

GREENPEACE

NATURE CRIME FILES

CZECHIA

DECLASSIFIED

CRIME SCENE DO NOT ENTER

HOW COMPANIES DESTROY NATURE AND
TURN CONSUMERS INTO ACCOMPLICES

#NATURECRIME

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Every day in Europe, life is turned into death, but the perpetrators go unpunished. These crimes are not committed with guns or knives, but with chainsaws and bulldozers. When the forest industry destroys vital - even protected - nature for wood products, and governments look the other way, the consumer becomes both a victim and an accomplice. Centuries-old forests in Czechia, Carpathian forests in Romania and Poland, and the boreal forests of Sweden and Finland - all central to Europe's fight against climate change - are being turned into short-lived products and sold across Europe. While presenting itself as a progressive defender of biodiversity and the environment, Europe is actually doing little to stop corporate greed and corruption from destroying both. These crimes are part of a series called 'The Nature Crime Files - Declassified' - a clarion call for the proper protection of ecosystems.

#1 Europe's old-growth forests - vital to our survival - are not effectively protected.

#2 Wood products made from old-growth forests end up in European homes.

#3 It's a crime against nature and Europeans, and only effective protection will stop it.



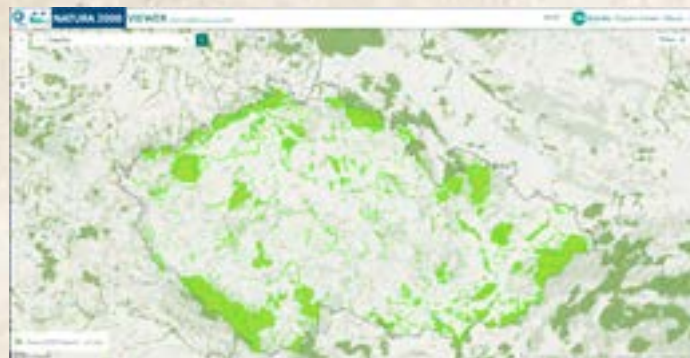
The Czech case shows that despite some formal protection and criticism from affected communities, two of Europe's most biodiverse places - the beech forests of the Ore Mountains and the Ždánice Forest - are being destroyed for short-lived wood products.

Greenpeace Czechia used Global Positioning System (GPS) tracking devices to monitor logging sites in the two forests. It was found that wood illegally harvested in the Ore Mountains was sold as firewood for Czech homes, and that wood from the Ždánice Forest was transported to a paper mill in Slovakia and very likely further exported to other EU countries. Czechia is one of the largest timber exporters. It exports [about half of its timber production](#). According to [2021 World Bank data](#), it exports its wood primarily to Germany (32%), Austria (15%), Slovakia (8%), Poland (8%) and Italy (4%).

The crimes against nature described in this report are manifold. The majority of forests of the Ore Mountains are part of the [Natura 2000](#) network, which means they should be formally protected from all destructive forestry activities. The Czech authorities only require that a permit be obtained prior to logging. Logging without a permit and selling the timber are

both illegal, the latter under [European law](#). Yet both occur. Morally, it is a crime against nature to destroy old-growth forests – habitat for numerous species – for profit and short-term use. These vibrant forests are Europe's contribution to the global battle and defense against the climate and biodiversity crises.

This case demonstrates the lack of effective protection of old-growth forests and the lack of control over where their timber ends up in the EU, forcing EU institutions to take action.



Czechia's Natura 2000 protected areas (©EEA)

1. THE BEECH FORESTS IN THE ORE MOUNTAINS

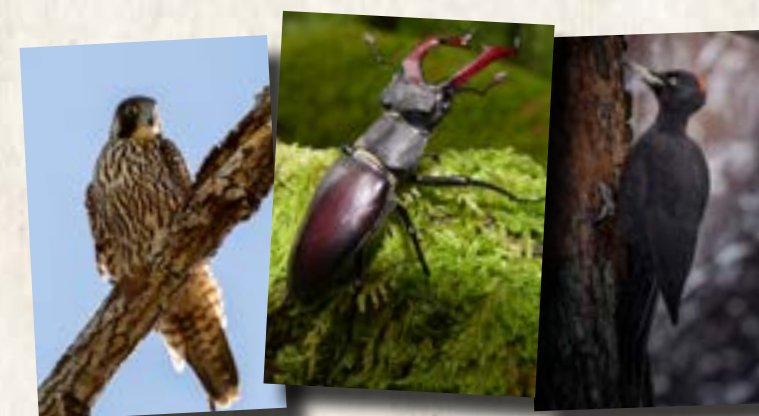
The beech forests in the Ore Mountains cover an area of more than 80 square kilometers, which is almost three times the size of the city of Brussels. Due to their unique ecological richness, they are part of the "[Site of Community Importance](#)". The area is [home to a number of rare plants and animals](#), including birds such as the peregrine falcon, white-tailed eagle, stock dove, and Eurasian goshawk, and beetles such as the European stag beetle, alpine longhorn beetle, and violet click beetle. The Mariánské Údolí Forest Management Unit, located near the town of Horní Jiřetín, is habitat for rare species such as the Eurasian eagle-owl, [black woodpecker](#), and the violet click beetle - a critically endangered species and an important indicator of the naturalness of the forest.

The area is [included in the Natura 2000 network](#) and should be protected following the transposition of the directive into Czech law, but no special protection measures have been implemented apart from obtaining a [permit before logging](#). There are only a few small [spots in the area that are strictly protected](#).

Although the forests in this area are high in biodiversity, [forest management plans](#) allow them to be managed as ordinary commercial forests - with the

only condition that companies must obtain permits for new logging activities. In recent years, the number of applications for logging permits has increased significantly, and in at least two cases logging has taken place without prior authorization and therefore illegally in Greenpeace Czechia's legal opinion: in [2021 trees were cut](#) by the state-owned company [Czech State Forests \(Lesy ČR\)](#) near Litvinov and in [2023](#) by the private company [Royal Pine](#) near Horní Jiřetín. As a [direct result](#), the Regional Authority [tightened the conditions](#) in the current forest management plans and [initiated proceedings](#) against the 13 forest owners. They were completely [banned from logging](#) in the most valuable forest stands older than 120 years. However, this measure is only temporary, and some of the proceedings are not final as Czech State Forests and Royal Pine have appealed against the decision.

There is an ongoing debate between the Ministry of the Environment and other stakeholders about declaring a large [Protected Landscape Area in the Ore Mountains](#) to protect rare beech forests and other local natural monuments. In fact, the Ore Mountains are the only large mountain range in Czechia that is [not yet protected on a large scale](#).



Peregrine falcon (©Frank Cone), European stag beetle (©Michael Kunkel/Greenpeace), the black woodpecker (©Daniil Komov)



Box 1: Europe's most pristine forests protected only on paper

[Nearly 40% of Europe](#) is covered by forests. But with less than [3% of the EU's total forest area](#), the most valuable forests - old-growth - are scarce. These forests are particularly vital to our health and well-being and to the health of the planet. They are rich in biodiversity and play an important role in preventing and mitigating the effects of climate change. Approximately [93% of mapped old-growth forests](#) are included in the Natura 2000 network, a system of protected areas established by the EU for important breeding and resting sites for rare and threatened species. [87% of mapped old-growth forests](#) are under strict protection from human interference. The reality is that protected old-growth forests are often only protected on paper. And the rest is still not officially considered old-growth by the authorities, and therefore not protected at all.

THE CASE OF THE CZECH STATE FORESTS

In December 2020, Czech State Forests applied for a permit to cut down trees in the Litvínov Forest Management Unit and - before receiving the permit - proceeded to cut down trees, [some as old as 267 years](#), in [several hectares of forest](#). The Forestry Service [acknowledged in a statement](#): "The processing of the timber should have taken place only after the nature protection authority issued its consent, which we applied for in December 2020, which unfortunately did not happen. It is appropriate to admit the mistake." [Later in the media](#), a spokesperson of the company suggested that it had not received the permit quickly enough: "We can apply for a permit to log, but our experience so far is that we may not get it for a year."

In the spring of 2022, Greenpeace Czechia filed complaints with both the Czech Environmental In-

spectorate to investigate illegal logging and with the Ústí nad Labem Regional Authority to stop possible trade in illegally harvested timber from the Natura 2000 site. In Greenpeace Czechia's legal opinion, any marketing of illegally harvested timber is illegal under European and Czech law and should be prevented by authorities. Greenpeace Czechia has reminded the authorities and their superiors - the ministries - of the complaints several times, but to no avail.

In June 2023, Greenpeace Czechia filed a criminal complaint against Czech State Forests with the Most District Prosecutor's Office. According to Greenpeace Czechia, Czech State Forests may have committed the crime of damaging a forest.

THE CASE OF ROYAL PINE

In January and February 2023, a shocking unauthorized logging in a Natura 2000 site took place in the Mariánské Údolí Forest Management Unit, located on the slopes above the town of Horní Jiřetín. In the middle of the permitting process, in which Greenpeace Czechia and the town of Horní Jiřetín opposed the planned logging, the forest owner, Royal Pine, proceeded with logging the area. On February 20, the Ústí nad Labem Regional Authority issued a [statement denying the permit](#), but by that time the entire forest area in question no longer existed. Long strips of forest over 170 years old had been [irreversibly cut down](#) in a clear-cut. Royal Pine denies the illegality of the logging without providing any evidence or explanation. Greenpeace Czechia and the town of Horní Jiřetín

[filed complaints](#) about illegal logging with several authorities to investigate and stop possible trade in illegally harvested timber from the Natura 2000 site, but without tangible results. The [regional authority replied to Greenpeace Czechia](#) that it could not intervene against the trade of harvested timber because the Czech Environmental Inspectorate had not yet confirmed that the logging was illegal and that, according to the forest owner's statement, the timber in question had already been sold.

Greenpeace Czechia and the Horní Jiřetín also filed a [criminal complaint against Royal Pine](#) for illegal logging. They claim that Royal Pine intentionally broke the law and committed a crime by damaging the forest.



Evidence of illegal logging by Czech State Forests in 2022 presented to the prosecutor (©Greenpeace/Nikol Krejčová)

Testimony: Vladimír Buřt, mayor of Horní Jiřetín

We have spent many years defending the very existence of our town Horní Jiřetín, which should have given way to expanding coal mining, and in the end we managed to save it. But we still can't rejoice as we see the precious forests that surround us, that we love and that are intrinsic to our home disappear. The competent authorities are just watching the widespread felling and not acting properly. We, the local people, are upset at the sight of systematically deforested hillsides and are once again experiencing the injustice of how our much-tested landscape is being treated.

The precious nature of the Ore Mountains finally deserves to be protected. Unfortunately, instead, we continue to see more and more clear-cutting and irreversible destruction of local forests. Even today, the protection of the landscape and nature of north-west Bohemia is at the very edge of the environmental protection authorities' concerns. Forests that have withstood the effects of centuries of extremely intensive industrial activity are now being wantonly destroyed for short-term economic gain. It is our duty to the landscape and to future generations to do everything we can to change this.

The owner of the forest in the Mariánské údolí is behaving in a completely outrageous manner. He has logged the entire southern slopes without permission, leaving only a few thin strips of trees. The site is a natural water reservoir and has now been completely destroyed. In view of what they have done here, I would like to take this case to court.

The forests that surround our town are extremely important to us and we have an emotional attachment to them. That is why it upsets us to see wood from such precious trees being used senselessly as firewood. We do not want the forests around Horní Jiřetín to go up the chimney. The true protection of the Ore Mountains must be established as soon as possible.



Buřt speaks at a gathering against the logging (©Greenpeace/Jakub Šedý)
Satellite image of clear cuts near Horní Jiřetín (©Seznam.cz/Mapy.cz)
Clear cuts on the slope above Horní Jiřetín (©Greenpeace/Ibra Ibrahimovič)

Box 2: Mariánské Údolí: The journey of illegally harvested timber to a consumer

Logging in Mariánské Údolí has taken place without permit and in violation of the law. The authorities are unable to stop the illegally harvested timber from reaching the market. To prove this, Greenpeace Czechia placed GPS trackers in wood piles near Mariánské Údolí.

Tracker #1

On May 17, logs were transported from the supervised landfill to the industrial zone in Chomutov. Investigations confirmed that the handling area is used by a local company to cut logs for use as firewood. On May 19, the logs were transported to Spořice - approximately three kilometers southwest of Chomutov - and deposited as firewood in the garden of an unsuspecting private individual.

Tracker #2

On September 19, logs from the second monitored pile were being transported to the same industrial area. Because of the speed of processing in the first case, the Greenpeace Czechia crew went to the site immediately to catch Royal Pine in the act. Activists protested against illegal logging and the use of old-growth timber for firewood. They also managed to retrieve the GPS tracker from the log in the presence of journalists.



The journey of tracker #2
(©Seznam.cz/Mapy.cz)
Protest against illegal logging
(©Greenpeace/Barbora Sommers)



2. THE INDUSTRY VERSUS OLD-GROWTH FORESTS

Ždánice Forest is a hilly area in southeastern Moravia at the very edge of the Western Carpathians. In the east, the area is connected to the Chřiby Site of Community Importance. It is characterized by old-growth forests in the form of Pannonian and Carpathian oak-hornbeam forests and beech forests in the higher areas. There are many endangered and protected species of animals and plants in the area, such as various species of orchids. The largest European beetle, the [stag beetle, is a local pride of the forest and is abundant](#) in the area thanks to the old trees and dead wood.

The Ministry of the Environment has tried [several times to list the Ždánice Forest as a Natura 2000 site](#) of European importance due to its unique and highly biodiverse forests. There was even talk of declaring it a "[Protected Landscape Area](#)", which is the second strictest form of protection in Czechia after "[National Park](#)". It was one of the sites that the European

Commission demanded to be protected but was rejected. The Ministry of Industry, the local oil mining company MND, the Ministry of Agriculture, Czech State Forests and local villages played an active role in this process and reportedly were against the better protection of the area. After the European Commission [threatened Czechia with sanctions](#), the Czech government declared a fraction of the area to be protected. The Dambořice Forest Site of Community Importance was created, but its protection is weak. The only strictly protected area is the [nature reserve U Vrby](#) – a small area of 30 hectares. Thus, a large part of the most valuable area of the Ždánice Forest remains a nature park, which is the [lowest form of environmental protection](#) in Czechia. It does not restrict deforestation or protect biodiversity, and it preserves [landscape character rather than nature](#). Therefore the Czech State Forests are now able to cut down large stands of deciduous forest every year, [creating huge deforested areas](#).

Testimony: Zuzana Veverková, local citizen opposing the logging

I am a native of southeastern Moravia and my roots are firmly connected to this region. Having lived and worked elsewhere for many years, my need to engage with the place that is my home is all the stronger. Moreover, I live with my family right at the foot of the Ždánice Forest, which is such a natural part of our everyday life. As a biologist, I enjoy its natural diversity and richness. Although there is a large forest cover in Czechia, many forests lack the natural character and biodiversity of the Ždánice Forest.

Our region is extremely poor in terms of environmental quality. The landscape is being drained by a system of land reclamation, regulated watercourses and highly intensive agriculture. In addition, extreme weather fluctuations and rising temperatures lead to droughts. As a result, our region is becoming an agro-desert in many places. The Ždánice Forest represents an essential element in an exploited and overheated landscape, which helps the entire region to stabilize the microclimate, retain water, prevent extreme climatic events and cool the environment.

The current state of forest management is extremely dismal, driven by the single objective of maximum yield of wood biomass. The people in our village are disgusted and desperate. The forest they have known all their lives is disappearing before their eyes. I am disappointed that something like this is happening in our backyards and on government property that belongs to all of us. I am disappointed that nature conservation always gets the short end of the stick and that the rules of the game are set by those who are only interested in maximizing their returns. And that this game is gustily supported by some local politicians who are proud to block efforts to protect our forest and our environment. But I feel a little hope that support can be found for the idea that our forest deserves the protection it needs.



Veverková standing on a huge stump and clear cuts in Ždánice Forest (©Greenpeace/Majda Slámová)

Mondi facility in Ružomberok, Slovakia (©Greenpeace/Matěj Kumpán)



ANOTHER CASE OF THE CZECH STATE FORESTS

In 2020 the management of the Ždánice forest was reorganized by Czech State Forests. Since then, logging activities have [expanded significantly](#), moving from one area to the next. This has been criticized mainly by the people living in the area and the local branch of the [Czech Union for Nature Conservation](#)

Kyjov. They founded an initiative called [Living Forest for a Living Region](#), which appeals to the Czech State Forests to manage the area more sparingly, not to log on a large scale, and to leave the old-growth forests in the area completely untouched.

Box 3: Ždánice Forest: From old tree to paper

On May 21, a GPS tracker was planted in a beech log in a wood pile south of the village of Snovídky (see wood dump No.1 on the map). The wood was harvested in the Židlochovice Forest Management Unit and is therefore [certified](#) by the [Program for the Endorsement of Forest Certification](#) (PEFC).

A 2021 [Greenpeace International report](#) on the ineffectiveness of forest certification noted that “PEFC describes itself as a ‘global alliance of national forest certification systems’, in part created to address ‘the specific requirements of small- and family forest owners’. [But] it is dominated by governments and economic interests, and the governance structures of PEFC-endorsed schemes do not have full and balanced representation of economic, environmental, social and Indigenous interests. It is considered a weak and industry-dominated certification scheme.”

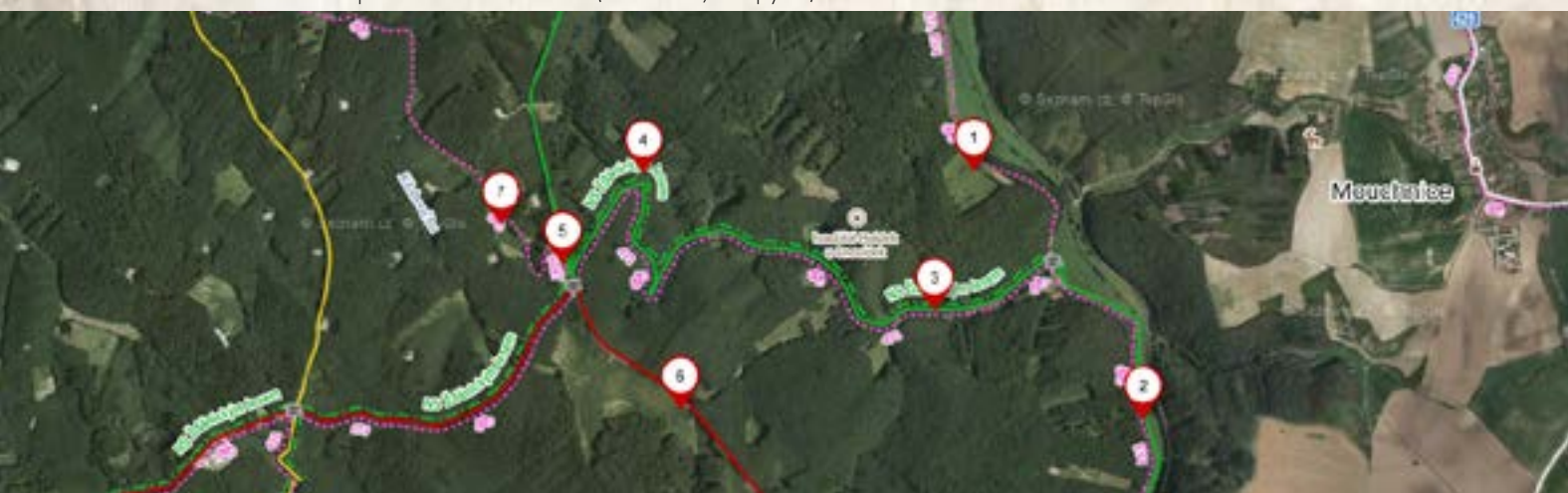
On May 26, the tracker sent a signal from a new location north of Snovídky. In the first half of June, the logs were cut in half at this location to make them easier to handle.

On June 23, the tracked logs were transported to Ružomberok, Slovakia, to a large paper mill owned by the [Mondi Group](#), a multinational company specializing in packaging and paper products. Its paper mill is one of more than 100 production sites in 30 countries, employing approximately [22,000 people](#), primarily in Europe, North America and South Africa. According to the [company’s website](#), they are Europe’s number one producer of virgin paperboard and paper bags.

The GPS tracker last reported from the handling area in front of the wood shredder on the morning of June 24, after which it went silent. Therefore, it can be assumed that the wood harvested in the Ždánice old-growth forest was shredded and turned into paper.

In response to our request for comment, the Mondi Group referred to “official information given by the State Forests of the Czech Republic” and stated it complies with national law and an approved forest management plan.

Clear cuts and wood dumps in the Ždánice Forest (@Seznam/Mapy.cz)



3. OUR DEMANDS

Despite EU regulations, forest destruction continues even in small areas of Europe’s remaining old-growth forests, including protected areas. A combination of [ambiguous legal frameworks](#) - there is no EU-level definition of “old-growth forest”, illegal logging, and poor mapping is allowing these vital forests, which deserve the highest level of protection, to disappear. Industrial forestry takes advantage of the lack of effective protection and recklessly damages the natural complexity of our most biodiverse forests.

Greenpeace demands:

- 1. 30% protection of the EU’s sea and land areas.** EU countries must make legally binding commitments to meet the [Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework](#) (KMGBF) and the targets of the [European Biodiversity Strategy for 2030](#) to effectively protect at least 30% of their land and water as an ecologically representative, well-connected and equitably governed network of areas.
- 2. Effective protection.** Adopted targets must be effectively implemented in such a way that the natural processes of ecosystems are essentially undisturbed by harmful activities for biodiversity (such as for example industrial agriculture, industrial fishery or industrial forestry), while ensuring that any use by human activities, where appropriate in such areas, is sustainable and fully consistent with clearly defined conservation outcomes, recognizing and respecting the rights of Indigenous Peoples and local communities.
- 3. 10% strict protection of areas with high biodiversity value.** At least one-third of protected areas of very high biodiversity value, including carbon-rich ecosystems (such as old-growth forests), should be strictly protected and left essentially untouched by humans. In these areas, only limited and well-controlled activities that either do not disrupt or enhance natural processes would be allowed, such as scientific research, prevention of natural disasters (e.g. forest fires), control of invasive alien species, non-intrusive activities and facilities, and non-intrusive and strictly controlled recreational activities.
- 4. The transformation of the forestry system.** Old-growth and other high-nature-value forests must be strictly protected because of their climate and biodiversity importance. European decision-makers must immediately put a stop to the logging of these forests. Beyond protected areas, we also need to immediately transform the forest system to strive to mimic natural forest development with a close-to-nature forest management approach.

Protection does not mean excluding people from nature. Land rights, access and sustainable use by Indigenous Peoples and local communities must therefore be an integral part of the concept of protection. At the same time, we should take into account biogeographical differences across Europe when considering the implementation of the targets, and ensure that nature conservation within Europe’s borders does not lead to the degradation of forests or other natural ecosystems, or to human rights violations elsewhere.

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