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Dr. Libor Ambrozek
Minister of Environment of the Czech Republic
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Czech Republic

26 March 2003

Re: Working towards better protection of Sumava National Park

Your Excellency,

We would like to thank you for providing us with the final report of the IUCN mission to Sumava National Park and we appreciate that WWF representatives were able to participate in this mission as observers.

WWF has been engaged since 1990 in the establishment of the Sumava NP and in promoting better protection of this unique forest landscape. Sumava NP - as part of the largest continuous forest area in Central Europe - is of significant importance for forest conservation in Central Europe. With its peat bogs and waterlogged spruce forests, fragments of old-growth forests and many flagship species such as lynx, capercaillie, black grouse and ural owl, as well as endemic fauna, the Sumava NP is of outstanding ecological value for Europe.

WWF's engagement, however, has suffered several setbacks, such as during the Sumava NP workshop from 5 to 7 June 2000. Implementation of the agreement, reached by all participants, failed due to lack of support from the Park Administration. We were, therefore, delighted that you invited the WCPA experts to the Sumava NP to find a solution to these problems.

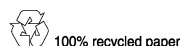
With this letter, WWF would like to support the general findings and recommendations of the IUCN report in January 2003 and, in particular, would like to stress the following recommendations:

1) The establishment of a coherent zoning system

- Establish a compact core zone where the principle of non-intervention is applied.
- Accelerate the transition process to transform parts of zone II into the core zone in order to cover 30 to 40 % of the NP within 3 to 5 years.
- Merge newly-designated core zone areas with the currently existing 135 core zone fragments to form a few compact blocks.
- Establish a buffer zone around the core zones, where there would be low-impact interventions, to prevent the spreading of bark beetle and small-scale restoration.

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- The transformation of artificial stands into natural mixed forest would be permitted.

2) **Revision of the Management Plan**

The Management Plan (MP) should be revised and the strategy, as well as the short and mid-term objectives, should support the long-term goal of the Sumava NP. Additionally, the changes in zoning proposed by the WCPA experts require further adaptation of the MP. It is most desirable to conduct the revision of the MP in close coordination with the Bayerischer Wald NP and adjacent forest owners in Austria.

3) **Involvement of local people**

The local people should be involved in decision making concerning the future management of the Sumava NP and its buffer zone to generate local ownership, which is crucial for the successful implementation of the revised MP. Necessary steps have to be taken to provide the local people with benefits from the NP, e.g. income from sustainable tourism. At the same time they need to understand why certain activities are being carried out inside the Park. For example so-called sanitation measures which, in many cases at present are fairly intensive forestry activities connected with commercial timber trade, do raise serious doubts in people's minds about the way the NP Administration implements the Park's concept.

4) **Participatory decision making and clear communication**

Local people and relevant stakeholders, such as scientists and NGOs, should be given the opportunity to participate in decision-making processes to revise the zoning system and the Management Plan. A formal procedure for stakeholder participation should be implemented, as well as for future decision making.

A clear communications strategy should be developed so that the local population, stakeholders, and tourists understand the outstanding ecological values of Sumava, the long-term goal of the NP, and why certain management policies are implemented.

WWF supports the standpoint of the WCPA experts that the long-term goal of the Sumava NP justifies its categorization as an IUCN II Protected Area. To meet the IUCN Category II requirements it is, however, crucial to allow - in the long term - natural processes to occur in the Sumava NP over most of its territory. These also include non-interference with bark beetle outbreaks in the core zone. Other famous forest National Parks in Central and Eastern Europe have demonstrated that support from local people and visitors can be mobilized for such natural processes through public awareness and education programmes.



Generally, WWF's impression is that a conservative forest management approach currently prevails over a modern nature conservation approach in the management of the Park. However, recent developments raise our hopes that the situation will improve in the near future.

We would be happy to discuss the next steps in working towards the better conservation and management of the Sumava NP with you at your earliest convenience.

Yours sincerely,

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Director, Europe/Middle East Programme
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