



Safeguarding our Natural Heritage

WCS AND THE WORLD HERITAGE CONVENTION



Human activity is transforming our planet.

Increasing demand for resources is placing extraordinary pressure on our natural world, driving a record number of wildlife species to extinction, and unraveling ecosystems and degrading the services they provide to people. Terrestrial and marine habitats around the world are undergoing change at an unprecedented rate, threatening the environment and the myriad species—including humans—whose existence depends on it.

Protected areas are powerful tools for conservation during such extraordinary change.

Legally protected, well-managed landscapes and seascapes help maintain ecologically viable wildlife populations, while preserving ecosystem functions and services for humans. In order to succeed, any long-term conservation strategy must include the conservation and management of existing protected areas, along with the creation of new ones that focus on those intact, climate-resilient, and biodiverse ecosystems containing critical species and habitats. However, creating and managing protected areas requires both resources and political will. Many existing protected areas are chronically underfunded and suffer from inadequate infrastructure, poorly-trained and under-equipped staff, corruption, and/or a lack of political support. That being said, many governments are highly committed to the conservation of protected areas, particularly their World Heritage sites.



Non-governmental conservation organizations like the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) are leading the way on protected areas and site-based conservation.

WCS, founded in 1895, is a global conservation organization with a science-based approach to the protection of wildlife and wild places. WCS currently manages hundreds of conservation projects in nearly 60 countries. Assisting governments and communities with the conservation and management of the world's protected area network is an essential part of WCS's long-term conservation strategy across four continents and every major ocean. We have helped establish and manage over 245 protected areas worldwide. WCS works with government partners, local communities, other global and local conservation organizations, and the private and philanthropic sectors to ensure that the protection of these sites is adequate and is contributing to our mission of protecting wildlife and wild places across the globe.

The UNESCO World Heritage Convention protects cultural and natural sites of outstanding universal value.

The Galapagos Islands, Mount Kilimanjaro, Yellowstone, Virunga, the Great Barrier Reef, the Taj Mahal, the Great Wall of China, Stonehenge—the list of natural and cultural World Heritage sites is a roll-call of the most iconic places on earth, the most important to safeguard for future generations. Signed in 1972, and entered into force in 1975, the UNESCO World Heritage Convention is the global framework for identifying and protecting these sites.

Today, 191 countries are Parties to the World Heritage Convention, an international treaty that requires “the identification, protection, conservation, presentation and transmission to future generations of the cultural and natural heritage” through the designation of World Heritage sites. These places are recognized for their Outstanding Universal Value and the unique role they play in protecting our collective cultural and natural heritage. Once formally recognized, World Heritage status affords sites an additional level of protection beyond domestic laws and regulations. States Parties have pledged to manage and preserve such sites to the best of their ability, and, crucially, not to change their boundaries without the express approval of the international community via the World Heritage Convention.





Map created with GIS support from ESRI, May 2016.

While States Parties are directly responsible for the implementation of the Convention and the conservation and management of World Heritage sites, they also rely on technical support from non-governmental organizations like WCS to ensure that these sites are adequately protected. WCS and other NGOs mobilize tens of millions of dollars every year to help protect natural World Heritage sites, providing a crucial lifeline where resources are limited. We assist through capacity-building for scientific research, improving monitoring and law enforcement, promoting sustainable livelihoods for local communities, and ensuring the private sector is aware of the value of natural heritage.

In Africa, WCS's work is reinforced by our membership in the African Natural World Heritage Site Support Network (ANWHSSN), a collaborative group of global and regional conservation organizations that support natural World Heritage sites by combining local insights and capacity with global connections.


Few other conservation organizations, if any, have WCS's depth and breadth of engagement with natural World Heritage sites on a global scale.

WCS has built regional field conservation programs around core protected areas that are often, and increasingly, listed under the World Heritage Convention, while undertaking complementary policy interventions based on information directly from the field. Our scientific expertise and technical capacity, decades of site-specific experience, and ongoing relationships with the authorities responsible for managing World Heritage sites have led to an increasingly important role for WCS in the Convention's implementation. We work closely with IUCN (International Union for the Conservation of Nature), the official Advisory Body to UNESCO for natural World Heritage sites, to provide vital scientific and technical advice in support of decisions by State Parties and UNESCO, such as the listing of new sites or determining whether implementation of the Convention is sufficient to meet obligations. WCS is uniquely positioned to assemble and disseminate lessons learned and best practices.

WCS currently works on the ground to conserve **32 World Heritage sites** (natural, cultural, and mixed) in four continents. In 2014 alone, WCS **mobilized over US \$14 million** in support for projects at these sites.

WCS helps to protect at least **14% of all natural WH sites, and 32% of natural sites on the World Heritage In Danger list**, through unique, long-term commitments to globally significant landscapes and seascapes.

WCS has active projects in another **16 sites on State Parties' Tentative Lists**.

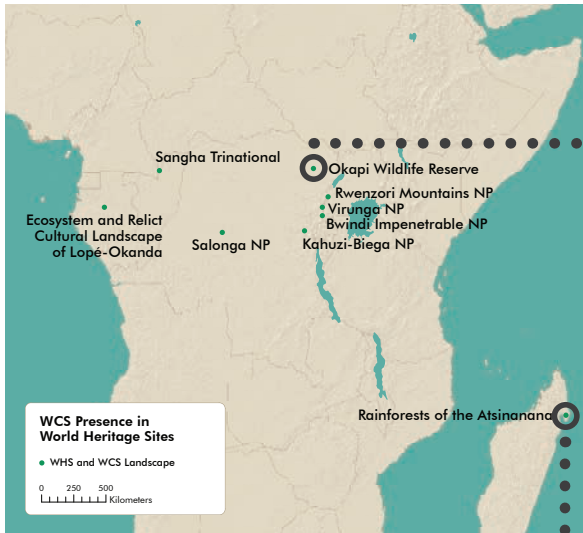


**WCS works with our
numerous government
and other partners to:**

Secure World Heritage status
for the protected areas at the core
of all WCS Global Priority Regions

Improve the level of protection
provided for natural World
Heritage sites in all WCS Priority
Regions, especially those that are
listed as Sites In Danger

Maintain and defend the
protective provisions of World
Heritage listings by supporting
the Convention at a policy level
and helping to secure a more
transparent and active role
for conservation NGOs in the
workings of the Convention



Rainforests of the Atsinanana, Madagascar

WCS has long-term conservation programs in northeastern Madagascar, the epicenter of the island's unique biodiversity. Our MaMaBay land/seascape includes Masoala National Park—part of the Rainforests of the Atsinanana World Heritage site—as well as the Makira Natural Park and Antongil Bay. WCS, the Government of Madagascar, local communities, and other conservation organizations are working together to realize an ambitious vision for this last great wilderness by focusing on the conservation of core protected areas and sustainable resource use within the surrounding habitats.



Okapi Wildlife Reserve, Democratic Republic of Congo

The Okapi Wildlife Reserve in the Democratic Republic of Congo was listed as a World Heritage site because it contains key populations of okapi, forest elephants, and other vulnerable species, and also represents the cultural heritage of mbuti, pygmy hunters. WCS has been supporting the park authorities, the Institut Congolais pour la Conservation de la Nature (ICCN), for more than 30 years, researching biodiversity and building local capacity to conserve it. WCS also works with NGOs, government partners, and local communities to improve the governance of the Ituri forest, and recently began assisting ICCN with anti-poaching and law enforcement activities.

ASIA PACIFIC



Sundarbans, Bangladesh

WCS has worked with the Government of Bangladesh for over 10 years to ensure the long-term protection of cetaceans (whales, dolphins, and porpoises) through collaborating with local fishing communities, conducting range-wide assessments of populations, and creating new protected areas. Recently, we've supported the implementation of SMART, a conservation approach and software tool, to improve wildlife monitoring and law enforcement in the Sundarbans World Heritage site.



Tropical Rainforest Heritage of Sumatra, Indonesia

The Indonesian island of Sumatra contains some of Southeast Asia's last great forest wilderness, harboring species of global significance like orangutans, tigers, rhinos, and elephants. WCS is currently working to support the Ministry of Environment and Forestry (MoEF) to improve management of two of the three parks that comprise this World Heritage Site—Bukit Barisan Selatan and Gunung Leuser. Ongoing activities include collaborative management, improved development planning, scientific research, and increased government capacity for law enforcement. Our vision is to support the Indonesian government to conserve Southeast Asia's iconic wildlife across the World Heritage site.

LATIN AMERICA & CARIBBEAN



Tikal National Park, Guatemala

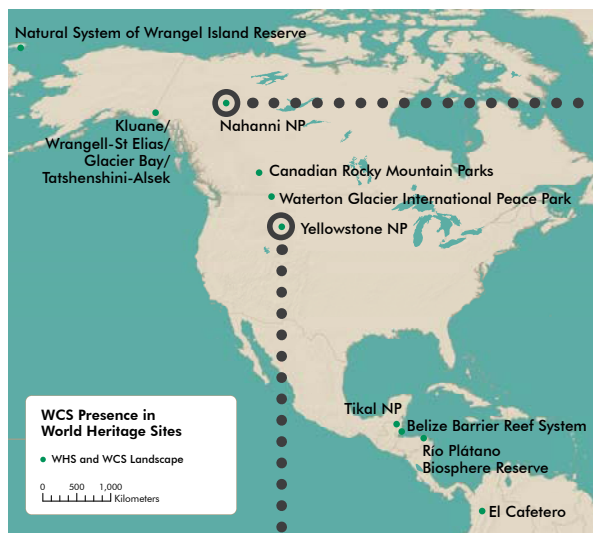
Mesoamerica is filled with natural and cultural heritage, including community and indigenous protected areas, the vestiges of ancient civilizations, and a number of World Heritage sites. WCS has worked in Guatemala for over 20 years, in partnership with local organizations and government agencies, to integrate conservation and development in the Maya Biosphere Reserve (including Tikal National Park) by supporting efforts of local people to manage their forests, reducing the threats of deforestation and fires, and ensuring that the habitat of jaguars, macaws, and other species remains intact.



Península Valdés, Argentina

Península Valdés receives thousands of visitors each year and provides employment to thousands of people in hotels, restaurants, and travel and tourist agencies. WCS seeks to protect the wildlife and other natural resources of Península Valdés and other parts of coastal Patagonia by introducing non-consumptive practices into local livelihoods, ensuring that regional activities cause as little harm as possible. We do this through supporting development of wildlife-based tourism, aiding management of wildlife areas, and establishing long-term policies to ensure that wildlife conservation and local livelihoods go hand in hand.

NORTH AMERICA



Yellowstone National Park, United States of America

WCS has been working in Yellowstone National Park since the early twentieth century, when we established the American Bison Society to restore the species across its range. Today, WCS's goal is to safeguard the ecological integrity and resilience of the entire Northern Rockies by conducting field research to assess the ecological health of the region, identifying threats to its health, and helping to develop and implement conservation actions with a wide-range of partners.



Nahanni National Park Reserve, Canada

The Nahanni National Park Reserve was established in 1972 to protect some of the deepest river canyons in Canada, large hot-springs mounds, and the iconic Virginia Falls. WCS's John Weaver conducted research on three of WCS Canada's focal species—grizzly bear, caribou and Dall's sheep—to help Parks Canada define new park boundaries. The resulting change—a seven-fold expansion in 2009—made it one of the largest national parks in the world and it remains one of the oldest World Heritage sites.



WCS is committed to investing in long-term, results-based conservation programs, and using our global experience and science-based approach to inform policies, decisions, and regulations to support our partners in protecting World Heritage sites for future generations.


We look forward to collaborating ever more closely with government agencies, intergovernmental organizations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the philanthropic and private sectors, and the local communities that depend on World Heritage sites for their cultural and economic well-being.

For more information and to learn how you can work with WCS programs to support World Heritage sites, please visit **wcs.org** or contact **mhatchwell@wcs.org** or **slieberman@wcs.org**.

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