

Honourable Ostap Semerak
Minister of Ecology and Natural Resources of Ukraine
Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources of Ukraine
35, Metropolitan Vasil Lipkivskyi
03035 Kyiv
UKRAINE



Birmensdorf, April 18, 2018

Subject: Development projects in mountain region of Svydovets and flood risks

Dear Minister Semerak

Our institute has been conducting research in various projects in the Ukrainian Carpathians for 20 years and has established intensive and successful cooperations with various Forest Research Institutions, especially in the oblasts of Transcarpathia, Ivano-Frankivsk and Lviv. Together with these Ukrainian institutions and their researchers several interesting scientific projects have been hitherto realized. Through all these years we have grown very fond of the region of the Ukrainian Carpathians. Exchange visits between researchers of WSL and those from the mentioned oblasts take place regularly.

According to various sources, a group of investors is planning a large tourist development project in the unique high mountain region of Svydovets in the catchment area of the Black Tisza (Chorna Tysa). Today, this area is still largely wooded and sparsely populated. Farming is performed in a traditional manner (Alpine farming). However, the Svydovets area has also seen large-scale logging in recent years, which is e.g. documented on the platform "Global Forest Change": (<http://www.earthenginepartners.appspot.com/science-2013-global-forest>).

As our researchers also found in Svydovets, forests in such sensitive catchment areas of large river systems are extremely important to protect against erosion on the upper reaches of rivers and to regulate runoff during major precipitation events. WSL was involved in investigations concerning the devastating floods in 1998 and 2002. These showed major deficiencies in the catchment areas of the rivers, i.e. the damage downstream was partially caused by deforestation and monocultures. After these floods, the forest managers in Ukraine called for careful management of the forests in the catchment areas. This makes forests healthier and more stable and allows them to expand to areas where they have been severely reduced beforehand due to deforestation or agricultural use. Fortunately, no major floods have occurred since then. However, these recommendations still apply today. Heavy precipitation events such as those of 1998 and 2002 may occur again at any time.

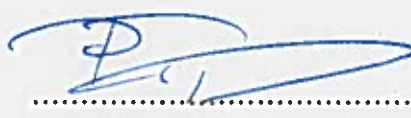
We are aware that projects are interesting which offer perspectives and jobs to the local population living in the structurally weak region of Svydovets. Nevertheless, we would urge you to ensure that such projects are planned and implemented in an ecologically compatible, sustainable manner for the sake of utmost protection of the fragile environment. If our information about the planned major project is correct, this venture cannot be regarded as sustainable: the water catchment areas are likely to be endangered; massive flooding could result. Rather, we recommend that forest structures and the protection of unique natural values are improved. In view of the current climate change, sensitive ecosystems in catchment areas of larger rivers must be treated even more carefully than before.

Dear Minister, we ask you to consider our concerns in this matter and to ensure that the natural values in Svydovets are preserved. Irreversible mistakes made in this unique high mountain region could massively impair the catchment area of the Black Tisza in its protective functions.

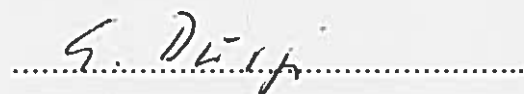
Sincerely,



Prof. Dr. Konrad Steffen
Director WSL



Dr. Peter Brang
Head Cooperation Project Ukraine - Switzerland



Dr. Anton Bürgi
Forest Scientist



Prof. Dr. Irmi Seidl
Head Economics and Social Sciences