the lynx in the Białowieża Forest is comparable to that in other areas with similar conditions. However, it is worth emphasising that the decline in the species' numbers began significantly before the barrier was built on the Polish side. The data collected during this project will contribute to the development and implementation of a system of measures to support the Polish lynx population at the Property.

The presence of lynx in the Białowieża Forest is taken into account when creating annual hunting plans, resulting in far-reaching restrictions on the hunting of roe deer, the main component of these predators' diet. For this reason, does and kids have not been hunted in the part of the Białowieża Forest managed by forest districts since the mid-1990s. Only the harvesting of males (bucks) is planned and implemented, mainly on the fringes of the Forest. In the 2023/2024 season, the harvest plan was 59 bucks in total in all forest districts, of which 51 shoots were realised. It should be noted that the realisation of the above plan also includes falls caused by natural factors, mainly predators (identified cases) and traffic accidents. The State Party informs that there is no hunting within the area of the Białowieża National Park and the nature reserves of the Białowieża Forest.

Due to the low abundance of lynx in the Białowieża Forest, it is difficult to plan and carry out effective research on the effects of light, noise and other stressors on the population in the area. The collected field data, mainly coming from photo-traps and field observation cards are being analysed, and this topic was one of the main issues of the expert opinion made for the Property Management Plan 'Impact of the border barrier on the Polish-Belarusian border on the Białowieża Forest World Heritage Property': Mammals and Invasive Plants'. The conclusions of this expertise will be taken into account when planning activities in the Białowieża Forest. In addition, at the request of the Chief Conservator of Nature, the nature conservation services of the Białowieża National Park and the forest districts carry out observations related to the study of the impact of the razor wire barrier on the health of animals living in the Białowieża Forest. Every fortnight, the managers send information on the observations made. So far, no injuries to animals in the vicinity of the barrier have been reported.

c) Providing additional funding for monitoring and mitigation measures to suppress the introduction and spread of invasive species, including screening all human activities for invasive species, rapid detection and eradication programmes,

The threat from alien species is gradually increasing as a direct result of human activities at the Property, but also as an effect of climate change. However, it should be emphasised that at the same time the awareness of the Property managers in this regard is increasing. The managers of the Property - both the Białowieża National Park and the forest districts - carry out monitoring of alien

species as part of their activities and with their own funds in the area they administer, including the border strip (UNESCO Zone 4). Thanks to the monitoring and fast reaction of relevant services, alien species appearing within the border road strip are effectively eliminated and do not spread to other UNESCO zones.

Employees of the Białowieża National Park and forest districts participate in workshops and training courses on invasive alien species. In addition, forest districts participate in the project entitled: "Comprehensive project for the protection of species and natural habitats on areas managed by the State Forests", financed within the framework of Infrastructure and Environment Programme funds and own funds. Within the project *Impatiens parviflora* and *Reynoutria japonica* are being removed. The forest districts carry out information and education activities on invasive species. The topic is covered in educational activities, on social media or on websites. Other, customary ways of informing the local community are also used – community notice boards or posting information at bus stops. The daily duties of the field services include keeping an eye out for the presence of alien species. Additional activities are carried out to identify sites with the highest probability of their presence: in settlements, along transport routes, in places associated with tourism, also in forest areas and their fringes. The inventory includes the following species: *Prunus serotina*, *Acer negundo*, *Quercus rubra*, *Robinia pseudoacacia*, *Cornus sericea*, *Rosa rugosa*, *Reynoutria japonica*, *Symphoricarpos albus*, *Impatiens parviflora*, *Impatiens grandiflora*.

There were several joint activities taken to eradicate some of alien species, e.g. action of the Białowieża Forest District and the Białowieża National Park to eradicate *Impatiens parviflora* in the immediate vicinity of the Białowieża National Park's strict reserve, or the action carried out by the Hajnówka Forest District to eradicate *Solidago canadensis* on the route of the narrow-gauge railway and the former timber depot near the Forest District. Other institutions and the local community were also involved.

As part of the forest districts' hunting management, raccoon eradication is carried out on an ongoing basis.

The alien species problem was one of the points of the expert opinion 'Impact of the border barrier on the Polish-Belarusian border on the World Heritage Property "Białowieża Forest" performed for the Property Management Plan: Mammals and Invasive Plants'. Conclusions of this expertise will be taken into account when planning activities in the Białowieża Forest.

d) Establishing dedicated monitoring and adaptive management capacity to mitigate noise and light pollution and edge effects,

An analysis in this regard will be carried out by a team comprising representatives of the managers of the Property, the Ministry of Climate and Environment, the Border Police and scientists.

e) Refraining from the further development of the barrier infrastructure in the property,

The State Party of Poland is making efforts to ensure that there is no need for further expansion of the border infrastructure. In the last six months, the existing barrier was strengthened by adding transverse beams to reinforce the spans and prevent them from cutting or bending. At the same time, the opto-electronic system was improved. It is planned to reconstruct the existing technical road running along the state border in the border strip in order to reduce the time it takes for border protection services or also emergency services to reach the site. The reconstruction of this road will reduce the use of other roads in the Property. A concept is currently being developed, including a comparison of three technologies for upgrading the technical road, together with an estimate of the

cost of implementing the technical road upgrade in each of these technologies, taking into account the geotechnical conditions. The project will be completed by the end of 2025. The contractor has been obliged to carry out environmental supervision of the investment. This process is supervised by the Minister of Interior and Administration and controlled according to jurisdiction by the Regional Directorate of Environmental Protection in Białystok. The Chief Conservator of Nature and the General Director for Environmental Protection are involved in the work of a team appointed by the Minister of the Interior and Administration to supervise the works being carried out, in order to ensure that the works carried out comply with EU regulations on habitat protection and UNESCO regulations.

f) Taking additional measures to increase the resilience of the ecosystem by addressing other stressors on the integrity of the property;

An analysis in this regard will be carried out by a team comprising representatives of the managers of the Property, the Ministry of Climate and Environment, the Border Police and scientists.

Ad. 6. Requests the States Parties of Poland and Belarus to resume, to the extent possible, transboundary cooperation, at least at the technical information exchange level, in order to facilitate the development and implementation of the recommended mitigation measures;

Cross-border cooperation at this stage of Polish-Belarusian relations is not possible. The resumption of cooperation with Belarus in the field of protection of the Białowieża Forest within the framework of the Transboundary World Heritage Property may take place when political relations between Poland and Belarus are repaired and, at the same time, the Belarusian Party ceases its hostile actions towards Poland, inter alia, by permanently and effectively blocking all channels for unauthorised persons to penetrate the Property and its buffer zone.

Poland welcomes the proposal made in the Report of the Experts' Visit in March 2024. 'The mission notes that UNESCO and IUCN, and possibly with the involvement of other UN entities, could potentially facilitate a dialogue between the States Parties at the appropriate level.'

Ad. 7. Further requests the State Party of Poland to establish a comprehensive and long-term research and monitoring programme on the OUV of the property in order to allow for adaptive management of the threats and impacts of the border barrier and its associated infrastructure, and to conduct further research on the impacts of the border barrier and associated infrastructure on the biodiversity and ecological and biological processes of the property, including alternatives to conventional border walls, wildlife passages and other measures to minimise the impacts of the border barrier, concertina fences and associated road infrastructure;

The Ministry of Climate and Environment plans to set up a working group comprising representatives of the managers of the Property, the Ministry of Climate and Environment, the services protecting the border and scientists carrying out research in the Białowieża Forest over the past decades. The possibilities of setting and funding a long-term programme of research and monitoring of the Property's unique universal value, not only in the context of the border barrier, but also in the context of climate change in general and the emergence of invasive species and the consequences of their presence are analysed.

In addition, as mentioned above, the managers of the Property are monitoring the impact of the border barrier, including the razor wire fence, on animal health on an ongoing basis. The managers report the monitoring information every 2 weeks to the Minister of Climate and Environment.

Ad. 8. Further considers that a new Reactive Monitoring mission would be required in 2027 to assess the implementation of these recommendations, re-evaluate whether the property then meets the criteria for its inscription on the List of World Heritage in Danger, and to assess the feasibility of implementing additional measures to fully restore the ecological connectivity in the property;

Poland declares its willingness to invite a reactive monitoring mission in accordance with the recommendation of the World Heritage Committee.

Ad. 9. Also urges the State Party of Poland to revise the draft Integrated Management Plan to improve clarity and to include core guidance on the overall management principles of the property in order to inform all relevant management documents for the component of the property located in Poland, including Forest Management Plans, to ensure they align with the protection of the property's OUV by including the following:

- a) Clear guidance statements for addressing threats to the OUV,*
- b) Guidance for integrating border security issues into the overarching capacity to protect the property's OUV,*
- c) A catalogue of active forest management interventions that can be accepted in the active protection zone and the conditions under which they should be applied,*
- d) A comprehensive and long-term research and monitoring programme to allow for adaptive management of threats, and*
- e) To finalise the draft before the end of 2024 for submission to the World Heritage Centre and review by IUCN;*

The draft Management Plan for the Białowieża Forest World Heritage Property is being prepared by the Institute of Environmental Protection - State Research Institute. The first version of the Plan did not meet the requirements imposed by the World Heritage Committee. After the visit of UNESCO and IUCN experts, which took place from 18 to 27 March 2024, the Ministry of Climate and Environment commissioned the Institute of Environmental Protection to verify the Draft Plan, so that the new version of the Plan took into account the conditions imposed by the Committee and the recommendations of the experts of the Mission.

In accordance with the experts' recommendations, the Forest Fire Protection and Suppression Plan for the Polish part of the Białowieża Forest Transboundary World Heritage Property was revised.

The proposal of zoning with different protection regimes and scope of permitted activities is under particular scrutiny. Substantive grounds for verification of the zoning, including a significant reduction of zone 4, are provided by the latest field data collected in 2023-2024 for the Protection Plan of the Natura 2000 area 'Białowieża Forest'. The draft Protection Plan of the Natura 2000 area Białowieża Forest is at the stage of public consultation. The Protection Plan for the Natura 2000 area Białowieża Forest is being prepared in accordance with the provisions of the Nature Conservation Act and the very precisely described requirements concerning the scope of works necessary for the preparation of such a plan, which include a wide range of field works. The data collected within the framework of the works on the Protection Plan of the Natura 2000 area 'Białowieża Forest' are the most up-to-date material on which to base the zoning of the World Heritage Property.

Another important aspect that was not taken into account in the first stage of works is the functioning of the border barrier. In the second half of 2024, an expert opinion 'Impact of the border barrier on the Polish-Belarusian border on the Białowieża Forest World Heritage Property' was prepared on request of the Institute of Environmental Protection - State Research Institute. The authors of the study - a team of scientists from the Mammal Research Institute of the Polish Academy of Sciences and the Białowieża Geobotanical Station of Warsaw University - clearly state that the border barrier has a significant impact on the ecosystem and may contribute to the deterioration of the natural value of the Property. At the same time, they propose a number of measures to minimise its impact. The Ministry of Climate and Environment is looking at the feasibility of implementing these recommendations and incorporating them into the Property Management Plan. However, the inclusion of this measure in the Plan must be preceded by a detailed economic analysis and the identification of funding sources for these measures. Poland anticipates that these analyses will be completed by mid-2025. In addition, as mentioned in the report presented in January 2024, the Białowieża Geobotanical Station of Warsaw University is monitoring the impact of the barrier operation on selected environmental components as part of the implementation of the research project „Understanding and mitigating the ecological footprint of state border barriers” funded by the National Agency for Academic Exchange under the agreement BPN/GIN/2023/1/00007/U/00001. The project was supposed to end in August 2024 and, based on the results of the project, the Polish Party was supposed to develop preliminary recommendations for the minimisation of the negative impact of the barrier on the Property's Outstanding Universal Value by the end of 2024. However, the project has been extended and has not been completed, making it impossible to develop recommendations at this stage. The anticipated date for the development of recommendations is mid-2025.

The participatory way of preparing the Draft Property Management Plan involves working through the various issues in face-to-face meetings with stakeholders. The stakeholder groups identified during phase I of work on the Draft Plan are characterised by considerable diversity in many respects, including knowledge of the Property's unique universal value as well as its importance for the protection of world heritage. The Ministry of Climate and Environment is putting great effort to ensure that the Draft Property Management Plan is developed in accordance with UNESCO guidelines, in particular paragraph 123 of the Operational Guidelines, stipulating the crucial participation of local communities in the process of preparing documentation for the Property, so as to enable them to take co-responsibility for the maintenance of the Property.

At the same time, the Ministry of Climate and Environment is working on the preparation of a programme of economic support for the Białowieża Forest region (based on existing legal regulations, including the provisions of the law on support for local government units), which should result in increased acceptance of the updated zoning of the Białowieża Forest World Heritage Property.

Ad. 10. Reiterates its request to the State Party of Poland to ensure that all habitat management operations in the property comply with the management arrangements as described in the 2014 Nomination dossier, including that the undisturbed wild nature is the basic principle for the management, by:

- a) Ensuring that the new zonation fully complies with the principles detailed in the 2014 nomination dossier and does not result in an increase of the active forest protection zone,*
- b) Ensuring that the new Forest Management Plans include a clear justification for each of the planned forest management interventions, as outlined in the 2024 mission recommendations,*

The zoning proposal that is currently being developed does not involve an increase in the active protection zone.

The draft forest management plans for the forest districts were prepared in accordance with the recommendations of the experts from the 2018 Reactive Mission. The process of preparing the documents was carried out in accordance with national regulations, including those concerning the conduct of an environmental impact assessment of the planned activities. In addition, an assessment of the impact of the planned activities on the Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) of the UNESCO World Heritage Property Białowieża Forest was prepared.

At present, the further procedure of forest management plans is suspended until the Property Management Plan is developed and approved. Adoption of updated and verified forest management plans for the forest districts will probably not be possible before 2026.

c) Revising the proposed Forest Fire Prevention and Suppression Plan prior to its incorporation into the Integrated Management Plan to ensure that any inconsistencies with the recommendations of the 2018 mission and management arrangements described in the 2014 Nomination dossier are resolved;

Fire Protection and Suppression Plan for the Polish part of the Białowieża Forest Transboundary World Heritage Property has been revised. The document is an annex to the Draft Management Plan for the Białowieża Forest Property.

Ad. 11. Also requests the State Party of Poland to develop and implement additional measures to further mitigate the impacts of the Narewowska road, including additional restrictions on the use of the road;

Traffic on the Narewowska road is monitored in terms of the number and type of moving vehicles. The field services of the Białowieża and Browsk Forest Districts (through which the road runs) carry out year-round monitoring of the road in terms of traffic volume and animal mortality. Observations show that vehicle traffic on this road is seasonal, with a concentration in the months of May to August. Bicycles make up a significant proportion - this road is a section of the popular Green Velo cycle route. During the report period, one collision involving a wild animal - a badger - was recorded. The monitoring results do not indicate that there is increased amphibian mortality on the Narewowska road during migration season.

The forest districts managing the Narewowska road are considering the introduction (in addition to the restrictions already in place - speed limit and road width) of further solutions to reduce the potential negative impact of this road on forest ecosystems. Among the measures being considered are speed bumps or a radar speed display. Formal and legal analyses of the feasibility of various solutions are currently being carried out, including technological considerations (interference with road construction and user safety).

Unfortunately, due to the current geopolitical situation on the eastern border of the European Union, a fragment of which crosses the Białowieża Forest, the Narewowska road is one of the main routes for the movement of services protecting the state border, which is reflected in the volume of vehicle traffic on this road, but it is not the result of the road surface upgrading.

Ad. 12. Further requests the States Parties of Belarus and Poland to implement the other recommendations of the 2024 Reactive Monitoring mission, in particular to:

a) Reinitiate the work on developing a Transboundary Management Plan and coordinate transboundary management actions to address the different conservation challenges of the property,

b) Undertake a new scientific evaluation of bison and red deer ecological carrying capacity for the entire property and implications for management of dispersal, migration and range expansion movements within and outside the property,

c) Bring wildlife management in the property better in line with undisturbed ecological processes as outlined in the mission recommendations,

The State Party of Poland awaits the possibility of working on a transboundary management plan for the Property. The Ministry of Climate and Environment declares to immediately start working on the transboundary plan as soon as the reasons blocking transboundary cooperation with Belarus cease. The situation in Belarus after the 2020 presidential elections has led to an unprecedented collapse in mutual relations and an almost complete withdrawal of Minsk from cooperation with the West. In 2021 Belarus suspended its participation in the work of the Eastern Partnership, among other things. As Russia's main ally in its aggressive war against Ukraine, Belarus has become one of the main factors destabilising the security situation in the region. A serious problem is the widespread violation of fundamental human rights by the authorities in Minsk, as evidenced by the growing number of political prisoners and the persecution of representatives of the Polish minority.

The resumption of cooperation in the field of protection of the Białowieża Forest as a Transboundary World Heritage Property may take place when political relations between Poland and Belarus are repaired (and restored) and, at the same time, the Belarusian Party effectively blocks all channels for unauthorised persons to pass through the Property and its buffer zone. The Polish Party is convinced that Belarus has all the technical and personal capabilities to eliminate completely the threat to the outstanding universal value of the Property, which is the presence of unauthorised persons in the World Heritage Property.

The Ministry of Climate and Environment is planning to establish a working group composed of representatives of the managers of the Property, the Ministry of Climate and Environment, the services protecting the border and scientists of various scientific units carrying out research work in the Białowieża Primeval Forest over the last decades, and is considering the possibility of developing and financing a long-term programme of research and monitoring of the unique universal value of the Polish part of the Property, which will also cover these issues.

d) Continue and further increase efforts to restore the natural hydrology of the property and include the research, monitoring, and adaptation to climate change as a core guiding principle in all management planning,

The Forest Districts of the Białowieża Forest have a hydrological study for the catchment area of the Polish part of the Białowieża Forest prepared by the Bureau of Forest Management and Geodesy in Białystok in 2021. The study made it possible to identify priority, in terms of urgency, measures to improve ground and water conditions. On the basis of the study, localities were selected where the slowing down of water run-off on periodic watercourses has already been carried out or is planned for the following years.

In 2024, further damming was carried out to slow down water run-off. The activities were carried out as part of hydrological workshops involving foresters, scientists, naturalists, forestry and environmental engineering students. A total of 21 damming operations were carried out (in the following compartments: 364Cc, 422Aa, 426Aa, 498Bg, 500Ba, 500Bk, 758Ac, 758Bi).

Activities in Białowieża National Park in this respect are carried out in accordance with the provisions of the long-term Protection Plan of the Białowieża National Park.

e) Implement measures to further reduce habitat fragmentation by avoiding any further upgrading of roads, significantly reducing the number of forestry roads and the number of forestry fences,

The Białowieża National Park and the forest districts maintain forest roads on their territory, which are necessary for the management of the Polish part of the Property. The roads are used by the Border Guard, Polish Army, Police and emergency services (fire brigade, ambulance service). These roads are maintained in an appropriate technical condition so as not to generate additional adverse impacts on the ecosystems of the Białowieża Forest.

The maintenance of fire access roads in an appropriate condition is an obligation under the provisions of the Forest Act and the regulation on fire protection of buildings, other structures and areas.

During the work on the Management Plan, the Forest Districts identified roads within the Property which will be decommissioned (no longer maintained and overgrown) with a total length of almost 117 km.

Within the forest districts, a part of silvicultural fencing that has served its purpose is being dismantled annually. In 2024, a total of over 36 km of fences in forest ecosystems were removed (Białowieża about 3 km, Browsk 26 km, Hajnówka over 7 km). No new silvicultural fencing has been built in the forest for several years.

f) Develop a vision on how the property can contribute to sustainable development of the surrounding region, based on a clear sustainable tourism strategy compatible with the protection of the OUV;

These issues have been taken into account in the Draft Management Plan of the World Heritage Property 'Białowieża Forest' (Polish part). The Draft Plan identifies the main management objectives of the Property, which are primarily to preserve the outstanding universal value of the Property by:

- 1) preserving undisturbed ecological processes;
- 2) conservation of biodiversity at all its levels (ecosystem, species and genetic) and its essential habitats;
- 3) preserving the integrity of the Property.

A number of measures have also been proposed to achieve the objectives of economic and social development of the Białowieża Forest region, including:

- 1) promoting and supporting the interaction of international, national and local entities;
- 2) creating conditions for sustainable development of the Białowieża Forest communes;
- 3) strengthening the identity and pride of local communities on the basis of knowledge of the natural, cultural and historical values of the Białowieża Forest;
- 4) conducting natural and cultural education and promoting the World Heritage Property;
- 5) using the outstanding universal value of the World Heritage Property in promoting the Białowieża Forest region.

In addition, the Government of the Republic of Poland introduced in 2025, for the first time, a new distribution of subsidies for local government units that have protected areas, taking into account their ecological needs when calculating the amount of subsidies. According to forecasts, the budgets of municipalities in the Białowieża Primeval Forest region will receive additional funds in the following amounts this year: the Białowieża municipality - PLN 1,839,033; the Hajnówka municipality - PLN 8,179,535; the Narewka municipality - PLN 2,466,440. In the following budget years, the subsidy taking into account ecological needs, due to valorisation, will be higher.

13. Finally requests the States Parties to submit to the World Heritage Centre, by 1 February 2025, an updated joint report on the state of conservation of the property, on the implementation of the above and the 2024 mission recommendations, in particular on the urgent measures taken to mitigate the impact of the border barrier infrastructure, for examination by the World Heritage Committee at its

47th session, considering that the urgent conservation needs of this property require a broad mobilisation to preserve its OUV, including the possible inscription on the List of World Heritage in Danger.

The State Party of Poland presents the report.

3. Other current conservation issues identified by the State(s) Party(ies) which may have an impact on the property's Outstanding Universal Value [Note: this includes conservation issues which are not mentioned in the Decision of the World Heritage Committee or in any information request from the World Heritage Centre]

The following conservation issues were identified:

3.1 Anthropopressure related to the migration crisis on the Polish-Belarusian border.

Since 2021, there has been an increase in the number of people crossing the Polish border at non-designated places on the Property. The section running through the Białowieża Forest World Heritage Property is just over 50 km long. In the 3 years since 2021, 40% of all attempts to cross the Polish-Belarusian border were recorded here (Border Guard posts in Białowieża, Narewka and Dubicze Cerkiewne), while in 2023 it was already 63%. The effect of the presence of a large number of people illegally crossing the Polish border in zones I and II (where human presence and interference has so far been very limited) include the lighting of bonfires, trampling of vegetation, scaring of animals and leaving rubbish.

This is associated with increased fire danger, littering in the forest and intensification of the activities of the services protecting the border. The Białowieża National Park and forest districts are constantly monitoring the situation and responding to any irregularities identified. They cooperate on an ongoing basis with the command of the services protecting the border in order to take appropriate measures to minimise the impact on the Property. Periodic training sessions and meetings are organised with soldiers to make them aware of the uniqueness of the Białowieża Forest.

3.2 Fire hazard

Forest fires are considered in the nomination dossier to be one of the most important threats to the Białowieża Forest ecosystems.

In the area of the Białowieża National Park and the Białowieża and Browsk Forest Districts, no fires were recorded between 1.11.2023 and 31.10.2024. In the Hajnówka Forest District, 5 fires broke out in the period in question, where an area of 2.04 ha was burnt.

In order to ensure proper fire protection in the forests, the managers of the Property have taken a number of measures, such as:

- 1) organising comprehensive observation and patrolling of the forests during the fire danger period in order to detect fires and alert on their occurrence;
- 2) maintaining water sources for fire fighting purposes;
- 3) maintenance of fire accesses to water stations, properly signposted;
- 4) maintenance of stations of fire fighting equipment;
- 5) maintaining the fire access network in good condition by removing dangerous trees, bushes and branches and mowing the roadsides;
- 6) mineralisation of fire lanes at tourist facilities.

It should be emphasised that the cooperation of the nature protection services, State Fire Service, as well as of the Voluntary Fire Brigades in the Białowieża Forest region has been tightened, which has contributed to faster detection of fire outbreaks.

4. In conformity with Paragraph 172 of the *Operational Guidelines*, describe any potential major restorations, alterations and/or new construction(s) intended within the property, the buffer zone(s) and/or corridors or other areas, where such developments may affect the Outstanding Universal Value of the property, including authenticity and integrity.

1) In the Białowieża National Park (Zone 1 of the Property), a 400-metre long tourist footbridge was renovated in 2024. The material used for the refurbishment was Hanit, which is much more durable than wood and, most importantly, is bio-neutral (no infestation of alien species). In Zone 2, 430 m of footbridges on hiking trails were renovated;

2) during the period covered by the report, the forest districts did not carry out any investment tasks that could adversely affect the outstanding universal value of the Property;

3) by virtue of Decision No. 9/2024 on the permission for the realisation of a road investment, issued on the basis of the Act of 10 April 2003 on detailed principles of preparation and realisation of investments in the field of public roads, and the Act of 21 August 1997 on real property management, The Podlasie Voivode granted the Podlasie Voivodeship Board in Białystok permission to realise a road investment consisting of the construction and extension of the road No. 687. As a result of this decision, a forest area of approx. 2.5 ha located within the boundaries of the World Heritage Property in zones 3 and 4 of the Browsk Forest District was transferred for the realisation of this investment. Supervision over the implementation of this investment is exercised by the Regional Director of Environmental Protection in Białystok; the timber obtained from the widened road was intended for retail sale to the region's inhabitants;

4) In some locations in the Białowieża Forest, particularly in wetlands along the border strip, the services protecting the border have installed temporary wooden footbridges to facilitate the safe movement of officers in the performance of their duties. The footbridges are also intended to minimise the impact of people moving over sensitive ground, preventing the widening of paths and pressure on bigger fragments of natural habitat. These footbridges will be dismantled once the need for their use has ceased.

5. Public access to the state of conservation report

[Note: this report will be uploaded for public access on the World Heritage Centre's State of conservation Information System (<http://whc.unesco.org/en/soc>). Should your State Party request that the full report should not be uploaded, only the 1-page executive summary provided in point (1.) above will be uploaded for public access].

The State Party of Poland is content for the full State of Conservation Report to be uploaded to the World Heritage Centre's State of Conservation Information System.

6. Signature of the Authority