



IMCG resolution 2018 for Poland regarding coal mining plans threatening mires in Ramsar Site „Poleski National Park“

The International Mire Conservation Group (IMCG) is a worldwide organisation of mire (peatland) specialists with a particular interest in peatland conservation. The IMCG held its General Assembly in Utrecht, the Netherlands on 31st August 2018, attended by members from 23 countries and 6 continents. At the General Assembly the following resolution was adopted.

At its General Assembly in 2010 in Goniądz, Poland, IMCG expressed its appreciation for the achievements of Poland in identifying and selecting valuable mires for the Natura 2000 legislation and including them in a network of protected areas. We also stated our hope for the successful implementation of this policy. Special attention was paid by our delegates to mires of the Polesie region, which had been visited during a field symposium and recognised as sites of special international biodiversity value. Recently, however, we have been informed about threats to these ecosystems arising from new plans to develop a black coal mine in the Polesie region. Hereby, IMCG wishes to express its deepest concern and requests the Polish government to reconsider these plans.

Mires of the Polesie region (Lubelskie voivodship, SE Poland) are internationally recognised as unique well-preserved wetlands, supporting numerous threatened species of plants and animals. The region is protected as Poleski National Park under the Polish Law, whereas its international conservation status has been secured as UNESCO Biosphere Reserve, Ramsar Site (Wetland of International Importance), International Bird and Biodiversity Area (IBBA) and several Natura 2000 sites. Here, we specially want to mention the Bubnów mire (Natura 2000 area „Bagno Bubnów“, 2344 ha), one of the largest well-preserved alkaline fen ecosystems in Europe, hosting 3-4% of the global nesting population of the globally threatened Aquatic Warbler, as well as viable populations of several red-listed plant species, including *Pedicularis sceptrum-carolinum*, *Betula humilis* and 13 species of orchids. The exceptional biodiversity of Bubnów mire arises from its geological and eco-hydrological settings, almost not disrupted by reclamation works. Unfortunately, the permit for exploring black coal deposits issued in 2018 by the Chief Geologist of Poland may lead to opening mining activities only a few kilometres from Bubnów mire. According to our best knowledge, such mining activities will have an inevitable impact on regional water conditions and will degrade mire eco-hydrology in the areas affected by mining. Therefore, we feel obliged to notify Polish authorities and international society about the very high risks of degrading the unique wetland habitats if the plans are implemented.

In addition to the biodiversity threats, we want to highlight the climate-conservation context of this affair. Peatlands constitute the most effective carbon stores of the terrestrial biosphere. Carbon stored in peat during thousands of years of mire functioning is, however, emitted as carbon dioxide to the atmosphere as soon as peatlands are drained, thereby aggravating global warming. As a society of experts concerned about the state of nature and the human environment, we denounce both the jeopardizing of large undisturbed mire ecosystems, and the exploitation of new coal deposits in times of increasing climatic calamities caused by greenhouse gas emissions from fossil fuels. We appeal to the government of Poland, as signatory of the 2015 Paris Agreement and host of the 24th Conference of Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, to stop coal exploitation in Polesie and to secure the preservation of mires in this region and elsewhere in Poland, fulfilling international commitments. We offer our assistance to the Polish government and regional authorities in strengthening the conservation of mires, as hotspots of biological diversity and regulators of biosphere integrity.