



The contemporary Knyszyn Primeval Forest represents all that remained after several historical complexes of primeval forests, that is: Grodzieńska, Knyszyńska and Bludowska Primeval Forests. Settlement there was carried out very slowly. For a long time it was a borderland influenced by following nationalities: Polish, Russian, Lithuanian and The Teutonic Knights. The acceleration of the primeval forests' colonization in the 16th and 17th centuries resulted in the considerable shrinkage of the forest area in comparison with the agricultural area. At that time the range of today Knyszyn Primeval Forest was formed approximately.

Through the centuries game animals and bee-keeping constituted the forests' main asset. Timber harvesting (the main mean of forest) was conducted on a little scale which enabled the forests to regenerate naturally.

The vital changes took place in the 19th century when an intensive exploitation of forests begun. That was the reason of introducing forest economy based, among other things, on the artificial afforestation. The greatest changes in Knyszyn Primeval Forest started in 1914. The German army carried on felling the forests on an unusually big scale. Many sawmills were built in the forest villages as well as a little network of a narrow-gauge railway meant for timber transportation. It is estimated that from 1915 to 1918 10 000 hektars forest area (the oldest and the most valuable) was cut down using clear cuttings method. After regining the independence the intensive forest exploitation was continued. Clear cutting areas were afforested with Scots pine monocultures regardless of the forest habitat type. That was the reason why the habitats changed for the worse in terms of natural conditions. Fortunately there were

not defeats here which had happened in other forests where massive appearances of insects damaged tree stands. Besides in Knyszyn Primeval Forest there are a lot of places which were not even touched by human, which makes it exceptionally precious from the nature point of view.

1970's and 80's of 20th century was a turning-point in approach to the forest and its functions. A bigger attention was paid to biological wealth of the forest, its ecological and social aspects. Where possible clear cuttings were limited or totally abandoned for the benefit of other ways of wood harvest. Afforestation was planned in agreement with habitat as well as species diversity. For many species the minimal age at which it can be harvested has been increased. For pine for example the minimal tree age is 130 years. Nature protection was also emphasised which was shown in: creating reserves, delimitation protection zones around nests, pointing out nature monuments, water-protecting forests, seed stands etc. All these actions are leading to stands reconstruction and making Knyszyn Forest older and older. All these actions allow the Wilderness to become gradually older. An average age is between 50 –60 years old, over 100 – only few percents. Presently, the average age of trees varies from 50 to 60 years, with only a small percentage of trees being over 100 years old. It seems to be not much however compared to most forests in Poland, the results are significant.