



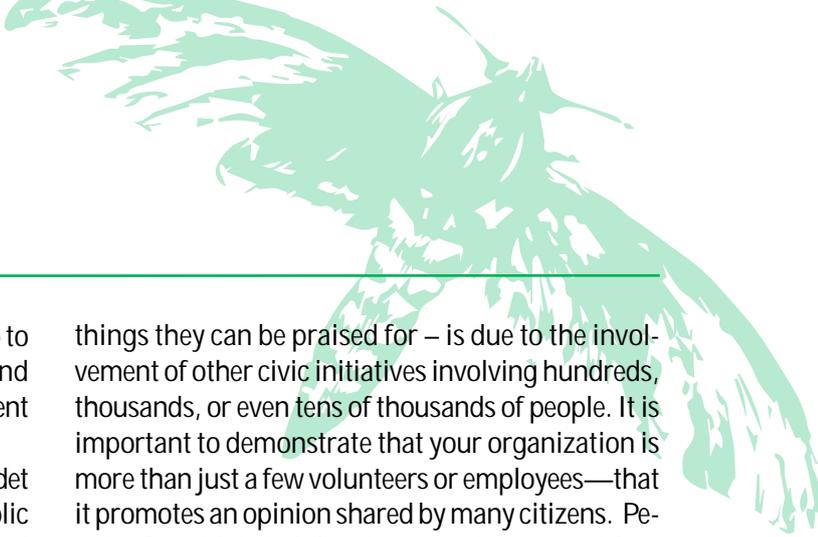
Hnutí DUHA
Friends of the Earth Czech Republic

POWER OF PUBLIC IN PRACTICE

When Czech and Norwegian Public Help Protect Forests



Introduction



This publication contains tips on what you can do to ensure the environment around you is clean and healthy. Key to getting the job done is the development of a responsible, strong, healthy civil society.

Nationwide organizations like Naturvernforbundet in Norway and Hnutí DUHA in the Czech Republic oftentimes they can't respond as rapidly as local people to local issues. Because of this, the proper functioning of civil society requires a wide range of associations, initiatives, and individuals contributing to the development of their city or region, pushing politicians and the bureaucracy to do the right thing, helping in the search for solutions, and keeping attention focused on the quality of life—thereby reinforcing the essential support of public opinion. It is public opinion that ensures the public interest does not fall prey to bureaucracy, political conflict, or pressure from commercial interests. Various associations in a number of Czech cities and villages help to organize social life, improving the environment and guiding its development. They plant trees, repair monuments, and take part in the creation of zoning plans. At other times, they stand against projects that would create pollution or devastate the countryside, like large quarries or factories using outmoded technology.

The fact that both Hnutí DUHA and Naturvernforbundet are so successful – and there are many

things they can be praised for – is due to the involvement of other civic initiatives involving hundreds, thousands, or even tens of thousands of people. It is important to demonstrate that your organization is more than just a few volunteers or employees—that it promotes an opinion shared by many citizens. People often think their involvement changes nothing. They may tell themselves: “it's only one letter... a few sentences for a pre-election meeting... a single visit”. But many proposals have been adopted precisely because a large number of people sent that “one” letter—and hundreds of others did the same.

The examples given here form complete stories of instances in which ecological organizations used a number of tactics to protect the environment. The stories are meant to inspire, so that you, too, may see what can be done to attain your goals. From among the options presented, select that which best suits your case.

Hnutí DUHA and Naturvernforbundet have been working together for several years, mutually sharing experience to seek out worthwhile ideas and incentives. We would like to share the knowledge and experience we've gained with you, as well. We present several Czech and Norwegian examples in which public involvement helped get the bureaucracy moving to attain positive change.

Naturvernforbundet – Naturvernforbundet – Friends of the Earth Norway is the oldest Norwegian ecological organization. Founded in 1914, it counts more than 20,000 members and approximately 100 local groups across the country, addressing environmental protection issues on both the local and global levels. Naturvernforbundet's main goals are nature conservation and protecting the environment to make sure that the impact of humans does not overreach the limits sustainable by our planet. The group addresses a broad range of issues in the areas of environmental protection, climate change, energy, and transportation. Its vision is a society in which the diversity of life is maintained for future generations, and where the value of nature is taken to be the building block of human respect for life and for the countryside.

Hnutí DUHA – Friends of the Earth Czech Republic came into being in 1989. This leading Czech ecological

organization successfully promotes ecological solutions that support a healthy, clean environment for citizens of the Czech Republic. It proposes specific measures to reduce pollution of air and water, help reduce the amount of waste created, protect the countryside, and eliminate toxic substances from the food chain. Hnutí DUHA experts negotiate with authorities and lawmakers, proposing improvements to laws, monitoring industrial firms, helping people, and offering tips on how wise day-to-day decisions in the marketplace may contribute to improving the environment at the same time they save money. Hnutí DUHA also takes part in education and research, provides information to journalists, and collaborates with municipalities. It operates throughout the Czech Republic in individual towns and regions, and at the international level. The group is the Czech representative of Friends of the Earth International, the largest global association of ecological organizations.

A Czech Example: Involvement of the Public in the Discussion on the Approval/Rejections of the Bohemian Forest National Park Act



Background

Bohemian Forest National Park is the Czech counterpart – much larger in size – to Bavarian Forest National Park. Taken together, they form a key location in the protection of biodiversity in Central Europe. The international Union for conservation of nature (IUCN) refers to the combined national parks as being “part of the most extensive, best protected and, in terms of diversity of species, richest forested area in Central Europe.” Endangered species include capercaillie (the single viable population in the CR), the lynx, the elk, and the Ural Owl. The Ramsar Convention protects peatlands, wet forests and wetlands of global significance. The Bohemian Forest is the best opportunity for the renewal of wilderness over a large area in Central Europe, something which is important for wildlife adaptation to climatic changes.

In 2014, Bohemian Forest National Park was threatened by an act submitted by a group of senators. This Act on the Bohemian Forest National Park proposed, among other things, that:

- The area currently left in its wild state be reduced from 30% to 23% of the park's total area.
- Objectives for the park be modified so that only 35% of the park area would be left wild instead of the 50% which had been in the 2000 plan.
- Projects by developers within the national park be given the same weight as protection of the

environment, and regulation of construction be reduced on two thirds of parkland. This radical change would have opened the majority of the park to further construction—of apartment buildings, hotels, resorts, new ski slopes, cable cars, and golf courses.

- Land within Environmental Protection Zone III be transferred to another status, thereby opening the path for construction of a cable car and a ski slope in the southern section of the national park and permitting new construction around villages. The land in question had been purchased in advance by land speculators, real estate brokers, construction companies, and persons with close ties to some of the politicians.
- New paths leading into the core capercaillie habitat be constructed, endangering the entire population.

During the first phase, this group of senators convinced a large majority of Senate members to support the proposal. Objections from environmentalists and scientists were ignored, and the proposal was forwarded to the Chamber of Deputies (the lower house of the Czech Parliament). This was clearly a situation in which influential people who had invested money in the land were behind the proposal; MPs would not be swayed by careful argumentation from scientists and ecology-oriented NGOs. The only available option to stop this liquidation proposal was to generate loud support





from the public for preserving the environment of Bohemian Forest National Park.

Hnutí DUHA – Friends of the Earth Czech Republic encouraged the public to take action. Their advantage was Bohemian Forest National Park’s popularity: almost 2 million visitors come to the park every year. It is these visitors who were targeted by DUHA to try to get them actively involved in the legislative process.

Because of its previous work, Hnutí DUHA knew what park visitors’ attitude would be. Since 2007, the group has operated an information stand in the most frequented location in the national park, with volunteers providing information for tourists and where tourists fill out a questionnaire giving their opinions. Those interested in helping protect the environment also had the option of leaving their contact information. The questionnaire results showed that 63% of visitors (a total of 3916 respondents) perceive national parks to be places where significant areas of the environment should be left untouched by human influence. The presumption was that these people would provide support—and the presumption proved correct.

Ways to Involve the Public in the Legislation Process

Hnutí DUHA knew from its prior experiences with the public that the degree of public involvement may vary. Most people who wish to take part are limited by time constraints. That meant it was necessary that Hnutí DUHA prepare a wide range of opportunities—some for people who had only a few minutes to spare, and some for those who were willing to spend a significant portion of their free time working for the Bohemian Forest. There were three key ways in which the public was involved: petitions sent to legislators, personal letters to MPs and personal visits to MPs. It was clear from the outset that these three actions would provide different levels of reward.

Petitions

The petition we created, titled For a Good Law on Bohemian Forest National Park, contained three key requirements for the protection of the Bohemian Forest’s natural riches:

- Protection of the environment must take precedence over other ways of using the land
- One-third of the national park must immediately be left wild, and this area is to expand to include up to half the park’s area by 2030,
- All further construction on the land must be stopped.

Personal Letters to MPs

The petition allowed people to show their support for these requirements for presentation to





lawmakers in just a few minutes. It was put up on the Hnutí DUHA website (<http://www.hnutiduha.cz/petice/>), and volunteers supplemented this by collecting petition signatures at stands located in Bohemian Forest National Park, and in larger cities and at musical festivals. People with a lot of free time to devote were actively involved in collecting signatures. Most efficient in terms of the number of signatures collected was the petition stand in Prague, which was set up as part of a volunteer initiative. The entire operation centred around the volunteers' work. The stand was open at least one day a week and its objective was not only to collect signatures, but also to provide information to passersby. Not everyone who stopped at the stand signed the petition, but they did have the opportunity to learn about the issue and the approval process of the Act on Bohemian Forest National Park. What was responsible for the stand's success? The population density is highest in Prague, and that was certainly one factor. Another consisted of the large-format photographs and banners the stand was equipped with, featuring quotes from politicians and drawing attention to the pressing danger to the national park.

The petition was signed by a number of well known public figures: actors, signers, musicians, sportsmen and others. Many asked their fans to sign the petition using, e.g., Facebook, which expanded opportunities to address the public. Boris Hybner, an actor and mime, volunteered and personally helped at the petition stand. A group of popular bands organized a tour with special concerts to support the Bohemian Forest wilderness, at which musicians encouraged their fans to sign the petition and become personally involved in protecting Bohemian Forest National Park. They also organized an excursion to the Bohemian Forest wilderness for their supporters.



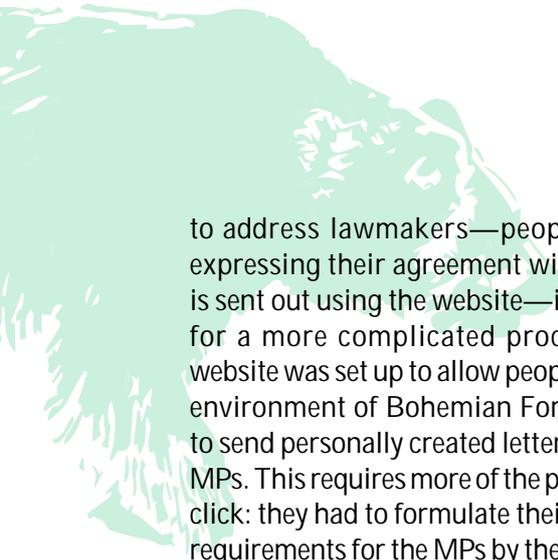
Hnutí DUHA presented the Czech Parliament with over 43,000 signatures affixed to the petition For a Good Law on Bohemian Forest National Park. The petition had a threefold effect on discussion of the act:

- Media interest—information on the petition's presentation and the large number of signatures got to MPs via the media.
- The petition was discussed by the Petition Committee of the Parliament of the CR, which then prepared a report for other MPs. Representatives of signatories were also allowed into the discussion.
- Above all, the message got out to the public thanks to the petition stand and to directly communicating with people. In discussions at the stand, many signatories showed interest in helping Bohemian Forest National Park by doing more than just signing the petition. Specific forms of further involvement were arranged, such as letters and visits to MPs, as described below.

The outcome of all these efforts was that the petition was directly mentioned several times when MPs presented their arguments during the decisive discussion to reject the draft liquidation act.

Personal Letters to MPs

Directly addressing MPs is more effective than using a petition. What is the best way for the public to address an MP? Our prior direct consultations with MPs made it clear that MPs react very unfavourably when their email boxes are jammed with mails that are worded identically. Some labelled it counterproductive. Although DUHA thinks this is a legitimate way



to address lawmakers—people sign the mail, expressing their agreement with it, and the mail is sent out using the website—in the end, it opted for a more complicated procedure. A special website was set up to allow people interested in the environment of Bohemian Forest National Park to send personally created letters and messages to MPs. This requires more of the public than a simple click: they had to formulate their opinions and the requirements for the MPs by themselves.

Information was put out to the public with a reference to the website for the letter (<http://www.hnutiduha.cz/srdce>). The word was spread both by Hnutí DUHA employees and volunteers via a Facebook campaign, email tools, and by active citizens who had signed up to help at information and petition stands. The event was supported in parallel by a media campaign that gave the public a further opportunity to learn about the threat to Bohemian Forest National.

This way of getting the public involvement was highly successful. MPs were flooded with personal letters, and the feedback some provided to us shows that each MP received almost 1000 personal letters and messages. These high numbers were also raised during the discussion that led to the



rejection of the draft liquidation act. The MPs thus learned firsthand how deep the public interest is in Bohemian Forest National Park.

Personal Visits to MPs

The most effective single way in which the public got involved in the legislative process was to pay MPs personal visits. This is the way that voters make the strongest impression in presenting their opinions and arguments. It also allows MPs to hear those arguments in full, which might otherwise not happen, since most MPs do not read materials sent by post or email if they come in large numbers. But if you want to go meet your MP in person, you need to be prepared ahead of time.

People must therefore be encouraged to overcome their shyness when they go to see their MP; they need to be encouraged and the meaningfulness of such visits should be explained. Most members of the public don't believe politicians can really be spoken with—that they are uninterested in their constituents' opinions. To the contrary. MPs and senators are happy to learn what people think, what they want, and what they are interested in. They need the input to carry out their jobs. Many politicians are used to digging up their own information, to be able to show that they know something beyond what the parliamentary minister in the topic area knows. Politicians know that for every person who comes to see them, thousands more hold the same opinion. That prompts them to remember each visit well.

"Go see your MP" requests sent by email or via Facebook prompted minimal or no involvement from the public. Therefore a preparatory meeting was held in Prague for people who had expressed interest in



actively helping. Sharing personal experiences from visits to MPs' offices truly encourage others to go. Thus we had those interested in talking to MPs hear from other members of the public who had already done so. After the meeting, most people who had taken part decided they would pay their MPs, or the MPs of the pertinent parliamentary committees, a visit. The committees in question were the Committee on the Environment, and the Committee on Agriculture. Some went as well to see other MPs of the party they voted for. The people who took part in the meeting also started a group for sharing their experiences and what they had learned from their individual visits.

But unfortunately, the initiative that grew out of the meeting of mostly Prague-based volunteers did not spread to other locations. Prague MPs hence

met many people who go to Bohemian Forest National Park and are interested in protecting the environment; MPs from other electoral districts, with few exceptions, received no visitors at all. In the future, we must find a way to expand this activity to the rest of the Czech Republic.

In the end, thanks to these activities and the massive involvement of the public to which they led, the Chamber of Deputies rejected the draft liquidation proposal at the first reading by a large majority. The enormous numbers of personal letters MPs received, and the parallel media campaign, played a key role. But their success would not have been possible without supporting actions such as petitions and concerts for the Bohemian Forest wilderness.



The Norwegian Example: The Wild 1990s

Background

Forest conservation in Norway got off to a promising start. First, near the turn of the 20th century in 1905, forest preserves began to emerge in the country. That was a long time ago; in the decades since, scientists and civic organizations have demanded that protected forest areas be expanded. This has indeed taken place, but only slowly and reluctantly. A significant shift in perceptions concerning Norwegian forest protection took place in the 1990s, both within forestry and in the political sphere. This culminated in a plan adopted in 1996 in which the Norwegian government pledged to expand areas protected from logging in productive coniferous forests from the original 45 km² to 120 km². What led to this? The biggest factor was civic activism.

Civic Disobedience and Forest Watch

In 1990, only 0.2% of productive forests were under protection. But things changed that same year when desperate NGOs decided to resist the public authorities that had ignored them using civil disobedience. In 1993, civil blockade stopped logging in an area that was soon after declared a protected zone. Once the logging stopped, a tense situation arose in which “Forest Guards” remained in the forests—voluntary monitoring teams and individuals ready to call for further nonviolent blockades if the need arose. These Forest Guards were mainly members of Young Friends of the Earth Norway. To tell the public about themselves, they

used the media, and the media, thanks to the previous blockade, gave them the coverage they asked for. The Forest Guards emphasized their determination to set up another blockade if need be. During the tensest moments, they monitored the 13 most valuable areas in which logging efforts were in evidence. The loggers knew that hundreds of people were combing the woods checking the legality and legitimacy of what they were up to. That forced them to join the debate themselves.

Marked Timber and Consumer Pressure

Over the ensuing 20-plus years, active protests in the form of blockades, protest letters, and other activities directed against the industry or the government have been the main strategic tools of environmental organizations and civic initiatives. After more than 20 years, active protests (blockages), protest letters and other activities directed against the industry or the government have been environmental organizations’ and civic initiatives’ main strategies. In the nineties, a new and successful strategy emerged which aimed to inform consumers, as consumers have enormous power in a democracy especially if they are informed and organized.

Economic forests, trees or felled at a young age. They never grow old. But the life of many endangered species depends upon old, dying, or dead trees. In Norway, only 15% of the productive forests are more than 160 years old. It was here, in these remaining virgin forests, that the Norwegian



government began to allocate permits for logging. Volunteer guardians responded by marking the wood from these forests so that buyers could not claim they didn't know where the wood had come from. In 1996, an extensive catalogue was prepared that showed where old forests, suited for conservation, were located in Norway. This catalogue was sent out to all companies working in the wood trade, and called upon them not to agree to take wood from these areas. Volunteer guardians also visited the largest European wood buyers and introduce them to the Norwegian forests where efforts were still underway to exploit and export timber. Paper producers promised not to accept raw materials from these sources.

Because of the initiative, Norske Skog, the world's largest producer of newsprint, had to deal pragmatically with the threat that orders would be cancelled for one of its biggest customers, the German publisher Axel Springer Verlag. There was great public concern at that time about the loss of biodiversity in Germany, and Springer Verlag feared a significant loss of custom should it fail to respond to this challenge. It required its paper suppliers to prove that no products had come from forests that should be under protection, and in fact went a step further: Springer asked suppliers what they were doing to protect forests and endangered forest species. Initially, Norske Skog reacted angrily to Springer's letters; they denounced the conservationists of treason. But in the end, they were forced to admit that Norwegian forestry practices should be improved. They realized they would have to change their ways if they wanted to call their customers. Norske Skog therefore agreed to a debate on the introduction of sustainable forest

management and the expansion of logging-free areas. The result was a plan to expand the protected forest area. The campaign became a milestone in the history of forest protection in Norway.

Voluntary Forest Conservation in Norway

Primarily in the 1990s, the protection of forests in Norway was a controversial topic, a point of contention. Though positive changes came about in the legal arena, on a practical level the protection of forests lagged behind; negotiations between forest owners, the government, and conservationists saw no major positive shift. In recent years, though, a project entitled Voluntary Forest Protection has brought changes.

Unlike in the Czech Republic, most forests in Norway and other Western European countries are owned by small private owners. The fate of Norwegian forests thus depends to a large extent on the convictions of the owners and their willingness to protect nature.

Since 2000, the majority of newly protected forest areas have been declared so on the basis of voluntary protection. Under the program, forest owners may submit the forest land they plan to provide for conservation purposes for assessment. Once the biological value of the forest has been assessed, the state decides whether such land has adequate value for nature conservation. Negotiations then follow between the regional government and owners. These negotiations may result in agreement or disagreement on a single indemnity payment offered by the state to the owner.

The agreement is conditioned on the owner waiving all rights to exploitation of the forest for



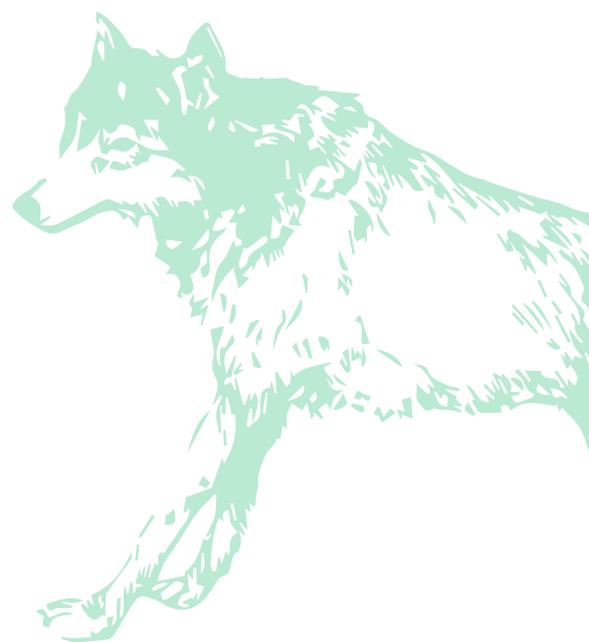


an unlimited period even though he still retains ownership. Similar programs are also in existence in other Nordic countries, but the Norwegian program is unique in that it specifies an indefinite period. The owner thus gives up management not only for himself, but also for his children and his grandchildren. This stipulation has of course meant fewer owners with interest in the voluntary protection program, but the stipulation is still indispensable for nature conservation.

It would seem, then, that a major change is underway from a conservation approach in which the state decides where protected areas shall be located, subsequently providing compensation to the owners, to one which is voluntary in nature. The first step in voluntary protection lies with the forest owner. It is up to him to decide whether to provide the land for conservation or not. It is fair to note that the compensation paid out under the voluntary protection program is somewhat higher than that offered in the conservation process under regular forestry law. But when protected areas have been declared outright, protracted litigation has often resulted, forcing the state to pay out more for obtaining forest land.

Norway has a fairly large number of owners who have little motivation to properly manage their forests. They may, for example, have inherited the forest and have no relationship whatsoever to forestry. For such owners especially, the voluntary program is a good opportunity to increase the value of their forest assets. Their motive often extends beyond pure financial gain to the perception that they are acting in the service of society.

The Voluntary Forest Conservation Program has changed attitudes to nature conservation. The government now has an opportunity to improve the use and protection of forests without creating major conflicts. Suddenly, everyone, including the Association of Forest Owners, agrees that Norway should protect more forests, and the waiting list for inclusion of land in the program is lengthy. The biggest obstacle now is the money earmarked for conservation purposes in the state budget—in 2015, it was half of what it had been the year before.



„People are social and civil society allows them to freely associate with others and live more creatively and authentically. At the same time, it contributes significantly to the stability of the state. This is because it offers the best protection against any attempt to usurp power...”

Vaclav Havel, in a 1999 speech

Norway is seen as the most democratic country in the world. But as the above example shows, democracy grows out of the citizenry, the people. It cannot function properly without their active involvement. Their role and their opportunity to create

society is no different in the Czech Republic than it is in Norway. If the public feels its interests are under threat, it has every right to stand up for them. We hope you will draw inspiration from the examples we've presented here.





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