BULGARIA

THE PIRIN CASE

Since 2016, WWF Bulgaria has been fighting to prohibit new logging and construction in Pirin National Park. These activities would not only endanger many species that depend on the area's old-growth forests, but also contravene EU legislation. After all other efforts to stop the planned construction and logging had failed, in March 2017 WWF Bulgaria and the Association of Parks in Bulgaria (APB) filed a lawsuit against the Ministry of Environment and Water's decision not to conduct a Strategic Environmental Assessment of the expansion plan.

On 29 April 2020, the Bulgarian Supreme Administrative Court definitively ruled that the new management plan's omission of environmental and Natura 2000 impact assessments is illegal. The court case, which lasted three years, was finally won by WWF and APB and thousands of supporters from Bulgaria and around the globe.

Pirin has exceptionally beautiful mountain scenery and glacial lakes, and is an example of a healthy, functioning Balkan uplands ecosystem that is home to protected species such as brown bears, grey wolves, chamois and the Eurasian three-toed woodpecker, the rarest woodpecker in Europe. The natural coniferous forests shelter a **1,300 year-old** endemic Bosnian pine tree (Baykusheva mura) which is believed to be the oldest tree on the Balkan peninsula.

Source/more information here.

STURGEONS RESTOCKING

As part of its efforts to save the last vital populations of wild sturgeons in Europe, over the past five years WWF Bulgaria has organised several restockings and released over 80,000 baby sturgeons, including sterlets, belugas and Russian sturgeons, into the Danube. They were raised in conditions close to their natural environment, in earth-fill pools, and fed with natural food. WWF tested the fish to make sure they are genetically pure because hybridization is a major problem for the survival of endangered species.

All sturgeons were marked with a magnetic tag, which carries a unique number that can be read with a special reader. This will allow us to track the sturgeons' migration routes and breeding areas. Knowing where they are will help us to better protect these ancient fish.

Sturgeon have outlasted the dinosaurs, but now teeter on the very brink of extinction. They are vulnerable to overfishing and interference in their natural habitat. According to the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), these remarkable fish are "more critically endangered than any other group of species.

BEAR RELOCATION

In September 2021, WWF was asked to help address a problem with bears in Bulgaria. A female bear and her two cubs were frequently entering a village in the Rhodope mountains, where they caused damage and disturbed the local people. A permit was issued to shoot the mother bear. In order to save its life, WWF managed to catch the bear, collar it and translocate it to a remote area determined by the local forest authorities. This was the first ever translocation of a "problematic" bear in Bulgaria with the purpose to save it - an important precedent for managing conflicts with bears in future.

Unfortunately, this story did not end well. The bear was old, her teeth were in bad condition, and she had been habituated to easy food around settlements. She returned to the village, causing even more damage to domestic animals. The GPS collar enabled us to follow the bear's movement and report it to the authorities. Sadly, the bear was eventually killed illegally. WWF experts have continued searching for the cubs, but so far without success. We suspect that both have been poached.

In November 2021, we translocated a young male bear from the town of Gabrovo to a reserve in the Central Balkans National Park. The bear had a record of causing damage to domestic animals and property, but he did not show any signs of aggression towards humans. Currently the bear is moving inside the park and keeping a good distance from human settlements.

BE PART OF OUR JOURNEY!

Help build a world where people and nature thrive!

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