



60 YEARS
OF ACTION FOR NATURE

SLOVAKIA

NATIONAL OLD-GROWTH FOREST NATURE RESERVE

On 17 September 2020, WWF Slovakia and the NGO Prales submitted to Slovak Minister of the Environment Ján Budaj a petition with more than 30,000 signatures supporting the declaration of the Old Growth Forest Reserve. The petition was the last step in the long-term efforts of the two organizations to protect the old growth forests remaining in the country - efforts that had begun years earlier with the mapping and identification of old-growth forests and continued through numerous negotiations and the preparation of the conservation proposal itself.

Mapping of old-growth forests lasted from 2009 to 2015 and revealed that 10,180 hectares of old growth forests remained in Slovakia, of which one third was unprotected or insufficiently protected. This led in 2018 to WWF Slovakia and Prales preparing a proposal for establishment of a nature reserve that would protect these exceptional forests. Negotiations with the Slovak state forest enterprise (LESY SR) secured a public commitment by the state-owned company that the identified areas would not be touched until a final decision about the proposal was made. In 2020, a campaign run by WWF Slovakia and Prales collected 30,759 signatures supporting establishment of a new nature reserve Old Growth Forests of Slovakia.

The Government of the Slovak Republic approved establishment of the nature reserve on 3 November 2021, and on 1 December 2021 it became reality. The reserve includes a total of 6,462 hectares of old-growth forests on 76 parcels of state-owned land across different parts of Slovakia.

RIVER BARRIER REMOVAL ACTIONS

In June 2021, WWF Slovakia launched an initiative to remove old river barriers on Slovak rivers. The first river barrier was removed on the Hučava River in the middle of Slovakia in cooperation with the Slovak Water Management Enterprise and with financial support of individual donors from across Europe through the Dam Removal Europe crowdfunding platform set up by WWF Netherlands.

The removal of the barrier on the Hučava is just a beginning. Together with other partners, WWF Slovakia is already finalising an evaluation of other old and useless dams and other barriers suitable for removal. Their removal will contribute to achieving the EU's aim, contained in the EU Biodiversity Strategy, of making 25,000 kilometres of rivers free flowing by 2030. More importantly, it will help free Slovakia's rivers and restore the vital functions of the river landscapes, with benefits for people and nature.

IMPROVE THE COEXISTENCE BETWEEN HUMANS AND LARGE CARNIVORES

Central and Southeastern Europe is home to about two-thirds of Europe's populations of large carnivores, including brown bears, wolves and lynx. There are approximately 12,000 wolves in Europe, of which 1,000 - 1,800 are found in Slovakia. Until 2020, Slovakia, unlike neighbouring countries, permitted wolf hunting during the hunting season by setting high annual quotas. Over the last two decades, almost 1,800 wolves have been legally killed.

In response, a campaign for the full protection of wolves was launched by WWF Slovakia and 30 partner organisations. Their joint petition to stop wolf hunting received over 51,000 signatures and massive attention from media and the public. The pressure was enough to secure passage of new legislation banning hunting of wolves in Slovakia as of 1 June 2021.

However, large carnivores continue to be threatened not only by illegal hunting but also by increasing fragmentation and shrinkage of their habitats brought about by the construction of roads and other infrastructure. According to the latest study, populations of lynx in Slovakia are stagnating.



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