

Via Baltica update - new imminent damage to Natura 2000 site

We urge the European Commission to accelerate its legal action: Via Baltica construction plans are progressing to damage the Knyszyn Primeval Forest EU-protected Natura 2000 site. The Commission should accelerate its legal action on the Katarynka-Przewalanka section immediately by sending Poland the reasoned opinion and calling on Poland to halt the road works unless the European nature directives requirements are fulfilled.

Rospuda Valley saved ... but Via Baltica destruction continues in other Natura 2000 sites

The Polish Government has announced it will no longer build a road across the Rospuda Valley which is a Natura 2000 site protected under EU law. The bypass around the town of Augustów will instead follow a route recommended by a new Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA). But preparation works for the other sections of the Via Baltica corridor are continuing to be progressed.

Strategic Assessment rejects damaging route – it must not be ignored

A Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) of the Via Baltica was approved over a year ago. This report recommends that the Via Baltica should be routed to the west via Lomza, NOT via Białystok (along road no. 8/S-8). However, the Polish Government has still not taken any official step to change the route. Moreover, damaging road projects along the “old” (road no. 8/S-8) route are advancing and about to start within the boundaries of EU-protected Knyszyn Primeval Forest.

Construction – and destruction – of EU Transport Network continues

Construction works are still continuing on the Białystok-Katrynka section of road no. 8 entering the Knyszyn Forest Natura 2000 site.

The most worrying news is that the upgrade of the next, 12 km-long, section of road no. 8 - the Katrynka-Przewalanka - involving cutting the Knyszyn Forest Natura 2000 site and damaging the habitat types from Annex I of the EU Habitats Directive¹ and affecting at least 15 bird species listed in the Annex I of the Birds Directive as well as mammals listed in annex II of the Habitats Directive (inc. wolf, lynx, European bison) – is about to start.

The environmental consent for this project may be granted in August. The investor applied for the “immediate implementation status” for this consent which means the forest cutting may start as soon as the consent is granted without possibility to suspend it by any legal appeals in Poland. It also means that it will not be possible to implement any potential compensation measures to ensure the site integrity before damage starts.

¹ including the priority habitat types: 91D0, 91E0.

The new documentation for this road project is still in breach of the European nature directives and does not properly address the EC's concerns expressed in the Letter of Formal Notice sent to Poland in March 2009. For example, the EIA report does not include an adequate assessment of alternative solutions and presents misleading information about the numbers of car accidents giving the impression that the problem is increasing (whereas in fact the trend is decreasing) in support of its arguments that there is an overriding public interest on health and safety grounds. NGOs believe there are no reliable arguments for proceeding with this investment on the basis of Article. 6.4 of the Habitats Directive.

Other road projects affecting the Knyszyn Forest Natura 2000 site are progressing at the same time: Wasilków Bypass and Sokółka Bypass along the road S-19. The lack of assessment of cumulative impacts of these projects in combination on Knyszyn Forest is a clear breach of Article 6.3 of the Habitats Directive.

For further information

Małgorzata Górską, OTOP – the Polish Society for the Protection of Birds (BirdLife Partner in Poland), malgorzata.gorska@otop.org.pl, tel. + 48 605 072 963.

Marta Majka Wiśniewska, CEE Bankwatch Network/Polish Green Network, mwisniewska@bankwatch.org, +48 602 888 143.

“VIA BALTICA” - FIRST PAN-EUROPEAN TRANSPORT CORRIDOR
 - routes according to the SEA
 - road sections mentioned in EC’s LFN (19 March 2009)

