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25 September 2012

Subject: Your letter from 8 August 2012, concerning IUCN Protected Area Management Categories with regard to Šumava National Park

Dear Mr. Mánek,

We are writing to you in response to your letter, sent to the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) on 8 August 2012, in our roles as the Regional Vice Chair for Pan-Europe of the IUCN World Commission on Protected Areas (WCPA), one of the six technical commissions of IUCN, and as the Regional Director of the IUCN Regional Office for Europe.

In this afore-mentioned letter, you seek the advice of IUCN with regard to the management of Šumava National Park. You also mention the new management plan for the national park, which currently is in preparation, and you elaborate on the planned future zoning of Šumava National Park. We appreciate you consulting IUCN in this important matter.

Indeed, the recent developments and planned changes of management practices in Šumava National Park have caused concerns to a number of WCPA and IUCN members. WCPA, through its Chair at that time, Nikita Lopoukhine, has previously expressed this concern in an official letter, sent in February to the Prime Minister of the Czech Republic as well as to the Ministry of Agriculture, the Ministry of the Environment and the permanent representation of the Czech Republic to the UN. IUCN acknowledges the receipt of a letter by the Minister of the Environment Tomáš Chalupa of 14 August 2012 in response to the communication from Nikita Lopoukhine.

Šumava National Park was originally designated a National Park, according to the criteria for Category II of IUCN's Protected Area Management Categories. This classification was justified by large parts of Šumava National Park being unspoiled forest habitat, allowing for maintaining ecological processes that permit the native species and communities to persist for long term with minimal human interventions.

The proposed change of sub-dividing the park to still keep it as a Category II Protected Area, while including a Category IV Protected Area as internal zoning, is doubtful from the technical point of view. Generally speaking, it is indeed possible to apply in individual parts of a protected area management objectives that correspond to two or more different IUCN Management Categories; however the protected area as a whole have to comply with the agreed standards of the category assigned to the protected area.

The system of IUCN Protected Area categories is based on the management objectives, especially on the primary management objective. This means that all other objectives in the protected area concerned, can only be applied if these are not diminishing or in opposition to the primary management objective. The primary management objective for an IUCN Category II Protected Area is »to protect natural biodiversity along with its underlying ecological structure and supporting environmental processes, and to promote education and recreation« (IUCN, 2008).

IUCN expert advice on this matter is that a protected area with only 35% of its total area being designated as core zone for maintaining ecological processes, as is the case for Šumava National Park, does not fulfil the standards for IUCN Category II, as outlined in its definition. In addition, Category IV protected areas are mainly designated to protect smaller areas and the focus is usually on species conservation, rather than on ecosystem protection.

Considering that currently only about 13% of the total area of Šumava NP are in a near-natural state, the key question is whether Šumava can at present still be classified as a National Park under the IUCN standards defined for a Category II protected area.

Allow us to outline some of the highlights from the *Guidelines for applying protected area management categories* (Dudley (ed.), 2008) which should be considered when considering changes in the extent or management objectives of Šumava National Park:

Among the purposes that IUCN opposes – and this is valid for any protected area, regardless of its category – is the *»use [of] the categories to argue for environmentally insensitive development in protected areas«* (Dudley (ed.), 2008: 6) and that among the principles that should be applied for every protected area is also the following: *»Protected Areas should usually aim to maintain or, ideally, increase the degree of naturalness of the ecosystem being protected«* (Dudley (ed.), 2008: 10). I am convinced that further exploitation of natural resources and construction of infrastructure in the area of the National Park would definitively be in opposition to the preservation of the natural environment and the Šumava ecosystem.

The principles that should be applied to every protected area (Dudley (ed.) 2008: 10) also include that *»Protected areas must prevent, or eliminate where necessary, any exploitation or management practice that will be harmful to the objectives of designation«*, and further reduction of the near-natural state of the areas in Šumava National Park will violate this principle. Furthermore, objectives that are common for every protected area, regardless to its Category, include that every protected area should aim to *»conserve the composition, structure, function and evolutionary potential of biodiversity«* and *»be of sufficient size to ensure the integrity and long term maintenance of the specified conservation targets or be capable of being increased to achieve this end«*.

After consideration of the above principles and purposes that are valid for every protected area and in particular for IUCN Category II, it is clear that any further fragmentation of the forest ecosystems in Šumava NP is not in line with the international standards applicable to Category II protected areas. Natural areas, even the last remaining parts of wilderness, are becoming more and more important, not only in terms of conservation, but also as an important source of ecosystem services and a mechanism to provide natural solutions as a response to the pressures of human induced impacts on our planet, including the damaging effects of climate change.

It is highly questionable to keep naming the area, which used to be managed in the past under Category II standards, a national park. Therefore WCPA and IUCN would like to state clearly that Šumava will not be able to retain Category II status under the current management proposal. This means that, based on expert advice, it will be downgraded in the World Database on Protected Areas (WDPA), the UN List of Protected Areas and on Protected Planet. The name “National Park” will be only of local use, but it will not be recognized internationally. Please note that reporting on national and international efforts on protected areas under the CBD, and in particular its Programme of Work on Protected Areas (POWPA), is based on the application of the IUCN System of Protected Areas Management Categories.

The IUCN World Commission on Protected Areas stands ready to assist with technical advice on the classification of Šumava National Park under the IUCN Management Categories System as well as to provide additional guidance on the use and principles of this system. However, IUCN has already provided recommendations on how to manage Šumava in line with the IUCN standards – two expert missions have been undertaken previously by IUCN / WCPA experts. Before further engaging in this matter, e.g. through sending another expert mission, we would like to see our previous recommendations be implemented and integrated into the new management plan.

We encourage you to take these points into consideration in defining the future management and conservation activities in Šumava.

Yours sincerely,



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