

Supporting and Enhancing World Heritage Sites

A Statement for the 39th Session of UNESCO World Heritage Committee Meeting

The African Wildlife Foundation (AWF), founded in 1961, is the largest international conservation organization focused solely on Africa. AWF's mission is to work together with the people of Africa to ensure the continent's wildlife and wild lands endure forever. AWF firmly believes that African nations, with proper planning and commitment, can maintain their extraordinary natural heritage amid continued economic growth and development. Critical to the realization of this vision is the maintenance of Africa's impressive World Heritage Sites (WHS).

AWF supports Africa's governments in strengthening the management effectiveness of a number of World Heritage Sites and is currently working in Simien Mountains National Park in Ethiopia, Dja Faunal Reserve in Cameroon and Niokolo-Koba National Park in Senegal. AWF has in the past worked in other WHS, including Zimbabwe's Mana Pools National Park and Virunga National Park in the Democratic Republic of Congo, and is engaged in conservation activities in the Selous Game Reserve region in southern Tanzania.

AWF's reflections on the status of conservation in these sites and recommendations for the relevant decisions in the 39th Session of the World Heritage Committee are provided below. In addition to site-specific recommendations, AWF supports two cross cutting items on the agenda for discussion at the 39th Session of the Committee.

First, AWF is among eight NGOs¹ convened at the IUCN World Parks Congress in Sydney in November 2014 that called for a 'no-go' and 'no-impact' policy around WHS when it comes to mining, oil and gas activities. AWF herein wishes to reiterate this position and call attention to it given the deliberation at the 39th Session of UNESCO World Heritage Committee (WHC) meeting. Additionally, AWF is a founding member of the Africa World Heritage Site Support Network (AWHSSN), a consortium of conservation NGOs supporting World Heritage in Africa, and supports AWHSSN's requests for support in building more systematic links between NGOs and WHS; securing a stronger role for conservation NGOs in the workings, management and oversight of the Convention (reflecting on the significant level of support that we provide to its implementation); and advocating for individual WH natural sites.

Item 7A : State of conservation of the properties inscribed on the List of World Heritage in Danger

Virunga National Park (N 63)

AWF worked for over two decades in the Virunga National Park (VNP) as part of the International Gorilla Conservation Programme (IGCP). VNP is a globally significant Park, which, together with Volcanoes National Park in Rwanda and Mgahinga Gorilla National Park and Bwindi Impenetrable National Park in Uganda, hosts the last remaining population of critically endangered mountain gorillas. It's estimated that fewer than 900 individuals are left in the world.

¹ AWF, WCS, WWF, FZS, FFI, ZSL, TNC, FZS, WF. www.awf.org/sites/default/files/WorldHeritageSite_No-Go-Extraction.pdf.



AFRICAN WILDLIFE FOUNDATION®

AWF supports the draft decision language *commending the courageous staff in the field working to protect VNP*. AWF also strongly supports the draft decision language *reiterating concern about the fact that the State Party has not canceled the petroleum licenses in the Park, and strongly urging the State Party to cancel all the oil exploration permits granted within the property without further delay and to make a clear commitment not to authorize further oil exploration or oil exploitation within the established boundaries of the property as it was inscribed on the World Heritage List in 1979*. AWF also supports the language of the draft decision *reiterating the position that oil exploration or exploitation is incompatible with World Heritage status, which is supported by the commitments made by industry leaders such as Shell and Total*.

The WHC *notes with concern that the Prime Minister in its letter dated 26 January 2015, while affirming that the Government so far has not approved oil exploitation in Virunga National Park, acknowledges that the State Party might seek a minor boundary modification to enable exploitation to go ahead*. AWF would welcome additional language in the decision calling on the State Party to not consider any proposals to change or alter the VNP boundaries to allow any such extraction activity to take place.

AWF calls upon SOCO International, a publicly listed British petroleum company, to relinquish its permits and withdraw any interest in natural resource exploitation in the VNP and to not support the modification of VNP boundaries. SOCO should join other companies, such as Shell, in its commitment to NOT excavate in WHS.

Simien Mountains National Park (N 9)

AWF is working in partnership with the Ethiopian Wildlife Conservation Authority (EWCA) to enhance the development and protection of the Simien Mountains National Park (SMNP) and the surrounding landscape. AWF and EWCA signed a collaborative management agreement in December 2014. Although Ethiopia has a considerable number of WHS, SMNP is its only natural WHS. The Park is noted for its exceptional natural beauty, dramatic views, and unique biodiversity, and is a key watershed. SMNP is a botanical hotspot and supports 21 threatened or endangered mammal species, of which ten are endemic. The Walia ibex (*Capra walie*) is found nowhere else except in the Simien Mountains, which is also home to the Ethiopian wolf (*Canis simensis*), one of the rarest canids in the world, and the Gelada monkey (*Theropithecus gelada*).

Anthropogenic pressures combined with civil conflict in the late 1980s resulted in a deterioration of SMNP and a decline in the populations of flagship species. At its 20th session in 1996 the WHC inscribed SMNP on the List of WHS in Danger for the following reasons:

- A decline in the population of the Ethiopian wolf and Walia ibex;
- Human pressure on the Park, through the expansion of agriculture and settlement in and around the Park;
- Overgrazing of the Park habitat by livestock; and
- The presence of a public road crossing the core area of the Park.

The WHC identified the following benchmarks to guide the removal of the Park from the List of WHS in Danger:

- Realign the Park's boundary to exclude villages on the periphery;
- Extend the Park boundary to include the Mesarerya and Limalimo Wildlife Reserves;
- Significantly reduce the human population density in the park, especially in the core area; and
- Effectively conserve the Walia ibex and Ethiopian wolf within the Park.

The State Party has made considerable progress towards meeting those benchmarks. However, there are still severe ecological threats to the Park. AWF supports the language of the draft decision before the Committee *commending the Government of Ethiopia in their efforts to enhance the conservation of SMNP, in particular their expansion of the Park to include key habitat and exclude villages, and the rezonement of the boundaries.* AWF is pleased to be collaborating with EWCA on:

- A revised grazing strategy with support from UNESCO;
- Development of a tourism plan for the Park;
- Training of EWCA scouts and community guides;
- Improvement of old signage and development of new ones; and
- Development of community benefits and livelihood options, including the development of a modern primary school and community-owned tourism facilities.

Despite impressive work by EWCA and partners, the conservation challenges and pressure on SMNP remain significant. AWF supports the draft decision language *reiterating the call to the international community to increase the financial support to the property for the implementation of the remaining corrective measures.* AWF recognizes draft decision language *requesting the State Party to commission an independent scientific study on the status, composition and distribution of important wildlife species such as *Walia ibex* and *Ethiopian wolf* and further language requesting the State Party to submit to the World Heritage Centre, an updated report on the state of conservation of the property.* AWF offers to work with EWCA and the State Party to support this effort and to support EWCA, if requested, in providing an updated report by 1 February 2016 as requested.

Niokolo-Koba National Park (N 153)

Niokolo-Koba National Park (NKNP) in southeastern Senegal is part of the Mandingue Plateau, a trans-boundary conservation complex that serves as one of the last remaining strongholds for endangered species in West Africa. The plateau has been identified as an “Exceptionally Important Priority Area” for the western chimpanzee, supporting approximately 1,500 chimps, as well as the largest area of intact savannah woodland in West Africa (Kormos & Boesch 2003). As most of the chimpanzee populations are found outside protected areas, they remain extremely vulnerable. As noted by WHC, a number of wildlife populations, including lion, Derby eland and elephant, are precariously low.

AWF is supporting chimpanzee conservation in Niokolo-Koba with the Jane Goodall Institute-Spain and other partners, focusing on monitoring and protection through deployment of CyberTracker and SMART tools. AWF concurs with WHC’s findings that the threats to this WHS are severe. These threats include poaching, the development of a dam on the Gambia River, and the issuance of gold mining permits.

AWF supports draft decision language by the Committee *expressing its deep concern regarding the granting of a gold prospection license in the immediate vicinity of the property and considers that if this license is converted into an exploitation license there would be a negative impact on the OUV of the property, in particular on the habitats of threatened species such as the chimpanzee, lion, elephant and Derby eland.* And the *reiteration of its position regarding the fact that mining exploration and exploitation is incompatible with World Heritage status, policy supported by the declaration of the International Council on Mining and Metals (ICMM) not to undertake such activities in World Heritage properties.*



AFRICAN WILDLIFE FOUNDATION®

AWF supports draft decision language by the Committee on the need for *capacity building of staff at the property by providing training and equipment adapted to the new technologies, including the application of the SMART tool (Spatial Monitoring and Reporting Tool) and for updating the ecological monitoring programme of the Park, based on indicators that are simple, reliable and inexpensive to measure, and on statistics drawn from reliable inventories of threatened populations of key species for the Outstanding Universal Value of the property (lion, Derby eland, elephant, chimpanzee and wild dog) and integrated into the management plan of the property, which must be updated and implemented urgently.*

AWF will continue to work with partners to scale up anti-poaching and ecological monitoring activities through CyberTracker and SMART with training, procurement of equipment and adoption of a holistic ecological monitoring program.

Selous Game Reserve (N 199 bis)

Tanzania's Selous Game Reserve has historically hosted a critical population of elephant. WHC notes a series of threats to Selous, including uranium mining, the proposed Stiegler's Gorge project and poaching. Whilst these threats need to be addressed, AWF urges the State Party with support from the international community to focus on anti-poaching and anti-trafficking efforts. Preliminary results from a recent elephant census in Tanzania indicate a sharp decline in the country's elephant population due to poaching, including a 66% decline in the elephant population in the Selous-Mikumi ecosystem.

AWF strongly supports draft decision language recognizing the poaching crisis and *urging the State Party to strengthen law enforcement, and to develop and implement a specific anti-poaching strategy and a comprehensive emergency action plan with the objective of halting poaching within the "Larger Selous Ecosystem" in 12 months, as originally recommended by the 2013 Reactive Monitoring mission and Decision 38 COM 7B.95, and further requesting the State Party to take decisive actions at national level to address criminal networks involved in ivory trafficking and to improve controls in the ports used by the traffickers, and calls upon the States Parties which are transit and destination countries for ivory and rhino horn, to support the State Party to halt the illegal trade in ivory and other illegal wildlife products.*

AWF has and will continue to provide judiciary training and will be supporting the installment of sniffer dogs in key ports, and remains committed to working with the Government of Tanzania to halt wildlife trafficking.

Item 7B: State of conservation of properties inscribed in the World Heritage List

Dja Wildlife Reserve (N 407)

AWF is working with the Service de Conservation (SDC) in Cameroon on the protection and improved management of this 5,260km² WHS. The Dja Faunal Reserve (DFR) is considered one of the largest and most species-rich protected rainforests in Africa. Home to the critically endangered western lowland gorilla (*Gorilla gorilla gorilla*), the endangered chimpanzee (*Pan troglodytes troglodytes*) and the endangered forest elephant (*Loxodonta cyclotis*), DFR is a global ecological priority that merits the concerted efforts of the international community.

Over the past year AWF has:

- Granted USD \$100,000 to SDC to support anti-poaching efforts in the Reserve;
- Provided the equipment and trained eco-guards on the use of CyberTracker and SMART for improved ecological monitoring and anti-poaching efforts in the Reserve, adapting the tool to the needs of this WHS and ensuring its continued development and implementation;



AFRICAN WILDLIFE FOUNDATION®

- Completed a south-north reconnaissance trek through DFR in April 2015 to assess the state of the Reserve, test CyberTracker and SMART tools, and raise awareness of the ecological importance of the Reserve.

AWF supports the draft decision language *commending the Government of Cameroon in their efforts to increase anti-poaching efforts and improve their anti-poaching strategy while also noting with concern that poaching remains a significant threat to the property*. AWF is of the view that the scale and scope of poaching in DFR is severe and puts the future of its wildlife, including rare, threatened and endangered species, at risk. However, with increased anti-poaching patrols, proper equipment and training, as well as an increase in poaching fines and judiciary training, AWF firmly believes the wildlife in the Reserve can be protected.

AWF is pleased to see the lapse and non-renewal of mining permits in DFR and supports the draft decision language *requesting the State Party to commit to not renewing, extending or expanding any natural resource extraction permits in the DFR and in areas outside the DFR that might impact the OUV of the Reserve*.

AWF shares the concerns raised about the potential significant impacts on the Reserve's OUV of the Mekin Dam and the Sud Cameroun Hévéa industrial plantation and agrees with WHC's call to determine the specific actions required to reduce and mitigate the projected impacts. AWF supports the language *noting with concern that no information is provided on the specific measures taken to reduce and mitigate the significant potential direct and indirect impacts on the OUV of the property from both the Mekin dam project and the Sud Cameroun Hévéa industrial plantation, as identified in the respective Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs) for these developments*.

AWF takes note of *the request for the State Party to submit to the World Heritage Centre statistics about deforestation in the property and its vicinity*, in light of the lack of information about the rates of deforestation and forest fragmentation. Deforestation and fragmentation put the ecological integrity of the site at risk and AWF is willing to work with the State Party to develop a monitoring framework to collect this information and monitor the trends.

AWF acknowledges *the request for an updated report on the state of conservation of the property and the implementation of WHC recommendations, to be examined by the World Heritage Committee at its 40th session in 2016*. AWF offers its support to the State Party in developing said report and supporting the mitigation of key threats, funding permitted.

AWF would welcome additional language in the decision calling on the international community to increase the financial support to the property for ensuring its effective management and language that acknowledges the role of the bushmeat trade in the DFR and the enormous risk to its great ape population.

No Extraction in World Heritage Sites

UNESCO natural and cultural WHS are recognized as being of Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) to humanity. Natural WHS are the flagships of the global network of protected areas. While they cover less than 1% of the world's surface, they contain a wealth of irreplaceable flora, fauna and ecosystems that should be safeguarded for future generations.



AFRICAN WILDLIFE FOUNDATION®

Despite the legal protections bestowed upon WHS properties, the growing demand for natural resources has placed an increasing number of these under threat, in particular from extractive activities. While recognizing the economic benefits that mineral, oil and gas exploration and extraction might bring to host countries, the potential impacts on the environment and ecosystem services are many, and may include habitat destruction, deforestation, biodiversity loss, water pollution and topsoil contamination. Such environmental impacts and the potential loss of a WHS may limit the possibilities for alternative, broad-based sustainable development with longer-term benefits for communities and wildlife.

Urgent action is required to stop the trend of increasing encroachment of extractive industries on natural WHS, as these activities jeopardize the OUV attributed to natural and mixed WHS.

Furthermore, mineral, oil, gas and other natural resource exploration and exploitation outside of WHS must not, under any circumstances, negatively impact their OUV. AWF urges the following actions:

1. States Parties to the World Heritage Convention should fulfill their obligations regarding the preservation of WHS. In particular, AWF encourages States Parties to:
 - a. Cancel all existing mining, timber and oil/gas concessions that overlap WHS and allocate no such concessions in future;
 - b. Include in national legislation a 'no-go' provision for mining, timber, oil/gas exploration and commercial natural resource exploitation in WHS; and
 - c. Include in national legislation a stipulation that rigorous pre-appraisal processes, such as conducting international best practice environmental and social impact assessments, must be undertaken for mining and oil/gas exploration and commercial natural resource exploitation activities that may affect WHS.
2. Extractive companies, financial institutions and industry groups should adopt and implement 'no-go' and 'no-impact' policies for all mineral and oil/gas exploration and commercial natural resource extraction activities (including associated infrastructure development and activities) in and around all natural and mixed WHS.

Africa World Heritage Site Support Network

The Africa World Heritage Site Support Network (AWHSSN) is an informal and open network of conservation organizations working in World Heritage Sites in Africa to support their management and conservation. The network was initially convened in 2014 by IUCN's Eastern and Southern Africa Regional Office to explore the value of collaboration and information sharing across the organizations. Over a sequence of discussions, the group has concluded that there is value in collaboration particularly around the following points:

- 1 **Build more systematic links between conservation NGOs and World Heritage:** for example, building a framework for more active, coordinated participation at the WHC in Bonn *and* active follow-up with the States Parties, local stakeholders, UNESCO, IUCN and the other Advisory Bodies to support full implementation of the Committee's decisions.
- 2 **Secure a stronger role for conservation NGOs in the Convention:** we welcome the opportunity to work with the Chairperson and her team on how best to organize the contribution of NGOs both at the Bonn meeting and beyond.
- 3 **Support for conservation needs of individual World Heritage Sites:** the conservation NGOs commit to continue to work with the Convention and with its State Parties to improve the management of sites.

AWHSSN has made the following requests to enhance NGO contribution to the WH processes:

- NGOs with expertise in the conservation and management of WHS to be accorded observer status to attend and engage with the annual meetings of the World Heritage Committee. Such observer status could be granted along similar lines to other MEAs.
- NGOs with World Heritage observer status to be able to speak and distribute documents at meetings of the WH Committee—by raising their name cards or hands
- NGOs with World Heritage observer status to be provided with name cards (with the name of the NGO, so that the Chair may call on them, and Member States and others at the meeting can find them).
- Consider, prior to the Committee meeting, whether any changes regarding NGO observer status necessitate changes to formal practices of the WHC, or can be accomplished as a matter of precedent.