

1. Why is there a controversy over the Białowieża Forest?

The controversy arises over the methods and human involvement in protection of this precious area. The Białowieża Forest, as we know it, is a unique remnant of ancient forests. But its biodiversity will decline without human help. Foresters want to prevent this. However, the opponents of the State Forests' activities are in favour of leaving the nature to itself and preserving its processes - even if it involves the extinction of certain species or valuable habitats.

4. What threat does bark beetles pose?

The European spruce bark beetle feeds under the bark. It can kill a tree within a month. Usually, only old or weakened trees fall victim, but presently the teeming population of bark beetle also attacks young, healthy and strong trees. Insect outbreaks, called gradations, happen cyclically every few to dozen odd years. So far, the foresters have countered them effectively, but a few years ago their actions were hampered.

6. Was it ever possible to save those trees from the bark beetle?

Yes. Actions based on scientific knowledge and experience would allow the foresters to end the gradation at its onset. This had been done numerous times in similar situations over the last decades. In the Białowieża Forest districts, all affected spruces were removed to prevent the bark beetle from spreading to other areas. But the scale of logging was usually very limited. This was changed by the new forest management plans for Białowieża, Browsk and Hajnówka districts for the years 2012-2021. Wood harvesting limits were radically decreased and more areas of the forest were excluded from human involvement. This prevented the foresters from removing necessary numbers of infested spruce trees. The bark beetle population thrived, attacking more and more areas of the Białowieża Forest.

8. Why do foresters fight the bark beetle?

It is required by law. According to the Forest Protection Act, the foresters' task is to protect the forests, which includes detection and control of infestations. The only known method of fighting bark beetle is to remove the affected trees before it spreads. Although stopping the gradation is no longer possible, the scale of disaster can still be reduced.

10. Are dead spruces dangerous to people?

Dead spruces, especially the ones located by road sides and hiking trails, are extremely dangerous. After its death, a tree may stand from 2 to 8 years, then it breaks. There are over 100 thousand of such trees standing around the roads. Soon, dozens of thousands of trees killed by the bark beetle will start collapsing. If they are not removed by the foresters, access to the Białowieża Forest will have to be prohibited. Dead trees also increase the risk of fire, especially during dry summers and intensified tourist traffic."

21. Why cannot the Białowieża Forest be left to itself?

Due to strong human imprint on the Białowieża Forest in the past and to its relatively small area, leaving it at this moment would be very risky. Today, the post-infestation areas left without any human intervention are dominated by hornbeams, hazel and invasive grass at the expense of other, more indigenous species. Research conducted within a strict nature reserve shows that leaving the forest to itself leads to reduction of biodiversity and disappearance of many valued species.

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<https://www.lasy.gov.pl/en/information/news/frequently-asked-questions-about-the-bialowieza-forest>