SUPREME AUDIT OFFICE

Auditing fire protection of national parks in Poland

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Pre-audit analysis

- The pre-audit analysis revealed:
  - In the conservation plans and tasks for 23 national parks, **fires** were indicated as **potential** or **existing risk**.
  - Actions to prevent fires were:
    - Constructing and maintenance of fire roads and fire protection infrastructure (tanks, hydrants, water points, equipment bases),
    - Purchase of equipment,
    - Conducting observations;
  - According to Minister of Climate and Environment, in 2018-2020, **203** fires occurred in national park areas, covering an area of **6,099.75 ha**.
  - The up-to-date legislation only regulated measures to protect **forests** in detail. There were no regulations for **non-forested ecosystems**. The issue of fire protection for all ecosystems under protection had to be addressed.

Methodology

- Audit was conducted from 30 June 2021 to 8 April 2022
- Period covered by the audit: **1 January 2018 – 8 April 2022**
- 21 audited entities:
  - **Ministry of Climate and Environment**
  - **10 national parks**
  - **7** district headquarters and **3** city headquarters of the **National Fire Service**.

Audit questions

Whether the adequate fire protection was ensured in the national parks in Poland?

Specific questions:

1. Have the **supervisory actions** of the minister in charge of the environment ensured effective fire protection of ecosystems in national parks and full implementation of the tasks in this regard?
2. Have the fire **protection** of ecosystems been **properly organized** in national parks?
3. Have ecosystem fire protection tasks been properly **planned** and **implemented** in national parks?
4. Were **funds** for ecosystem fire protection tasks properly and rationally planned and used in national parks?
5. Did the **State Fire Service** properly supervise the **fire safety** of the national parks?

Audit findings

- The Minister has not comprehensively **monitor** the national parks as required by Article 9(2) of the Nature Conservation Act. The measures taken have not contributed to ensure effective fire protection of ecosystems and full implementation.
- The Minister did not take effective action to require national parks to submit **the annual material tasks** arising from the conservation plan or conservation tasks. As a result, the Minister was unable to determine whether all parks planned to implement the conservation tasks from the conservation plan, including those related to fire protection.
- The Minister did not monitor the implementation of annual monitor tasks by national parks, including tasks to protect ecosystems from fires.
- The Minister did not prepare **annual summary reports** on the activities of the national parks (based on the activity reports submitted by the national parks). The lack of reports meant that the status of implementation of tasks included in the annual material tasks from the conservation plan or conservation tasks was not known.

Audit findings

- In general, fire protection in the audited national parks was organized **in line** with the principles of the Ministry of the Environment's **regulation on forest fire protection.**
- In accordance with the requirements of Article 4(1)(7) of the Fire Protection Act, 10 audited parks had a document named: ***The fire safety Precautions*** *(*based on *the Instruction on Forest Fire Protection* from State Forests)
  - In 4 of 10 national parks *The fire safety Precautions* were prepared unreliably (eg. the forest area of the park was incorrectly indicated, the locations of the information and warning signs were incorrectly indicated)

- For all the national parks audited, the **forest fire hazard category** was defined.
  - In 2 of them, the forest fire hazard category was established **inconsistently** with the **regulation** of the Ministry of Environment's regulation on forest fire protection.
  - The fire hazard category for terrestrial **non-forest ecosystems** was **not defined** because there was no appropriate methodology and **legal basis** for such a categorization.

Audit findings

- The Minister did not take actions to define the **regulations** and **organisation** of fire protection of **non-forest ecosystems** in national parks.
  - In 9 out of 10 national parks audited, the total fires area amounted to 6,000 ha, **80.5 %** of which was in **non-forest ecosystems**
  - In 4 out of 10 national parks audited, **non-forest ecosystems** accounted for more than **20 %** of the total area
  - The principles of fire protection and the organization of fire protection for non-forest ecosystems must be established, and then the principles of protection must be established for **the entire territory** of each national park

Audit findings

- All audited parks had **ground fire patrols** (park services and guards) equipped with basic fire protection equipment
- There were a total of **204 fire roads** (841 km in length) in the parks audited
  - In 2 national parks, fire roads were not in line with the provisions of 8(2) of the Ministry of the Environment's regulation on forest fire protection
  - All fire roads were passable and well marked. In 3 parks, the lack of signposting was noted, which was removed during the audit.
- There were a total of **458 water supply** points:
  - In 5 out of 10 parks, the water supply points were correctly marked, with proper access and access to the water table. In other 5 parks irregularities were found (the lack of or inadequate signage and obstructed access to the water points, which were rectified during the audit)
- All the audited national parks had fire protection equipment in quantities in line with the requirements of the regulations.

Audit findings

- In 9 controlled national parks, **187** fires were recorded in the period 2018-2021 (1st half of the year) with a total area of **6,049.58** ha, including: **1,178.44 ha** of **forests** and **4,871.14 ha** of **non-forest ecosystems.**
- The following tasks related to fire protection of ecosystems were planned and carried out in the parks:
  - on-call duty at observation and alarm/dispatch points and ground patrols, establishing/renewing fire lanes, cleaning up the area along facilities that could pose a fire hazard, maintaining the passageway of fire accesses, maintaining water points, maintaining and purchasing fire equipment.
- The main causes of the fires were **arson** and **carelessness** in the handling of **open flames**.
- **The State Fire Service** properly supervised the fire safety of the national parks.

Assessement

- In the assessment of the Supreme Audit Office, proper **fire protection** was **not fully ensured** in the national parks:
  - In 3 out of 10 audited parks significant irregularities were found (i.e. on the determination of the **forest fire risk category**, which did not comply with the binding **regulations)**
- The Supreme Audit Office gave a **negative** assessment of the minister in charge of the environment's **supervision** over the activities of national parks with regard to the fire protection of ecosystems. The Minister's management control system did not ensure effective and efficient oversight of fire protection activities of the national parks.
- The Minister **did not take legislative** action to define the **principles** of fire protection for terrestrial **non-forest ecosystems**, including the method for determining their **fire hazard category**. As a result, the fire disaster management regulations in force in national parks only considered the fire hazard category of forest ecosystems.

Assessment

- The **lack** of an appropriate **methodology** and **legal basis** for the fire hazard classification of terrestrial **non-forest ecosystems** prevented the reliable development of rules for the definition of **fire hazard categories** for the **entire area** of these national parks, were both forest and terrestrial non-forest ecosystems are located.

- Tasks related to fire protection of forest ecosystems were planned and implemented in the national parks, which included:
  - standby duty at observation points, ground patrols, establishment and/or renewal of firebreaks, clearing of areas along facilities that could pose a fire risk, maintenance of water supply points, purchase and maintenance of fire protection equipment. A sufficient number of fire protection equipment was also available and the right number of fire bases was organised.
  - However, **irregularities** were found in 5 national parks, which consisted in the lack of marking of fire access roads and water supply points and the difficulty of access to these points. These irregularities were rectified in the course of the audit.

- The National Fire Service has **properly supervised fire safety** in the national parks by agreeing the rules of conduct in case of fire communicated by the parks and carrying out inspections; when irregularities were detected, their elimination was enforced.

Conclusions

- **Legislative action** was requested from the **Minister for Climate and Environment** to:
  - To establish a methodology for determining the **fire hazard category** of terrestrial **non-forest ecosystems** in national parks and the principles of fire protection of these ecosystems.
  - To establish **rules** for the determination of **fire hazard categories** for the **entire territory** of the **national parks** within whose boundaries both forest and terrestrial non-forest ecosystems are located
  - To **set deadlines** for the submission of **annual material tasks** for approval
- And other actions:
  - To **obligate** of the directors of the national parks to prepare and submit to the minister responsible for the environment **reports** on the implementation of **annual material tasks**.
  - To prepare **summary reports** on the activities of the national parks (based on their reports on the implementation of the annual material tasks).