11th Transboundary Ramsar Site declared by Poland & Czech Republic

9 October 2009

Czech Republic
Poland

The "Krkonose/Karkonosze subalpine peatbogs" were added on 21 September 2009 to the list of Transboundary Ramsar Sites during the 7th international conference on geocological problems of the Karkonosze mountains, held in the Polish tourist village of Szklarska Proreba. The Giant Mountains (Krkonose in Czech, Karkonosze in Polish) mark the natural border between Poland and the Czech Republic, form an isolated mountain range with a particular geological history, and function as a biogographical refuge area and isolated outpost for several Arctic and Alpine species. The mountain habitats were at the base of the development of specific local cultures, traditions, legends and mysterious figures. Unfortunately, during the last period of the 20th century's centrally-planned economies, industrial air pollution created large-scale forest dying in the area. But presently the forests are growing again, and the beautiful landscape attracts millions of hiking and skiing tourists each year.

The Polish Karkonoski National Park is celebrating its 50th anniversary in 2009, and its Czech counterpart is to follow soon. Together with their buffer zones, both form a Transboundary Biosphere Reserve, and the coordination of the work of many scientists through the UNESCO Man and Biosphere programme was instrumental in furthering applied research and monitoring of this unique area. Now, with the declaration as a Transboundary Ramsar Site, also the peatbogs in the subalpine zone of the mountains (i.e., above the timberline), designated earlier unilaterally for the Ramsar list in 1993 in the Czech Republic (site N°637) and in 2002 in Poland (site N°1566), are formally recognized as a shared natural heritage and crucial hydrological infrastructure in the most upstream parts where such major European rivers as the Odra/Oder and Labe/Elbe take their sources.
During the international conference, bringing together about a hundred scientists, public administrators, Ramsar authorities and protected area managers, it was also evoked that not only the subalpine peatbogs in the Karkonosze mountains merit further consideration, but also other types of well-represented wetlands in the area, notably the subalpine lakes, mountain torrents, upstream river parts and their floodplains, and different types of mires. This led to the very concrete proposal about designating the nearby Izer river valley, forming the border between the two countries in its most natural part, with its floodplain, mires and bogs, as another Transboundary Ramsar Site. Watch this space to learn more about progress with this project.

The two official letters for the TRS:

Czech Republic   Poland
17 September 2009  14 September 2009

And a few photos:
Andrzej Raj, director of the Karkonoski National Park (facing the camera), explaining the functioning of the Upa peatbog situated right on both sides of the border between Poland and the Czech Republic on the high plateau above Karpacz tourist village.
Conference participants visiting the Izer valley, at the newly-established bridge again linking Poland with the Czech Republic, and inspecting the erosion of the man-high peat layer through the forces of the spring snow melt floods carried by a small meandering river in the Izer river floodplain.