Nationalparkverwaltung
Bayerischer Wald

PRESS INFORMATION

Bavarian Forest National Park

Profile

Location The Bavarian Forest National Park is located in eastern Lower Bavaria, close to the border with the Czech Republic. This large protected area is managed by the Nationalparkverwaltung Bayerischer Wald (Bavarian Forest National Park Administration), a special authority directly subordinate to the Bavarian State Ministry for the Environment and Consumer Protection. Together with the neighbouring Šumava National Park in the Czech Republic, the Bavarian Forest National Park makes up part of the largest interconnected protected area of forest in Central Europe.

Foundation On 11 June 1969, the Bavarian Parliament voted unanimously in favour of the resolution approving the establishment of a national park in the area between the mountains of Rachel and Lusen. On 7 October 1970, a large protected area some 13,000 hectares in size was opened in Freyung-Grafenau County as Germany's first national park.

Expansion On 1 August 1997, the National Park was extended by 11,000 hectares in the Falkenstein-Rachel area of Regen County.

Size 24,250 hectares, 17,516 hectares of which is natural zone – 72.3 percent of the overall surface area (as of 2019).

Philosophy Guided by its principle of "Letting nature be natural", the National Park leaves forests, bogs, streams and mountaintops to develop into a boundless woodland wilderness according to their own laws. This approach helps the commercial woodlands of yesterday become the primeval forest of tomorrow – fostering unique biodiversity in the process. Rare animals like the lynx, capercaillie, Ural owl and other species native to primeval forests, like saproxylic beetles, can then resettle in the region over time.

Dead wood The Park's high levels of biodiversity are thanks in part to the large volume of dead wood in the National Park, which provides both a source of food and a habitat for insects, fungi and birds. Natural processes of genesis and decay in the forest ecosystem are left to take their course in the National Park, as dead or windthrown trees are allowed to remain in the natural environment.

Nature 98 percent of the National Park is forest, though the area also includes open raised bogs ("Filze") and former mountain pastures ("Schachten").

Stabsstelle Koordination und Kommunikation
Telefon: +49 8552 9600-132,-144 oder -161
E-Mail: pressestelle@npv-bw.bayern.de

Visitor and environmental education centres

- Lusen National Park Centre with the Hans-Eisenmann-Haus, animal enclosures, botanical and geological site as well as the tree top walk
- Falkenstein National Park Centre with the Haus zur Wildnis, animal enclosures and stone age cave
- Forest History Museum St. Oswald
- Forest playground and natural Kneipp hydrotherapy site Spiegelau
- Deer enclosure Scheuereck
- Information points in Bayerisch Eisenstein, Zwiesel, Frauenau, Spiegelau, Mauth and Freyung
- Forest Youth Hostel at Schönbrunn am Lusen
- Falkenstein Wilderness Camp near Zwieslerwaldhaus

Total visitors: Around 1.4 million people visit the National Park every year

Development of the forest

Storms and bark beetle infestations have caused dramatic changes to the forest landscape over the past few decades. These events have led to intense discussion among local communities since the establishment of the National Park, and particularly during the 1990s. The appearance of the forest and the commercial losses incurred from such events were at the forefront of the controversy during this time. It was feared that irreparable damage had been done to the forests and some believed widespread planting was the only way to save the forest.

Fortunately, the worst fears have not come to fruition. We now know, thanks to numerous studies, that natural disturbances – whether in localised pockets or across large areas – are typical occurrences within forest ecosystems. The designation of the Bavarian Forest National Park and the corresponding commitment to refrain from interfering in natural processes offer a rare opportunity to observe nature developing completely independently.

The undisturbed development of the forest has led to an accumulation of dead wood and changes to its micro-climate as parts of the canopy open up. This creates numerous new structures, with different types of dead wood and root plates offering a variety of new habitats. The additional sunlight reaching the forest floor also provides additional energy and benefits countless animal, plant and fungus species.

Stabsstelle Koordination und Kommunikation
Telefon: +49 8552 9600-132,-144 oder -161
E-Mail: pressestelle@npv-bw.bayern.de

Objectives of the National Park

Nature conservation

The National Park's objectives include allowing the forest to develop according to its own ancient laws without human interference. By 2027, the proportion of the Park left to develop by its own accord will continually increase up to 75 percent. This objective also encompasses preserving endangered animal, plant and fungus species, re-establishing extinct species, protecting or restoring valuable biotopes, preserving cultural monuments and monitoring protection regulations.

Educational, informational and PR work

The National Park's communications focus on conveying the importance of large protected areas – particularly in relation to protecting natural processes. This includes offering access to the National Park for educational purposes in a way compatible with nature conservation. Educational and informational content is communicated both within the landscape and at the Park's visitor facilities. Environmental education also plays a key role. In addition, the National Park works hard to foster acceptance of the protected area among the local population.

Research

The Bavarian Forest National Park is an unparalleled place to learn about global forest conservation. In addition to developing the scientific principles for implementing National Park objectives and monitoring the efficiency of the National Park's management work, researchers are also examining how the forest and its communities develop without human interference and what effects anthropogenic influences have on nature.

Recreation and tourism

The region's unique landscape is accessible for nature-friendly recreation and experiences, which notably includes the National Park's well-marked trail network for hikers and cyclists. One particular focus is on allowing visitors to experience the wilderness first hand. In addition, attractive educational facilities are always kept up to date – a commitment which also encompasses modern visitor guidance systems. The National Park offering is coordinated in advance with the visitor facilities in Šumava National Park.

Stabsstelle Koordination und Kommunikation
Telefon: +49 8552 9600-132,-144 oder -161
E-Mail: pressestelle@npv-bw.bayern.de

Highlights from the history of the National Park

7 October 1974	The Forest Youth Hostel is opened as the first of its kind in Bavaria. Marking the fourth anniversary of the National Park's opening, Minister Dr Hans Eisenmann officially opens the building for its intended use.
23 November 1979	The National Park celebrates the topping-out ceremony for the National Park Information Centre in Neuschönau – now known as the Hans-Eisenmann-Haus.
1 August 1983	A violent thunderstorm knocks down roughly 30,000 cubic metres of wood across an area of 90 hectares. Dr Hans Eisenmann decides to refrain from intervening in the forest's natural development and leave windthrown trees untouched in the core area, which is now about 6,500 hectares in size. The idea is to allow the area to regenerate into its original primeval state for future generations.
1986	The Bavarian Forest National Park is awarded the European Diploma of Protected Areas. The diploma is presented to protected areas for their outstanding scientific, cultural and aesthetic qualities.
1 August 1992	The Bavarian Forest National Park Ordinance adopted by the Bavarian Parliament comes into effect. It was most recently amended in 2007.
1993	Local spruce populations are becoming more frequently affected by bark beetle infestations. The initial pockets of infestations eventually merge into one another to form large areas of infected forest. The beetle population quickly expands from Lusen towards Rachel and the spruce trees in this high-altitude area die-off on a considerable scale within a few years. The infestation of the 1990s leads to a total die-off area of about 6,000 hectares of high-altitude spruce forest. The primeval woodland of tomorrow has been re-emerging in these areas ever since.
1 August 1997	The National Park is extended to include parts of Bayerisch Eisenstein, Lindberg and Frauenau municipalities. With the addition of the area between Großer Falkenstein and Großer Rachel, the National Park now covers over 24,000 hectares. In the course of the expansion, Zwiesel Forestry Authority is integrated into the National Park Administration.
1998	The Junior Ranger project is launched with twelve children.

Stabsstelle Koordination und Kommunikation
Telefon: +49 8552 9600-132,-144 oder -161
E-Mail: pressestelle@npv-bw.bayern.de

2002	Falkenstein Wilderness Camp is opened as the National Park's second major environmental education facility.
14 October 2003	As a special authority, the National Park Administration is now directly subordinate to the Bavarian State Ministry for the Environment and Consumer Protection.
4 August 2006	The Haus zur Wildnis opens near Ludwigsthal.
9 September 2009	The tree top walk is opened in Neuschönau. It is operated by Erlebnis Akademie AG.
2011	The educational work of the National Park is awarded the seal of approval Umweltbildung.Bayern for the first time by the Bavarian State Ministry for the Environment and Consumer Protection.
29 October 2015	Together with the Šumava National Park, the Bavarian Forest National Park becomes a certified Transboundary Park for the second time. The first certification was awarded in 2009.
1 July 2016	With GUTi (Gästeservice Umwelt-Ticket), the eco-friendly travel pass, the National Park and Bavarian Forest Nature Park win the Fahrtziel Natur-Award 2016 (Destination Nature Award 2016) – the second time they have received the award following 2009.
31 August 2018	Four short hiking trails with the markings Ant, Woodpecker, Kingfisher and Crayfish are certified by the Deutscher Wanderverband (German Hiking Association).
1 November 2019	The natural zone is extended by a further 869 hectares near Großer Falkenstein. The principle of "Letting nature be natural" now applies to over 72 percent of the National Park area.
7 October 2020	On the 50th birthday, Bavaria's Prime Minister Markus Söder announced an expansion of the national park by around 600 hectares near Finsterau. The planning is ongoing.

For more on the National Park's history, visit:
www.nationalpark-bayerischer-wald.de/ueber_uns/geschichte

Stabsstelle Koordination und Kommunikation
Telefon: +49 8552 9600-132,-144 oder -161
E-Mail: pressestelle@npv-bw.bayern.de

Ten things we've learnt

1) The forest can rejuvenate without human help

After scores of older spruce trees in the high-altitude forests died off in the 1990s, many in the region believed that new trees had to be planted to aid the natural recovery of the forest. Experience in commercial forestry has generally shown that rejuvenation has always been a problem in high-altitude forests. However, the results of the forest inventories by the National Park Administration have painted a completely different picture. After the large-scale bark beetle infestations, the forest has rejuvenated more strongly than ever before. The density of rejuvenation after just ten years is already higher than the plant numbers typically seen in managed forests. This offered scientific proof that forests can regenerate extremely well even in harsh high-altitude areas without the need for human interference.

2) Capercaillies need wellness areas

In 2016 and 2017, the capercaillie population of the Bavarian Forest and Šumava National Parks was comprehensively studied based on samples of their droppings, chance observations and high-resolution aerial photography. The monitoring work revealed that around 550 capercaillies are currently living in the mountains hugging the Bavarian-Bohemian border. The population is therefore only just above the critical level of 470 animals required for the species' long-term survival in the region. The already limited habitat of the capercaillies in the protected areas is being restricted further by tourist activity. A genetic study into the stress hormones contained in capercaillie droppings revealed that the animals' stress levels increases in step with the volume of visitors. As a result, undisturbed capercaillie refuges – free of visitor crowds – are absolutely essential.

3) Death is what you make of it – the National Park is a hotspot for biodiversity

Ecological disturbances, like windthrow events or bark beetle infestations, change the structure and composition of forests and therefore its communities of species. These disturbances offer space and light for the regeneration of the forest, provide a rich source of nutrients and contribute to the accumulation of dead wood. This, in turn, creates habitats for species that were for years considered lost from the Bavarian Forest National Park. This includes not only primeval forest beetles, but also many types of fungus, such as flaviporus citrinellus (lemon-coloured antrodiella). These species – native to primeval

Stabsstelle Koordination und Kommunikation
Telefon: +49 8552 9600-132,-144 oder -161
E-Mail: pressestelle@npv-bw.bayern.de

woodland – can only find enough of their highly specialised habitats in areas with large volumes of dead trees. The varied range of habitats also benefits many other species, such as the barbastelle and the red-breasted flycatcher. Thanks to the increase in biodiversity, over 8,000 species have been proven to exist in the National Park, with estimates setting this number nearer to 14,000 species. Carcasses left behind in the forest are also hotspots for insects, micro-organisms and necrophagous creatures.

4) Animals can return to former habitats

The region's last lynx was killed in Zwiesel in 1848, and the species was considered extinct in the Bavarian Forest after that point. However, between 1982 and 1989, 18 Carpathian lynxes were successfully released in what is today Šumava National Park. After the population initially grew, the number of animals then stagnated from the start of the 2000s. Research showed that lynx were being killed illegally time and again outside of the protected area, causing numbers to plateau. Since the public debate surrounding their reintroduction, acceptance has grown and with it their population. The same applies to the Ural owl. Germany's second-largest owl species was considered extinct in the Bohemian Forest after the last one was shot in 1926. The reintroduction of the Ural owl in the National Park began in 1975. For a long time, these animals only survived with the help of special nesting boxes. But thanks to general acceptance within the population, the Bavarian-Czech population now comprises 50 territories. And while the lynx and Ural owl needed a helping hand, the wolf and primeval forest beetles have returned to the region all by themselves.

5) Bark beetles can also be tackled more naturally

Nature is allowed to develop according to its own ancient laws on over 70 percent of the surface area in the Bavarian Forest National Park. In the fridge areas, however, bark beetle control measures are undertaken to protect neighbouring forests. Research has revealed that this is also possible with more nature-compatible protection methods. Common techniques in forestry include the complete removal of bark from fallen spruce trees. Unfortunately, this method removes important biomaterial from the forest. The National Park has instead developed a new technique – slitting tree trunks – which helps keep the European spruce bark beetle at bay while lessening the impact on other users of dead wood. This technique involves removing part of the tree's bark, and therefore the biomaterial, but allowing the rest to remain within the habitat and provide nutrients for many other species in the forest.

Stabsstelle Koordination und Kommunikation
Telefon: +49 8552 9600-132,-144 oder -161
E-Mail: pressestelle@npv-bw.bayern.de

6) Increasing visitor numbers demand new management approaches

The number of people visiting the Bavarian Forest National Park has been increasing for some time, with around 1.3 million visitors now travelling to the protected area each year. For around 58 percent of these visitors, the National Park plays a major or very major role in their visit to the region. The increasing recreational use and resultant conflicts between user groups and requirements for nature protection pose one of the central challenges for managing large protected areas. Reliable data on the characteristics and desires of visitors is required for developing a management approach that enables a natural experience while still delivering on the National Park's conservation objectives. Cross-border socio-economic monitoring is, therefore, taking place to establish a reliable dataset.

7) Natural disruptions do not harm drinking water

During the European spruce bark beetle outbreak in the Lusen area, there were fears that the supply of drinking water in the National Park could be impacted by the high resultant nitrate levels. Testing in the National Park has shown that nitrate levels in the water rise in the short term (albeit with a delay) after large-scale bark beetle infestations, but never even approach the limit of 50 milligrams per litre set by the World Health Organisation. Indeed, levels have rarely been measured above 25 milligrams per litre, and nitrate readings returned to pre-infestation levels in all catchment areas within five years of the bark beetle outbreak.
As a result, it is safe to say that there is no conflict between the promotion of biodiversity through large-scale natural disturbances like windthrow and bark beetle infestations and the provision of high-quality drinking water from the National Park.

8) The National Park serves regional development

The National Park brand is synonymous with untouched wild nature, something which is both attractive to and appreciated by visitors: 58 percent of tourists travel to the protected area for this very reason, while 98 percent of visitors to the Bavarian Forest are aware of the National Park. It is the main attraction in the Bavarian Forest holiday region and therefore a driving force behind the development of regional tourism. Marked walking trails, visitor centres, museums and animal enclosures are vital pieces of tourist infrastructure, forming the backbone of tourism and recreation in the Bavarian Forest. The GUTi visitor card – which offers free mobility in the National Park region by bus

Stabsstelle Koordination und Kommunikation
Telefon: +49 8552 9600-132,-144 oder -161
E-Mail: pressestelle@npv-bw.bayern.de

and train – supports sustainable tourism and the regional public transport network. The National Park Partner project promotes environmentally-friendly tourist service providers from the hospitality, mobility and recreation sectors – all working in step with the National Park and its philosophy. This, in turn, fosters sustainable development within the region. From a commercial point of view, the National Park brings in gross tourist revenues of 52.4 million euros, resulting in net value creation of 26 million euros for the National Park region.

9) Climate change has arrived in the National Park

April temperatures have risen by almost four degrees in 30 years here, causing snow cover in the Bavarian Forest to break up three to four weeks earlier on average. The growing seasons, meltwater and groundwater replenishment periods have shifted forwards accordingly. In the latter part of the year, there is now less new groundwater, as higher summer temperatures lead to increased evaporation of water from trees, and ultimately less moisture seeping into the ground. Fungus, flora and fauna all react differently to this development. Some birds and insects are now resettling in high-altitude areas where these effects have yet to occur. Species adapted to living in the areas around the peaks – like the land snail, chickweed-wintergreen or ring ouzel – run the risk of disappearing from the Bavarian Forest all together.

10) Forests rich in dead wood do not create a carbon dioxide problem

The rich accumulation of dead wood in our forests has recently prompted the question of whether "letting nature be natural" could actually negatively impact the climate. After all, wood is left to rot where it falls in the National Park, releasing carbon dioxide (CO_2) into the atmosphere in the process. Commercial wood, on the other hand, appears to enjoy a longer useful life after being felled. However, the latter is an incorrect assumption – on average, commercial wood is burnt more quickly than the time it takes for wood in our forests to rot. Studies in managed and protected forests, both internationally and in the National Park, have revealed that bark beetles and windthrow events hardly differ from logging in terms of their disruption to the ecosystem. The CO_2 released is at most almost identical, and these losses are offset after a maximum of 15 years in National Park forests by the fixation of CO_2 in the biomass of vegetation which subsequently emerges in place of dead trees – a process that can occur even quicker depending on the state of the herbaceous layer and forest rejuvenation where the dead wood falls.

Stabsstelle Koordination und Kommunikation
Telefon: +49 8552 9600-132,-144 oder -161
E-Mail: pressestelle@npv-bw.bayern.de

For more information
and the latest press releases, visit:

www.nationalpark-bayerischer-wald.de

Social-Media:
Facebook: www.facebook.com/nationalpark.bayerischer.wald
Instagram: www.instagram.com/meinnationalpark
YouTube: www.youtube.com/nationalparkbayerischerwald

Appendix

- National Park cooperation projects
- Overview map
- Zoning map

Use of photos

We have provided photos for download on our website which are designated for further use.
Please use the following photo credit for these pictures:
Name of the photographer / Bavarian Forest National Park
The name of the respective photographer is included at the end of the jpg file.

Stabsstelle Koordination und Kommunikation
Telefon: +49 8552 9600-132,-144 oder -161
E-Mail: pressestelle@npv-bw.bayern.de