

CORRESPONDENCE

Conference ‘The Condition of Ecosystems in the Białowieża Forest’, Białystok, 28 January 2022

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On January 28, 2022, a conference was held at the Białystok University of Technology: ‘The condition of ecosystems in the Białowieża Forest’¹. Because of the COVID pandemic, the conference was conducted in hybrid fashion. The on-site part took place in the Big Hall at the Faculty of Electrical Engineering of the Białystok University of Technology, and the remote component was broadcast online on the YouTube channel of the Białystok University of Technology.

The event was held under the honorary patronage of the Minister of Climate and Environment², Anna Moskwa, organised by the Regional Directorate of State Forests in Białystok and the Institute of Forest Sciences of the Białystok University of Technology.

The scientific committee of the conference was composed of: dr hab. Janusz Czerepko (Forest Research Institute), dr Michał Orzechowski (Warsaw University of Life Sciences), prof. Sławomir Bakier (Białystok University of Technology), prof. Marek Konarzewski (University of Białystok), Janusz Łogoźny (Ministry of Climate and Environment) and Jacek Przypaśniak (General Directorate of State Forests)³.

The aim of the conference was, based on the most accurate data available, to familiarise representatives of the scientific world and the public with current information about the ecosystems of the Białowieża Forest.

The inventory of natural resources has been completed: soils and habitats, tree stands, water resources, accumulation of dead matter, natural species from the world of insects and birds. Considering the multidimensional importance of the natural description of the forests of the Białowieża Primeval Forest, it was concluded that it was necessary to organize a meeting presenting the state of knowledge of the forest to the public⁴.

The conference was addressed to scientists involved in research in the Białowieża Forest, employees of national and landscape parks, representatives of government and local government institutions, foresters, members of non-governmental organizations, and other people interested in the nature of the Białowieża Forest⁴.

The conference was opened by dr hab. Marta Kosior-Kazberuk, Rector of Białystok University of Technology and Edward Siarka, Secretary of State in the Ministry of Climate and Environment, Government Plenipotentiary for Forestry and Hunting.

¹ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s4zf8ir_tqU

² <https://pb.edu.pl/ekosystemy2022/patronat-honorowy/>

³ <https://pb.edu.pl/ekosystemy2022/o-konferencji/komitet-naukowy/>

⁴ <https://pb.edu.pl/ekosystemy2022/o-konferencji/cele-konferencji/>

During the conference, it was possible to address questions to the authors of the speeches. The conference was moderated by prof. Sławomir Bakier (Białystok University of Technology).

In the conference, which was divided into three segments, presentations were given by:

- ✚ Barbara Rajkowska (Center for Sustainable Development, Institute of Environmental Protection – National Research Institute) gave a presentation entitled 'Białowieża Forest – What about this management plan?' She provided information about the design assumptions, tasks to be implemented, and the current stage of work on the management plan for the Białowieża Forest UNESCO World Heritage Site. She indicated the need for the media to publish information about the project and discussed difficulties and issues that might affect its implementation. Finally, the composition of the Steering Committee for the preparation of the management plan was presented.
- ✚ Jan Tabor (Acting Deputy Director General of the State Forests for forest management) delivered a lecture on the report on the condition of the Białowieża Primeval Forest. He presented the individual parts of the report, which was divided into four parts:
 - Part I: Introductory material including general assumptions, expert opinions, formal grounds for appointing the team to prepare the report, the substantive scope of the report, the characteristics of the 'Inventory of the Białowieża Forest' as material for the report, the characteristics of the Forest, introduction to the report, and climate changes in the Białowieża Primeval Forest;
 - Part II: The main part of the report, containing the following issues: tree species and stands, flora, plant communities, natural habitats, saproxylic beetles, analysis of the results of trapping ground beetles (epigeic beetles), western barbastelle inventory, detailed multifaceted analysis of the bird inventory results, accounting for data in the available literature, mushrooms, and study of interactions between elements of the nature inventory with the use of neural networks;
 - Part III The archaeological heritage of the Polish part of the Białowieża Forest and a historical outline of the Polish part of the Białowieża Forest;
 - Part IV Synthesis and summary, including introductory issues, scope and purpose of the report synthesis, summary of the most important detailed results obtained, summary of basic industry results, discussion of the most important results, and cognitive and practical conclusions.
- ✚ Janusz Porowski (Forest Management and Geodesy Office, Białystok Branch) presented a paper entitled 'Results of the Stand Inventory of the Białowieża Primeval Forest Districts' as part of the sixth review of forest management, *i.e.*, long-term dynamics of the species composition of stands of the Białowieża Forest Promotional Complex. The author presented basic data on the area of the Białowieża Forest, the structure of stands by age classes and subclasses in the area and volume system, and the species structure by prevailing species in terms of area and volume. He also compared the area by dominant and actual tree species and presented changes in the average volume of dead wood in relation to the habitat types of forests and stands with different functions (economic, protection, and reserve).
- ✚ Jarosław Lickiewicz (Forest Management and Geodesy Office, Białystok Branch) in his speech entitled 'The Condition and Trends of Forest Habitats in the Białowieża Primeval Forest in the Light of Soil and Habitat Works' discussed the history of soil and habitat studies carried out in the Białowieża Forest, units distinguished in habitat studies, the percentage share of individual soil types, surface variation in the condition of forest habitats, and the optimal species composition of stands in individual forest habitat types in the Promotional Forest Complex 'Puszcza Białowieska'.

- ✚ Dr hab. Aleh Marozau, University Professor (Białystok University of Technology, Institute of Forest Sciences) gave a presentation entitled ‘The Condition of the Relict Fir in the Białowieża Primeval Forest’, in which he discussed basic data on the occurrence of silver fir in Europe. The author referred to the populations located in the Białowieża Forest (Tisovik Forest District in the Belarusian part and populations in the Polish part – Białowieża Forest District and Hajnówka Forest District).
- ✚ Dr hab. Ryszard Szczygieł, Professor of the Institute (Forest Research Institute), presented a paper entitled ‘Fire Protection of the Białowieża Primeval Forest’. He discussed the work related to the preparation of the Forest Fire Protection and Suppression Plan for the Polish part of the Białowieża Forest Cross-Border World Heritage Site. During the presentation, he indicated the necessary actions to be implemented in order to ensure the fire safety of the Białowieża Forest.
- ✚ Dr hab. Mateusz Grygoruk, University Professor (Warsaw University of Life Sciences, Institute of Environmental Engineering, Department of Hydrology, Meteorology and Water Management) gave a presentation entitled ‘Water Resources of the Białowieża Forest: Stability, Changeability and the Necessity of Action’. He presented and characterised indicators related to water resources, threats, and planned activities in the Białowieża Forest.
- ✚ Prof. Bogdan Brzezicki (Warsaw University of Life Sciences, Institute of Forest Sciences, Department of Silviculture) presented a lecture entitled ‘Demographic Curves as a Tool for Shaping the Structure of Forest Stands’. During the presentation, he presented the features that make up the Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) of the UNESCO World Heritage Site Białowieża Forest and assessed the effects of covering 75% of the stands of the Białowieża Forest under strict protection. He drew attention long-term likelihood of significant simplification and depletion of the species composition and structure of many stands, which in turn may lead to the disappearance of many elements of local biodiversity. He indicated an alternative to strict protection through the implementation of a demographic approach that could ensure a large structural diversity of forest communities and the continuity of forest tree species occurrence. He emphasized that the demographic approach meets the main demands contained in the latest EU Forest Strategy, the overarching goal of which is to ensure that forests in Europe will continue to be growing, larger, biodiverse, resilient, and multi-functional.