

The European Beech Forest Network addresses the States Parties of the extended serial UNESCO World Heritage property

“Ancient and Primeval Beech Forests of the Carpathians and Other Regions of Europe (Albania, Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Italy, Germany, Romania, Slovenia, Slovakia, Spain and Ukraine)”

From 12-15 October 2017, 33 experts representing 12 European countries convened on the Isle of Vilm, in the Baltic Sea, to further develop the European Beech Forest Network. The meeting was held in the course of a project funded by the German Ministry of Environment, Nature Conservation, Building and Nuclear Safety, and commissioned by the German Federal Agency for Nature Conservation.

The European Beech Forest Network has been institutionalized as a registered association according to German law and has the goal to build and grow a platform of interested parties to develop and share knowledge and experience with the expressed intention of influencing policy, management and overall protection and practice of the European beech forest ecosystem – with a special emphasis on old-growth forests in wild and wilderness areas. The association exclusively and directly pursues non-profit purposes to promote science and research, environmental protection, landscape management and environmental education. So far, the European Beech Forest Network supports 126 protected valuable beech forests from 25 countries.

At the meeting on Vilm the members of the association:

1. *Celebrated* the decision of the UNESCO World Heritage Committee made on 7 July 2017 to approve the extension of *Primeval Beech Forests of the Carpathians and the Ancient Beech Forests of Germany, Slovakia, Ukraine and Germany*, to become *Ancient and Primeval Beech Forests of the Carpathians and Other Regions of Europe*, Albania, Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Italy, Germany, Romania, Slovenia, Slovakia, Spain and Ukraine, on the World Heritage List.
2. *Recognized* that the management of the extended serial World Heritage property, which – with 78 component parts in 45 protected areas in 12 countries – is the most complex and ambitious in the UNESCO portfolio, requires extraordinary efforts.
3. *Reflected* that this inscription was the outcome of an ongoing process of exchange and intensive collaboration amongst the members of the European Beech Forest Network that represents a larger set of countries and valuable old-growth beech forests than included in the serial World Heritage property, but that has been actively promoting the extension nomination and inscription.
4. *Confirmed* that the activities of the network target the conservation management of the wider European beech forest ecosystems that also include the existing serial World Heritage property and potential candidates for further extension.
5. *Ratified* the statements expressed in their resolutions published in 2015 and 2016¹ as well as the Memorandum for *Protection of the Primary Forest Heritage of Romania*².

¹ <http://www.centreforeconics.org/news-and-events/press-release-downloads/vilm-resolution-european-beech-forest-network/> and <http://www.centreforeconics.org/news-and-events/press-release-downloads/vilm-resolution-european-beech-forest-network-2016/>

² <https://www.euronatur.org/en/news/detail/news/handover-of-the-memorandum-for-protection-of-the-primary-forest-heritage-of-romania/>

6. *Expressed* their serious concerns that the observed problems of unsustainable logging and forest degradation in the Carpathians, where the largest old-growth beech forest remnants are located, seem to have accelerated and aggravated in the last year.
7. *Concluded* that there must be a concerted pan-European effort to safeguard the last old-growth beech forest ecosystems in times of rapidly growing global demands for timber and tree biomass.
8. *Addressed* the insufficient capacities in many protected areas needed for effectively meeting the management obligations arising from the World Heritage Convention.
9. *Called* for following the recommendations under Article 5 of the World Heritage Convention referring to the establishment of national or regional education centers and fostering relevant research.
10. *Reminded* that the joint management of a serial site must include the active exchange of and cooperation between experts amongst all the sites empowering the staff of the protected areas.
11. *Echoed* the requests formulated by the UNESCO World Heritage Committee in their decision on the extension of the serial property³, especially referring to conserving the functionality of the forests in the component parts and their surroundings, and implementing an effective buffer zone management; this especially means that local entities and stakeholders need substantial support for safeguarding the integrity of the component parts and making use of their potential for socioeconomic development.
12. *Underlined* the risk of the World Heritage property being put to the red list if the requests expressed in the World Heritage Committee decision 41 COM 8b.7 are not decisively addressed by the States Parties in a timely manner.
13. *Urged* the States Parties to have a special focus on connectivity of component parts as requested by the World Heritage Committee and established in the work program of the Integrated Management System.
14. *Reminded* that shortcomings in the trilateral management of the site between Ukraine, Slovak Republic and Germany should be an incentive to strengthen and institutionalize both international cooperation and strategic development for the serial transnational property.
15. *Suggested* an improved integration of the various management levels from the Joint Management Committee, the national coordination bodies, the managers of the protected areas as well as the local stakeholders.
16. *Stressed* the importance of empowering and integrating civil society in forest ecosystem management and conservation.
17. *Welcomed* the short-term initiative offered by Austria to support the coordination of the extended serial transnational World Heritage property.
18. *Demanded* the States Parties to the serial World Heritage property to establish a permanent and effective secretariat as mechanism for its integrated management as well as to ensure long-term sustainable financing (such as potentially setting up a trust fund).
19. *Encouraged* the States Parties to incorporate the conservation of UNESCO World Natural Heritage into national legislative frameworks.
20. *Offered* to further contribute expertise and capabilities of the European Beech Forest Network and its members to the management of the World Heritage property.

³ 41 COM 8b.7: <http://whc.unesco.org/en/decisions/6879>

Signed by

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Isle of Vilm, Germany, 15 October 2017