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Abstract

Political and economic changes have often led to change in forest resources by new groups. Foresters acting in the name of the new state have tended to be agents that act on behalf state to nationalize the periphery. In the postsocialist border and forest politics of eastern Poland, state foresters altered the prominence of their nationalist images in the Bialowieza Forest in three important ways. 1.) They downplayed their historic role in nationalizing the periphery. 2.) They create new allegiances with the Belarusian identified local population and 3.) They referenced neighboring Belarus' preferential management of what is often called "Europe's last primeval forest." I present both an environmental history and an ethnographic account of relations between foresters working for the state, a wide array of biologists, NGO's, journalists and other conservationists whom I will label conservationists, and "local" people. My paper argues that foresters could deterritorialize their operation, at least rhetorically, because of the scaling up of conservationists, who viewed and promoted the forest as national, European and global heritage. Discourses about community-based and sustainable forestry further prompted foresters to defend and represent local interests against those of conservationists, including biologists living and working in the forest. The transcendence of cultural differences by foresters marks an important and novel component of the postsocialist period.