

The present statement was shown for approval on the first edition of the “Black Poplar Pollard Festival”, celebrated in Aguilar del Alfambra (Teruel) on the 24th of October 2009. Any person, association or group willing to support to this document, please contact us in order to add them to the list shown at the end.

STATEMENT ON BLACK POPLAR POLLARD’S CONSERVATION

1. The banks of the Iberian range have been historically processed through its vegetation management to provide open plant formations favourable for certain forest species such as black poplar or willow.
2. The black poplar pollard is the result of the traditional pruning of black poplar. These trees have a trunk right and thick, widened at the top (head) and continued at a same height in several branches (beams) arising beyond the livestock access.
3. The black poplar groves are the result of planting, taking care and use by farming communities on the banks of rivers, ditches and springs for centuries. Wood has been used extensively in the construction of housing, fuel and fodder for cattle ranching. The livestock management transformed the banks becoming enlarged rangelands with fresh meadows sprinkled of old monumental poplars.
4. The banks of the Aragon Iberian Mountain host the largest, more continuous and best preserved black poplar pollard groves in Europe, in spite of the breadth of the area of distribution of this species on that continent.
5. Growing new poplars by planting the small branches chopped down out of old poplars pruning for centuries allowed preserving the characteristics of the Iberian black poplars. These groves are a genetic reservoir of regional variety *Populus nigra* against foreign species.
6. The black poplar pollards determine the river bank ecosystems functioning in several sections of the rivers in southern Aragon, modifying microclimatic conditions, soil and hydrological, and conditioning the composition of the biological communities.
7. The black poplar pollard groves behave as mature bank river forests, housing many very ancient live trees with big dimensions and abundant internal voids, as well as a large number of dead wood. These groves maintained a high temporal and spatial continuity. Such concentration of trees with these characteristics is very difficult to find nowadays in other river banks of the Iberian peninsula.
8. These poplar pollards offer varied microenvironment providing food and serving as shelter or breeding place of a diverse community of algae, lichens, fungi, mosses, vascular plants, nematodes, molluscs, arthropods (especially wood eating insects), reptiles, mammals and birds. Some species are included in the catalogues of threatened species of Aragon and Spain.
9. The black poplar pollard groves are the last remains of riparian vegetation and sometimes the only trees in large parts of the Iberian range.
10. These old trees are the result of cultural and natural interaction. They are a basic landscape element of valleys and foothills of the Aragon’s Iberian range, constituting

the axis of the vegetation in the open and deforested scenery. These landscapes, apart of his great beauty, are equipped with its own identity and characterize the whole territory. This living heritage is unique in Europe.

11. This singular agro-forest managing is the result of an ancestral know-how treasured by farming communities and it's considered an ethnological and historic value.

12. Social, economic and technical changes have resulted in the abandonment of the care and use of poplar groves for over twenty years. Giving up pruning activities causes decline and collapse of the branches, a current process that is going further.

13. The decrease in the flow of rivers, underground irrigation ditches, the burning of embankments, some works of land reallocation, the construction of dams and the opening of opencast mines, as projected by the WBB Company in Galve and in Aguilar de Alfambra, pose serious threats to the poplars, besides the lack of care.

14. By all these causes, black poplar pollards are seriously threatened in the short term, and without human intervention to restore their care, they will irreversibly disappear in few decades.

15. The Environment, Rural and Marine Department, through the Ebro and Júcar Hydrographical Confederations, as the responsible for the management of the river banks, should undertake a black poplar conservation plan, recovering the traditional pruning with forest specialized groups of workers and declaring as "Protected Riverbank Landscape" the best sections of river with those trees.

16. Black poplar pollards are forestry cultivation with a very positive effect in ecological systems; so that they should be recognised by Aragon's Agriculture and Environment Departments of and give financial aid to compensate farmer's effort for conservation through traditional handling.

17. The Environment Department, on the other hand, must get involved in the protection of black poplar pollard groves and monumental trees, as well as all those other pollard trees located in his management area forests, reinstating its pruning activities.

18. These elderly pruned poplars obtained by generation's care make up a unique heritage, valuable enough in several sections of our rivers to declare them as "Cultural Park" by the Education and Culture Department of Aragon. This declaration would mean a value enhancement and to give boost to socio-economic development in rural areas.

Signature:

Name and surname:

Association/University: