



## **Policy Options for Storm Damage Management in Protected Areas**

*International workshop*

### **REPORT OF THE INTERNATIONAL WORKSHOP**

*ŠTRBSKÉ PLESO, HIGH TATRAS, SLOVAK REPUBLIC, 4-6 MAY 2009*

#### **Introduction**

Some 40 experts and representatives of different stakeholders of the High Tatras region protected areas as well as storm damage experts from a number of institutions took a part in the workshop. Objectives of the workshop were to provide information on the forest damage current situation and damage area management in the region after the windstorm occurred in November 2004. In particular, the participants evaluated the developments for the last four years, discussed the future possible solutions, including the treatment of spruce bark beetle infestation and fire protections issues in protected areas of national and international importance. The policy options for storm damaged areas management including the participatory approach were explored at plenary and working group discussions.

The detailed questionnaire on different aspects of forest policy and storm-damaged forest management in protected areas was distributed and completed by participants. The replies to the questionnaire will be processed and analyzed by national experts.

The Programme of the workshop included the field trip organised for the participants to the areas affected by storm in the Tatra National Park, including Ticha valley, Koprova valley and Vyšné Hágy.

#### **Background**

The experience in the forest management in damaged areas, accumulated during the last years was taken into the full consideration and paved the ground for the conclusions and recommendations of the workshop.

#### **Significant work was implemented by all stakeholders in the region to mitigate the impacts and consequences of the storm damage. That included:**

Operational approach in the first hours and days after the windstorm was the strongest aspect of after-storm actions. In particular:

- Conceptual and strategic teams were built immediately
- Food, energy, water and remedies supplies were urgently renewed
- Recreational values of the regions were largely renewed within the first year after the windstorm (tourist lines, skiing tracks)

- On time removal of calamity wood outside the areas under high level of protection was done operationally
- Fire risk was eliminated within one year after the windstorm in the vicinity of municipalities

As far as to the conceptual decisions, the following has been done:

- Active scientific support was provided for forest users
- Conception of the calamity processing, rehabilitation and protection was elaborated
- Extreme solutions (total wood processing/remaining at a stand) were rejected in the beginning
- Differentiated management of affected areas was applied as far as intensity of calamity wood removal
- Immediately after the forest fire in 2005 small water reservoirs started to be built over the regions

**At the same time, conflicts and a number of difficulties were not successfully overcome, and some administration and managerial mistakes were made. Participants of the workshop stated the following:**

- Decisions of the Ministry of Agriculture and Ministry of Environment were not synchronized and common conception of after storm area management was missing
- Stricken area zonations and fundamental principles of disaster area management were not timely prepared mainly on the reason of lacking general agreement
- Dichotomy of opinions on future bark beetle development between key stakeholders was hindering proper management action
- Unclear sharing of competences between State Nature Conservation, forest owners and NGO`s, with diametrically different opinions on after-calamity management undermined the efficiency of the management
- Crisis management plans and general management plans were missing in protected areas at all
- The “general exception” was asked, but not granted to the total wood processing
- Calamity wood was not processed in many regions and bark beetle calamities appeared subsequently.
- Exceptions of calamity wood processing were not granted in the requested extent and decisions on that were often delayed
- Fire management plans were developed after the calamity, however they not completely met the needs of the practical forest management.
- Technical and professional preparedness of firemen units for fire fighting in the forested land and in complicated terrain was low. Rising danger of forest

fires was expected from the very beginning, therefore forest fire fighting infrastructure and early warning systems needed to be developed.

- Underestimated increasing risk of bark beetle outbreaks and forest fires mainly from unmanaged sites surrounded by high valued forests
- Legislation was not prepared for this exceptional event at all (Law on the Forest Protection, Law on the Nature Conservation)
- Conflicts in understanding by different users of forest land and other wooded land of ultimate targets of protected areas, which are based on protection of forest ecosystems and biodiversity
- Difficulty to receive compensations for owners. Present solution lies in the long-term lease contract, land exchange or land purchase. From the long-term perspective, land exchange as well as flexible treatment of the ‘specific cases’ is the most promising.
- Communication in general, including media, was insufficient and has not brought positive result. As a consequence the public awareness was often built on the occasional and misleading information.

**The participant of the workshop also stated that some important actions and activities were not timely taken and implemented. Amongst them are:**

- Protected area zonation and restrictive actions hierarchy were not developed (crisis management was missing at all)
- Bark beetle outbreaks and risk of forest fires were identified as the primary components of the after-calamity management, but measures were not sufficiently applied in the practical management activities
- Current knowledge of climate change impacts and bark beetle ecology were not fully considered. Thus the actions mitigating shifts of bark beetle distributional range and changes in number of bark beetle generations were not taken into account.
- Fire management plans and forest fire warning system were missing at all
- More coordinated communication of all stakeholders with public was needed

On the bases of presentations of the background information at the workshop, discussions at the plenary sessions, elaborations of the working groups, and taking into account the recommendation of the previous international event, which have not been successfully followed, the workshop came up with the following recommendations:

## **Recommendations**

### **a. Government – Ministry of Interior SR, MoE SR, MoA SR**

- areas under highest protection level are considered as unmanaged. In the process of proposing unmanaged areas, it is important to be fully aware of the risks rising from such approach, as well as all ecological, cultural and social importance given to these areas

- to clarify the aims and tools for management of NATURA 2000 sites,
- to build capacities on preparedness for crisis management and develop guidelines on management of natural disturbances with the involvement of all stakeholders using the “participatory approach”,
- to endorse the approval of the Zoning System for all National Parks
- to set up the fund for financing emergency operations in areas affected by natural disturbances,
- fire fighting should also be applied on areas with high level of protection
- undertake necessary preparatory steps for forest fires prevention, control and fighting with forest fires
- to improve the forest fire monitoring and warning system, with high priority given to protected areas damaged by large scale natural disturbances
- to harmonize legislation with regard to (i) act on nature conservation and (ii) act on forests to be able to provide clear understanding of management of forest lands in protected areas,
- to update the current policy regarding to compensation of non-state forest owners,

#### **b.State and private forests**

- to carry out economic assessment of forest damage caused by natural disturbances

#### **c. State nature conservation**

- to share the responsibility of the decisions taken in protected areas affected by natural disturbances,

#### **d.International community**

- to update available guidelines and manuals for storm damage management
- to establish an international training centre for capacity building on management of protected areas affected by natural disturbances for EU countries, optionally on the basis of National Forest Centre in Zvolen

This Report was approved on 6 May 2009 at the plenary session of the participants of the workshop on “**Policy options for storm damage management focusing on protected areas**” held in Štrbské Pleso, the Slovak Republic.

The participants of the workshop agreed to bring their recommendations to the attention of the key stakeholders in the storm damage management areas.