

In Sutjeska National park a seven-day study of wildlife in the canyons of Sutjeska and Hračvka River was completed, in the zone of direct impact of the planned small hydro power plants on these rivers. This year's survey is a continuation of systematic research started last year after the adoption of the Environmental Impact Assessment, which superficially and without any foundation estimated that small hydro power plants won't have a negative impact on the environment.

After a series of submitted expert opinions, publications and consultations, the Government of RS addressed a special letter to the National Assembly, which was supposed to vote on the citizens' initiative against hydro power plants, and in which it emphasized that: "In general, it can be concluded that the reasons for launching civil initiatives are based on a series of unsubstantiated assumptions and theoretical phrases copied from the scientific literature which is used exclusively for training, teaching and education of students and, as such, do not reflect the real and actual situation in this National park".

The raw results already indicate the extraordinarily close relationship between a large numbers of rare species in these streams, and additionally disprove the feasibility of construction of these facilities on watercourses in NP Sutjeska. The research was initiated by the Center for Environment, Arbor Magna and WWF, enabled by the Swiss organization Pro Natura/Friends of the Earth Switzerland, and with the participation of over 20 researchers from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia and Croatia. They are specialized for 12 groups of organisms (fish, macrozoobenthos, birds, insects, bats, small mammals, large carnivores, amphibians, reptiles, moss, plants and mushrooms) which are related to these rivers and that would be directly or indirectly threatened by the construction of small hydro power plants.

During this research, Ministry of Spatial Planning, Civil Engineering and Ecology has published the statement trying to challenge the entire campaign in the hypocritical way, although the campaign aims to preserve the National Park Sutjeska and to halt plans for the construction of small hydropower plants.

Đorđije Milanović, the Association for the Protection of Natural Heritage "Arbor Magna": "I can't understand the message of the Ministry of Spatial Planning, Civil Engineering and Ecology that the campaign is "deceiving the public with false, incomplete information or misinformation for a long time" when all the information which we have and which we present are based precisely on fundamental scientific research that we conducted these days. Over 20 experts from the region were engaged in the study (ichthyologists, ornithologists, herpetologists, bryologists, botanists, entomologists, etc.) who did a major job that was supposed to be done by the authors of the disputable EIAs".

The Ministry also states the criticism that the research team did not seek permission for the research, which is not true. Work permits were obtained from the relevant institutions: the Sutjeska National Park and the Republic Institute for Protection of Cultural-historic and Natural Heritage of RS, and no approval was required by the Ministry, in accordance with Article 91 of the Nature Protection Act.

Čedomir Crnogorac, a professor at the Faculty of Science in Banja Luka: "As a reference specialist of river network of the Republic of Srpska, author of numerous scientific papers and monographs on the rivers and their protection, allow me to say "stop hydrocide" in the Republic of Srpska. On behalf of us and on behalf of future generations. Potamological pearls of our entity (Sutjeska, Hrčavka, Studena, Jalova, Govza, Bistrica, Janj and many others) are being destroyed by continuous distortions of basic natural values of the hydrospheric complex of Republic of Srpska".

After bitter experiences with previous opinions of the Ministry in this regard, such statements do not surprise but confirm incompetence and misunderstanding of the issues within the institution. In the absence of arguments, Minister Golić speculatively accuses environmental organizations stating that they may have hidden motives in this campaign, which is shameful for such an institution, which is most responsible for the bad state the NP Sutjeska finds itself in and for the approval of Environmental Impact Assessment that represents an offence to the profession and to decades of hard work put into the preservation of the area.

Nataša Crnković, Center for Environment/Friends of the Earth Bosnia and Herzegovina: "This is not just a matter of Sutjeska. Sutjeska is a symbol of all the struggles that lead to the preservation of our rivers. Two years ago, representatives of the Ministry stated that Sutjeska was dead capital, while our study of biodiversity of NP Sutjeska confirms that this area has the greatest potential for developing tourism and research activities in Bosnia and Herzegovina. It's just a matter of time when the interests of individuals and such projects supported by the Government will start to crumble like a house of cards under the pressure of the profession, public and intellect".

This study shows seriousness, but also huge commitment by several organizations in order to preserve the most valuable corners of our country. We want a realistic picture of the value of these rivers, and this research has already proved that it is a unique ecosystem that definitely should not be threatened.

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