

A-projekt, n.o., Liptovský Hrádok, Bratislava Regional Conservation Association, Bratislava, Club of Nature Guards, Bratislava, Ekopolis Foundation, Banská Bystrica, Living Planet civic association, Piešťany, Non-governmental Committee Our Tatras, Bratislava, Regional Association for Nature Conservation and Sustainable Development, Society for Protection of Birds in Slovakia, Bratislava, Wolf Protection Movement, Tulčík, Tatry

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**The Tatra mission of the World Conservation Union**

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**RE: Standpoint of the Slovak non-governmental organizations concerning mitigation of the threats to Tatra national park and proposing alternative ways of development**

Bratislava, April 30, 2005

Dear colleagues and friends from nature conservation,

We highly appreciate that you have given a part of your precious time devoted to investigation of the situation in the Tatra National Park after the November 1994 windstorm (which severely hit more than 12 000 ha of the forest) also to hear the voices of the NGOs.

To clearly express our standpoint, we summarize below the main threats which jeopardise the main mission of the Tatra national park as defined in the Slovak legislation and in the international standards (IUCN, WWF, PAN Parks) and we add our proposals.

**MAIN THREATS TO THE TATRA NATIONAL PARK**

- **Forestry:** Intervention in the core zone of the TANAP – planned and partially on-going extraction of the fallen trees in the A zone, on-going large-scale logging and extraction of as many fallen trees as possible in the B-zone – leaving no dead trees, just remnants of biomass – roots, stems, branches, plans to use pesticides to stop potential outbreak of the bark beetle *Ips typographus*. All this will have negative impacts on TANAP, especially on biodiversity, but also on soil, nutrient cycles, water regime and ecological integrity of the future forest.
- **Mass tourism:** Using large natural disturbance as an opportunity to develop new ski pistes and to enlarge mountain transport facilities – new ski lifts, transport stations, equipment, pipelines for the production of the technical snow, etc. Expansion of hotels, restaurants and roads will naturally follow the expansion of skiing opportunities. All this will have negative environmental impacts esp. on water regime, biodiversity, threatened species and will further drastically decrease the ecological integrity of Tatra ecosystems, especially forests.
- **National park urbanization:** In the past, the Tatra National Park suffered from the severe antiecollogical way of urbanization, examples are the localities of Štrbské pleso, Smokovce, etc. Currently we face the plans to decrease the level of protection in the settlements and on ski pistes inside the Tatra National Park to degree 2 instead of current degree 3. If this happens, unregulated urbanization of the TANAP will outburst, including plans to build luxury rent houses for permanent or seasonal living of very rich people inside the TANAP.
- **Change of the national park functions:** The above threats to the Tatra National Park are reinforced by support from the government and big financial groups, which define clear support for extraction of as much wood as possible as well as support for mass tourism

expansion and further large-scale urbanization inside the TANAP. There are even attempts to redefine the functions of the Tatra National Park after the windstorm, which threaten the basic status of this national park, including large areas of the Natura 2000 localities.

## OUR PROPOSALS CONCERNING TANAP FUTURE

Having in mind that Tatra National Park represents a great natural heritage of both national and European importance, we propose the following actions to mitigate the threats to TANAP:

### Nature conservation

- Dismiss antiecological plans and activities: We require that politicians stop any support for those plans and activities inside the Tatra National Park, which disregard nature protection and represent a threat to national and European natural heritage. Especially dangerous are attempts to prepare law measures supporting large scale development in TANAP.
- Respect for priority of nature conservation: All the decisions of state authorities or municipalities concerning economic and social development of Tatra region should be based on priority of the strict protection of the national and European natural heritage in TANAP.
- Strict adherence to law: We require to adhere strictly to existing Law no. 543/2002 on Nature and Landscape Protection (adopted in 2002), which incorporates also well recognized principles and standards of nature conservation required by the European Union, including strict protection of the Natura 2000 sites.
- Respect for international standards: We require to adhere strictly to international guidelines for protected area management, esp. concerning national park, set by the World Conservation Union (IUCN). This means also that the competence of the TANAP administration should be strengthened, to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the national park management.
- Respect for management plan: The Management plan for Tatra National Park was prepared by the TANAP administration with the largest consultation process with experts from various fields of science and with local stakeholders – as was never seen before in Slovakia. Thus it is necessary that all parts of this management plan come into full life without any delay.
- Approve the zonation: Zonation of the Tatra national park, compatible with IUCN standards, should be approved. This zonation of TANAP had already been prepared with a relatively minimal A-zone, it should be approved as soon as possible, brought into life and fully respected.
- Respect for A-zone regime: A-zone should be left without any intervention, concerning also forestry, tourism. This most precious zone inside the TANAP is critical for protection of the habitats of both national and European significance and for the survival of the threatened and protected species. To preserve viability of populations requires strictly protected core A-zone.

### Forestry

- Dismiss antiecological plans and activities: Plans to extract as many trees as possible, undermining nature protection priorities should be stopped. As well as the plans to change the status of 8000 ha of the TANAP forest land (2/3 of the forest area hit by the storm) to a kind of recreational forest-park (which is quite a different category than that of a national park).
- Leave fallen trees in A-zone: Pressures to extract the fallen trees even in the core A-zone should be opposed as these plans threaten the essential values of the TANAP and may lead to large disrespect of nature conservation regulations also by other stakeholders.
- Leave part of dead wood in B-zone: Plans to extract all the trees from B-zone should be re-evaluated, we require to leave at least 20-30% of dead trees on the spot, not just 20-30% of dead biomass (roots, stems, branches). Dead trees will support self-organization processes.

- Not to use the pesticides: Plans to use pesticides should be fully abandoned, both their application from air and directly on land. There is enough scientific evidence that only a small percentage of pesticides hits target pests, much larger part ends in air, water, soil and biota and leads to loss of biodiversity. Pesticides either directly kill keystone and threatened species or through the process of bioaccumulation severely disturb their reproduction and genetics.
- Prefer forest renewal close to nature: Use ways of forest renewal which are close to nature and which provide space for self-organization renewal processes, definitely in A-zone and at least in parts (20-30%) also in the B-zone. Self-renewal is the best way for future healthier forest, which will be more resistant to disturbances caused by wind-storms, immissions, etc.

### Tourism

- Dismiss plans and activities to expand mass tourism, esp. skiing: Plans to largely expand mass tourism, especially the skiing areas, should be stopped, the number of visitors, skiers and proportion and localisation of skiing pistes and mountain transport facilities are already beyond the carrying capacity of the TANAP ecosystems. Moreover, there is well documented scientific evidence of the negative impacts of large-scale mass skiing on nature.
- Stop pressure to decrease the degrees of protection in strictly protected areas: Contrary to nature protection mission of TANAP are also plans to support by law the existence of recreational facilities (e.g. mountain challets, transport facilities even in the areas with the highest degree of protection inside the national park). The decrease of the level of protection will lead to rapid expansion of transport facilities, restaurants, and number of visitors in the most vulnerable areas beyond the timberline and inside the most precious areas which are critical for maintenance of the ecological integrity of Tatra ecosystems. It can also lead to the fatal conflicts with EU environmental policy, esp. with the EU Natura 2000 policy.
- Nature friendly tourism as our alternative: Instead of mass tourism and building entertainment parks inside TANAP, environmentally more friendly tourism should develop, Tatra mountains have concentration of natural beauties and values on a relatively small territory. It is remarkable that these values are comparable even with the values of the famous Yellowstone National Park, which are spread on a territory 12 times larger than TANAP. Thus Tatra mountains have a great potential esp. for ecotourism, but also for agrotourism and ethnotourism.
- Tourism with benefits for nature, tourists and local inhabitants: It is remarkable that these new, environmentally friendly ways of tourism have a potential to bring much higher economic profit to the inhabitants of submountain villages than a mass tourism.

### Urbanization

- Dismiss antiecological plans and activities: On-going procedures to decrease the degree of the protection in Vysoké Tatry urban settlements below the level of the national park should be stopped. Otherwise unregulated urbanization will enlarge existing and create new sources of stress for precious TANAP ecosystems, which are both of national and European importance.
- Promote landscape-ecological planning and nature conservation priority: The territorial plan of the Vysoké Tatry town development should be much more environmentally friendly, which means necessity to fully reflect the fact that this town is „unhappily“ situated inside the Tatra National Park and should not expect to possess the advantages of the classical „cities“.
- Respect priority of nature protection inside the whole territory of TANAP: We require to respect functions of TANAP derived from its status of a national park and its special values and to subordinate to them all the activities inside TANAP. We require to respect priority of nature conservation, as defined in Slovak legislation and international standards (esp. well respected IUCN categories of protected areas and management guidelines), including soil protection, water retention, important climatic, curative and rehabilitation functions of Tatras.

Research, planning and participatory management - we strongly recommend

- Research: To support independent research concerning causes and impacts of the November windstorm in TANAP, including modelling of the various scenarios of future development.
- Planning: To utilize landscape ecological planning nad EIA procedure even in the planning level, while taking into account necessity to provide enough space for natural processes.
- Participation: To use participatory approach in seeking long-term solutions to Tatra region, involving local inhabitants, owners, experts, NGOs and young people into decision-making process.
- Cooperation: To develop cooperation between government and the interested NGOs and other civic structures, to take the opinions of non-governmental sector into account seriously.

Thank you for investing your time to be informed about the attitudes of the various Slovak environmental NGOs and about their common standpoint concerning TANAP after the storm.

With best wishes

In the name of the NGOs participated at the IUCN meeting in Tatras: Ing. Peter Sabo, CSc,  
The Non-governmental Committee Our Tatras

Signed: the representatives of the NGOs which participated in IUCN meeting, April 17, 2005

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