



## WCS Position Statement for 42COM

24 June - 4 July 2018

### Why WCS is at 42COM:

The **Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS)** is a global conservation organization that takes a science-based approach to the protection of wildlife and wild places, including over 30 natural and mixed World Heritage sites. The World Heritage Committee will adopt decisions on 10 of these sites during its 42nd Session, including eight sites on the List of World Heritage in Danger, and will consider other sites where we have knowledge or experience for inscription on the List of World Heritage. Our goal at 42COM is to ensure that States Parties on the World Heritage Committee have the information necessary to reach appropriate, science-based decisions for the continued protection of natural heritage. For more information about WCS and our approach, see page 2.

### In this document:

This document captures our experience and perspective on the proposed decisions for each of the sites where we are active. It is generally structured according to the 42COM provisional agenda.

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### How to contact us:

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## WCS and World Heritage

The **Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS)** is a nonprofit conservation organization with a science-based approach to the protection of wildlife and wild places in over 60 countries. A key conservation strategy for WCS has been assisting governments, communities and other stakeholders to propose, create, or expand more than 250 protected areas. Today, WCS manages, co-manages, or assists with management of more protected areas across the globe than any other single NGO, helping government or community authorities conserve ecosystems that harbor half of the planet's biodiversity. We generally focus on the most intact landscapes and seascapes — places that have the greatest chance of preserving species and natural ecosystems in the face of increasing global change. We leverage our local knowledge at the protected area scale to address global conservation issues — including climate change, livelihoods and natural resource governance, extractive industries, wildlife trafficking, and the relationship between wildlife, human, and livestock health.

As part of these efforts, WCS is working on the ground to support the protection of more than 30 natural and mixed World Heritage sites around the world. In some sites, we partner with States Parties in the direct management of protected areas. In others, we offer technical expertise for scientific monitoring, engage in capacity building for protected area managers, and provide other forms of support tailored to the specific needs of individual sites and countries. We are working at eight of the natural and mixed sites inscribed on the World Heritage Sites in Danger list (and under review at 42COM), and we also work in or around many sites on States Parties' Tentative Lists -- including one site that has been nominated for inscription at 42COM.







At the 42<sup>nd</sup> Session of the World Heritage Committee in Manama, Bahrain, our goal is to ensure that States Parties and the Statutory Bodies of the Convention have the technical information necessary to reach appropriate, effective decisions that contribute to the protection of World Heritage sites where WCS has a presence. This includes the addition of new sites to the List of World Heritage. In the case of sites on the List of World Heritage in Danger, we continue to work with the States Parties concerned, and other stakeholders, to implement the corrective measures adopted by the Committee towards the Desired State of Conservation for Removal (DSOCR) from the List of World Heritage in Danger. In addition to the technical, scientific, and financial support we provide to States Parties for the management of World Heritage properties on the ground, WCS is also an IUCN Outlook Partner, and we supply monitoring information to IUCN's periodic Outlook Assessment of the status of natural and mixed World Heritage sites.

As a member of civil society invested in the conservation of World Heritage sites, WCS believes that the rules and procedures of the World Heritage Convention should continue to evolve in coming years to better reflect the role of civil society -- particularly technically qualified, non-governmental organizations -- in supporting the implementation of the Convention on the ground, in national and international policy arenas, and as partners to mobilize funding (in line with Article 13.7 of the Convention). Transparent, ongoing engagement would help bring the Convention's implementation in line with those of other multilateral environmental agreements, including the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), and the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS). We strongly believe that these Conventions, and the fora and meetings convened under them, benefit from increased visibility and technical collaboration with NGOs in pursuit of common objectives.

WCS is very pleased with efforts of the World Heritage Centre and States Parties to ensure that civil society engaged in the implementation of the Convention, for example the opportunity to provide comments on the Draft Policy Compendium, though we note that there are some ways that this cooperation could be further developed. We encourage the Committee, through Chairpersons for its sessions, to ensure that civil society has the opportunity to intervene and provide relevant information during Committee meetings -- following all States Parties, but prior to the adoption of decisions. We also believe that any amendments proposed to the draft decisions should be posted online as soon as they are received by the Centre, to facilitate open discussion and rigorous technical analysis of the implications of any changes. These changes to procedure can be codified through changes to the Committee's Rules of Procedure, in order to lessen the need for interpretation by Chairpersons.

**For more information on WCS, and our engagement with World Heritage sites, please see our brochure at:**  
<https://www.wcs.org/about-us/literature>





## State of Conservation of World Heritage Properties (Item 7)

WCS appreciates the valuable effort of the World Heritage Centre and the Advisory Bodies to evaluate the various cross-cutting issues affecting World Heritage sites and the implementation of the Convention.

**Dialogue with Civil Society:** WCS greatly appreciates the support of the World Heritage Committee, States Parties and the World Heritage Centre to open the workings of the Convention to members of civil society. We appreciated the opportunity to participate in the May 2018 *World Heritage Civil Society Workshop*. We note that one finding of the workshop, that the Rules of Procedure for treaties such as CITES “are largely comparable with the Rules of Procedures and practices of the World Heritage Convention, despite some differences related to the nature of the Conventions themselves” is true in general, but could be unintentionally misleading. We believe that the Rules of Procedure for the World Heritage Committee should explicitly state that paper amendments submitted for draft decisions should be made available online for all States Parties and other approved Observers, and that State Parties and approved Observers be allowed to provide concise interventions, with relevant technical information, before a decision is taken.

**Climate Change:** We urge the international community to increase ambition and efforts to implement the Paris Agreement to mitigate the most severe impacts of climate change. We believe that the international community should acknowledge the contribution of World Heritage in this effort. For example, intact forests in World Heritage sites are important carbon sinks and an invaluable means of reducing emissions and reaching mitigation targets. We also urge Parties to consider climate change in national planning, and propose for World Heritage inscription the most resilient, intact natural sites, and particularly climate refugia that offer the best hope of protecting vulnerable wildlife. We welcome any opportunities for further engagement in the updating of the Policy Document on World Heritage and Climate Change.

**Industrial Development and Extractive Industries:** Industrial development and other infrastructure, particularly those associated with extractive industries, continue to directly or indirectly threaten natural World Heritage sites. World Heritage sites can contribute to economic development, and we support sustainable tourism operations that improve sites’ conservation outlook. However, WCS strongly supports decisions of the World Heritage Committee stating that mining activity and oil and gas exploration and exploitation are incompatible with World Heritage status. We urge States Parties to work with the private sector to ensure that rigorous spatial planning and SEA processes underpin responsible development that follows the mitigation hierarchy and international best practices (e.g. IFC Performance Standard 6, BBOP). We note that EIAs should be conducted for all proposed projects in or around World Heritage properties, using guidance developed by relevant Advisory Bodies.

**Illegal Activities and Wildlife Trafficking:** We note with concern that illegal activities threaten 25% of the sites under review at 42COM, and 55% of the natural sites. Our extensive experience monitoring and protecting wildlife and wild places suggests that illegal hunting and illegal trade of wildlife present some of the greatest threats to World Heritage natural and mixed sites in Africa, Asia and Latin America. We urge States Parties to put in place and implement strong legal frameworks to: combat wildlife crime and related corruption; ensure adequate resources for law enforcement at all levels; prioritize anti-poaching and counter wildlife trafficking efforts, including successful prosecutions; and increase domestic and international cooperation. Criminal networks behind these illegal activities, compounded by conflict and civil unrest in some areas, have been responsible for the deaths of our colleagues working in or around protected areas. We express our condolences to the families and friends of those killed while protecting World Heritage, and strongly urge the international community to increase financial and/or logistical support to those on the front lines.



## State of Conservation of Properties in Danger (Item 7A)

### Belize Barrier Reef System (Belize, 764)

WCS congratulates the State Party on the exceptional progress made towards the Desired State of Conservation for Removal (DSOCR) of the Belize Barrier Reef Reserve System (BBRRS) World Heritage site from the List of World Heritage in Danger. We concur with the State of Conservation report and are particularly pleased with the enactment of a moratorium on petroleum exploration and extraction within Belize's maritime environment, as well as the adoption of new forest (mangroves) regulations, and the continued implementation of the Integrated Coastal Zone Management Plan (ICZMP). WCS appreciates the opportunity to work with the Government of Belize on the new fisheries legislation and the management plans for key components of the BBRRS property.

With respect to outstanding items in the Desired State of Conservation for Removal of the site from the List of World Heritage in Danger, we concur with the draft decision that the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) regulations must be updated to take the Outstanding Universal Value of the site into account; we strongly encourage the completion of this process as proposed in paragraph 7 of the draft decision. We also urge the State Party to ensure that sufficient enforcement authority be provided to the Department of Environment to ensure that updated EIA guidelines are adhered to, and that no development threatens the conservation status of BBRRS. Finally, although we note that the voluntary moratorium on sale of public lands within the site is still in place, we urge the State Party to formalize this moratorium through a legally binding instrument that ensures cessation of sales and leases of land throughout the property. We note, however, that such a process will take many years in order to complete effectively – perhaps beyond 2018 – and one remaining issue should not necessarily mean the site should be kept on the List of World Heritage in Danger.

We commend the State Party for all of the steps taken so far and believe that this site is ready for removal from the List of World Heritage in Danger. We strongly support the recommendations in paragraphs 6, 7 and 8 of the draft decision, and look forward to working with the conservation community to ensure that these steps are taken and that the Outstanding Universal Value of this site is protected for future generations.

Belize Barrier Reef Reserve System, Belize // Alex Tilley © Astrum Helicopters



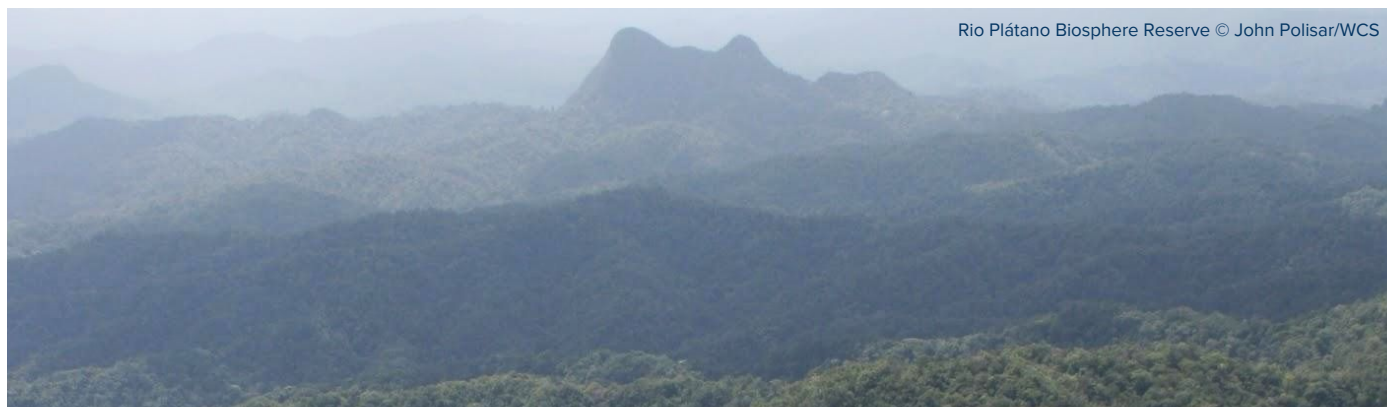




## Río Plátano Biosphere Reserve (Honduras, 196)

WCS has been working closely with the State Party to strengthen the national system of protected areas, and we congratulate them on the efforts they have made to strengthen the protection of Río Plátano Biosphere Reserve World Heritage site. We concur with the State of Conservation report that significant progress has been made by the Government of Honduras in addressing some of the existing recommendations of the World Heritage Committee – including and particularly the signing over of titles and the coordination with local and indigenous communities.

Although some external support has been located for some additional park guards, WCS believes that an extensive field presence will be essential for addressing key threats at this site, as identified by the State Party, and we concur with the SoC report that the long-term staff capacity for the necessary monitoring and law enforcement is insufficient. WCS strongly recommends that the State Party allocate resources to recruit and train additional park guards for Río Plátano. If these resources are part of external support from partners, which we believe is still critical at this point, we believe the State Party make explicit commitments to maintain any additional capacity.



WCS concurs with the State of Conservation report suggestion that a Significant Boundary Modification and revised DSOCR are in order to align existing legal frameworks and properly reflect the situation on the ground. We encourage the State Party to ensure that any new nomination/boundary modification and the corresponding DSOCR are based on sound scientific evidence and conducted in close consultation with stakeholders, including, in particular, indigenous territorial councils and local communities and technical experts within civil society. Should the site's cultural values be incorporated in a new nomination, we encourage the process to consult the Honduran Institute of Anthropology and History (Instituto Hondureño de Antropología e Historia), along with the National Institute for Forest Conservation, Protected Areas, and Wildlife (ICF). We note that the World Heritage Convention's Operational Guidelines provide the framework for submission of a Significant Boundary Modification and for revising a DSOCR. We believe these procedures should be followed, with the goal of harmonizing boundary changes and overlapping designations, while also addressing the remaining problems around capacity and resources.

WCS stands ready to support the State Party in achieving all of these goals, through provision of technical support through the nomination process, as well as for the protection and monitoring of the property and the broader landscape values within the bi-national Moskitia region. We look forward to discussing this further with our conservation partners.

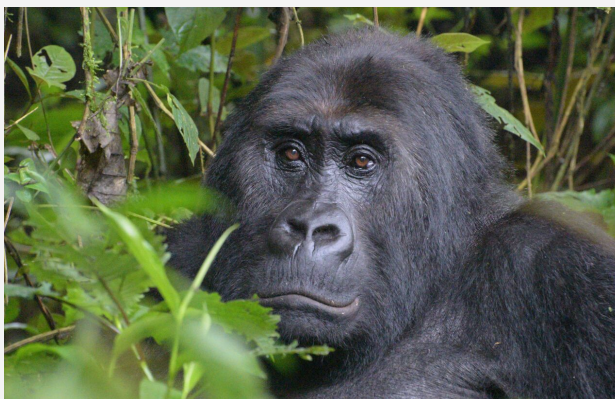
## Kahuzi-Biega National Park (Democratic Republic of the Congo, 137)

WCS has been supporting the management of KBNP, particularly through scientific monitoring and surveys, for over 20 years. WCS commends the efforts of the Institut Congolais pour la Conservation de la Nature (ICCN) to address the serious and complex threats posed to KBNP by the ongoing impacts of civil conflict, poaching, illegal mining and other factors. WCS notes with appreciation the funding provided for the conservation and management of this site by the Germany, the European Union and the United States.

As the State of Conservation report notes, frequent abductions last year undermined conservation efforts and presents challenges implementing recommendations from last year's mission. We strongly support the draft decision's commendation of the ICCN and its staff for protecting this park and its natural heritage under these conditions. We believe that the Committee's welcoming of MONUSCO support for securing key areas of this park (Lulingu, Nkuku, southern sectors of Nzvou-est and Tshivanga) would be helpful for both biodiversity surveys and the long-term management of this property. We strongly urge Parties to the Convention, and the World Heritage community, to support ecoguards, rangers, park staff and others on the front lines of conservation in sites where insecurity and civil conflict is a threat to both natural heritage and human lives. As part of this, there are still infrastructure needs in the low-altitude portions of the Park that prevent site managers and enforcement authorities from addressing threats that include illegal mining for gold, cassiterite and coltan, as well as hunting of wildlife and logging.

In 2017, WCS worked with ICCN and FFI on a [survey](#) of Grauer's gorillas (right) and is deeply concerned by the findings of a catastrophic 77% decline in the population of Grauer's gorillas in and around KBNP since 1994. WCS is working with other States Parties to ensure that supply chains for key natural resources referred to as "conflict minerals" remain transparent and do not threaten Grauer's gorillas and other species in the wild.

Photo: Kahuzi-Biega National Park, DRC  
© A.J. Plumptre/WCS



We support the draft decision's recommendation for the State Party to accelerate progress in cancellation of land titles in the ecological corridor between the two parts of KBNP. We note that this is a capacity issue, and any additional support or resources for this work, as well as demarcation of the park's boundaries, provided by States Parties would be welcome. We also encourage the State Party to continue reviewing the process through which mining permits are allocated in order to avoid any conflict with World Heritage sites.

Finally, noting that the SoC report and draft decision regret that information regarding biodiversity is not included in the current report from the State Party, we would like to inform the Committee that the remaining biodiversity inventories have been delayed due to lingering insecurity in and around the property. We look forward to further collaboration with ICCN and the State Party in finalizing the remaining biodiversity inventories, with a view to developing a Desired State of Conservation for Removal from the List of World Heritage in Danger and further discussion with the Committee.



## **Okapi Wildlife Reserve (Democratic Republic of the Congo, 718)**

WCS conducted many of the surveys in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) that led to the creation of the Okapi Faunal Reserve in 1992, and has provided ongoing scientific, technical and administrative support to Institut Congolais pour la Conservation de la Nature (ICCN) for park management – including biological monitoring – ever since. WCS commends the efforts by ICCN to address the threats posed to the OFR by the ongoing impacts of civil conflict, poaching, illegal mining and timber extraction, migration, and other factors.

WCS staff in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and around the world express our condolences to the families and friends of park guards and ICCN staff who have been killed while protecting this World Heritage site. We strongly urge Parties to the Convention, and the World Heritage community, to support ecoguards, rangers, park staff and others on the front lines of conservation in sites where insecurity and civil conflict is a threat to both natural heritage and human lives.

We are pleased to report that despite the lack of complete surveys since 2011 – due primarily to security issues – WCS launched a series of three surveys in December 2017 that should be completed by 42COM and available for review in advance of 43COM as part of an effort to review progress against indicators included in the DSOCR. We are also pleased to report that we will be working with the State Party on the new integrated management plan for this property (the PAG) during 2018.

We note that our field surveys suggest that artisanal and semi-industrial gold mining - as identified by third parties in the current and previous State of Conservation report – continues unabated, and presents a major threat to the security of this site and its natural values. WCS notes with concern increased human presence that may be associated with these mines, and encourages the State Party to ensure the closure of these mines and eviction of miners from the property. We strongly support the draft recommendation to that effect.

## **Salonga National Park (Democratic Republic of the Congo, 280)**

WCS is pleased to have supported the State Party and our conservation partners with wildlife surveys and the implementation of SMART software tools for law enforcement and conservation management in Salonga National Park (SNP). WCS appreciates the opportunity to work with the Institut Congolais pour la Conservation de la Nature (ICCN) and other conservation partners on a biological inventory in the corridor between the two parts of SNP. We have been working with ICCN since 2014 to finish some of the remaining inventories in and around SNP, and we look forward to future reports to the Committee detailing the findings and potential indicators for the Desired State of Conservation for Removal of the Property from the List of World Heritage in Danger.

WCS notes and appreciates the previous decisions of the World Heritage Committee that oil exploration and exploitation is incompatible with World Heritage status. This property contains some of the world's most intact tropical forest, which provides habitat for unique wildlife species and sustains local communities. We concur with the draft decision's recommendation to halt granting of concessions in or around the property, and urge the State Party to follow prescribed procedures for any boundary changes or other activities that may change the property's ability to protect its Outstanding Universal Value.





## Virunga National Park (Democratic Republic of the Congo, 63)

WCS commends the work of the Institut Congolais pour la Conservation de la Nature (ICCN), the Virunga Foundation and other partners to address the threats confronting Virunga National Park (VNP) and to improve the livelihoods of communities living adjacent to the park. WCS staff in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and around the world express our condolences to the families and friends of the park guard who was killed in May while protecting Virunga National Park. WCS notes with concern the reports of increasing insurgent activity and the danger faced by park staff and local communities around the park, as well as the problems that this causes for ecological monitoring of the property's Outstanding Universal Value.

WCS is pleased that a joint IUCN-UNESCO Reactive Monitoring Mission was able to visit the property in April 2018, although we note that the final mission report was not yet posted when this statement was finalized. We look forward to reviewing the mission's findings in closer detail, including any updated indicators for the Desired State of Conservation for the Removal of the site from the List of World Heritage in Danger. We strongly support the proposed corrective measures in paragraph 9 of the draft decision.

Finally, we note with concern the third party reports of a proposal to review the boundaries of the park with respect to potential oil exploration. We note, as above for Salonga National Park, that oil and gas exploration and exploitation is incompatible with World Heritage status. We concur with the draft decision's recommendation to halt granting of concessions in or around the property, and urge the State Party to follow prescribed procedures for any boundary changes or other activities that may change the property's ability to protect its Outstanding Universal Value.

## General Decision for the Democratic Republic of the Congo

WCS appreciates the opportunity to work with the State Party, and particularly the Institut Congolais pour la Conservation de la Nature (ICCN), on the protection and management of four World Heritage sites in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. WCS welcomes the State Party's efforts to implement the Kinshasa Declaration of 2011, and to operationalize the Okapi Fund (FOCON). We appreciate the support of the international community, and particularly Germany, in capitalizing this fund.

Noting with concern the targeting of ICCN staff in Okapi Faunal Reserve, Virunga National Park and Kahuzi-Biega National Park, we strongly condemn the targeting of park rangers and other staff working to protect the natural heritage of DRC. Our staff in DRC and around the world express our condolences to the families and friends of those killed in this violence. We urge other States Parties to the Convention, and the World Heritage community, to support ecoguards, rangers, park staff and others on the front lines of conservation in sites where insecurity and civil conflict is a threat to both natural heritage and human lives. Support for mobilizing the Corps responsible for the security of the National Parks and relevant protected areas (CorPPN) would be welcome in this regard.

We note with concern the third party reports of a proposal to potentially de-gazette some areas of Salonga and Virunga National Parks in anticipation of oil exploration. We concur with, and support, previous Committee decisions that petroleum exploration and exploitation is incompatible with World Heritage status. We strongly support paragraph 9 of the draft decision that "any proposal for modification to the boundaries of a World Heritage property must be based on strengthening its OUV and should not be proposed with the aim of facilitating extractive activities."



## Rainforests of the Atsinanana (Madagascar, 1257)

WCS worked with the Government of Madagascar in the 1990s to gazette Masoala National Park (MNP), one of six national parks and the largest single protected area in the Rainforests of the Atsinanana serial World Heritage site. We assisted the Government of Madagascar with the management plan for the park in 1998, and we currently provide support for park management. WCS is working with the State Party to improve monitoring of the park by increasing coverage and frequency of surveillance.

WCS generally supports the draft decision as written, including the retention of this site on the List of World Heritage in Danger. We appreciate the efforts of the State Party to combat illegal timber extraction and trade, as well as addressing illegal hunting while improving food security for local communities. However, we note with concern that this is the 8th year that the property has been on the List of World Heritage in Danger without effective action by the State Party to remedy the underlying threats and their causes.

We concur with State of Conservation report that insufficient evidence has been presented for some of the claims in the report on lemur poaching and populations and deforestation rates. We urge States Parties to provide the best possible evidence when evaluating progress made against the DSOCR indicators. This includes satellite data for analysis of deforestation rates and SMART patrol data for poaching of lemurs and timber species. A more transparent evidence base will allow the Committee to evaluate the progress being made. The participation of non-governmental organizations in this effort could strengthen reporting.

WCS believes it is vital to ensure full synergy between recommendations and decisions of the WH Committee, and those made within CITES, when dealing with illegal harvest and illegal trade in CITES-listed species from WH sites. WCS commends the State Party for implementing aspects of the CITES Action Plan and Biodiversity Management Plan, but is concerned that the special court established to fight against precious timber exploitation is not yet fully operational, and that cases are not being pursued against all offenders. WCS supports paragraph 5 of the draft decision and strongly urges the State Party to invest more resources in implementation of CITES decisions on timber species.

We also urge the State Party to improve its reactivity and response to observations of illegal activities including hunting of lemurs and other endangered wildlife, and illegal settlements within the Park in the vicinity of Cap Masoala and on the eastern side of the Masoala Peninsula. With respect to lemur conservation, WCS notes there is widespread consumption of hunted or trapped bushmeat by households around the Park. Evidence suggests that hunting methods are changing and there is increasing commercialization of bushmeat. We do not believe the evidence presented is sufficient to suggest that lemur species are not likely to go extinct. WCS urges additional attention from the State Party and the international community to this issue – from both a food security and biodiversity conservation perspective.

We note that Presidential elections are planned in Madagascar in 2018 and that there have already been incidences of political instability in the country. Electoral periods in Madagascar are often linked to significant increases in illegal exploitation of natural resources including precious timber trafficking and lemur hunting. We urge the State Party and other actors to reinforce control and oversight of the site during this critical period.

We look forward to continuing our collaboration with the State Party on Masoala National Park in an effort to improve the site's conservation outlook and remove it from the List of World Heritage in Danger in the future.



## Tropical Rainforest Heritage of Sumatra (Indonesia, 1167)

WCS provides technical support to the Government of Indonesia to manage parts of the Tropical Rainforest Heritage of Sumatra (TRHS) World Heritage site, and to achieve the Desired State of Conservation for Removal (DSOCR) of the site from the List of World Heritage in Danger. We have been working on the ground with park authorities in the Bukit Barisan Selatan National Park since 1997 and Gunung Leuser National Park since 2007 to improve the protection and management of wildlife, intact forest ecosystems, and other natural heritage. We assist park authorities with implementation of SMART conservation software tools, enforcement of laws related to encroachment and illegal hunting and trafficking of wildlife, and monitoring of key species populations such as Sumatran rhinoceroses and tigers. WCS structures our annual work plan and interventions at the two parks around implementation of the corrective measures adopted by the World Heritage Committee in 2014.

WCS remains committed to working with the Government of Indonesia in removing the site from the List of World Heritage in Danger. We recognize the increased efforts made by the Government of Indonesia and civil society partners in the surveillance of TRHS properties and the successful arrest and conviction of criminals associated with trafficking of priority species and illegal logging. We note that because poaching and illegal logging threats remain widespread, current efforts need to be intensified further and adequately resourced to ensure long-term sustainability. We are pleased that the State Party recently reallocated a planned geothermal energy from inside to outside of the property and that the Party has kept in place a moratorium on palm oil development. We note that other planned infrastructure development projects, such as roads and dams, still pose a threat to the property and require attention.



We appreciate the efforts of IUCN and the State Party to engage a wide variety of stakeholders during the Reactive Monitoring Mission, and we support the draft decision as written. We acknowledge the challenges in achieving the existing DSOCR, and support the Committee's adoption of the revised DSOCR as proposed by the mission. We strongly support article 10 of the draft decision regarding species monitoring, as well as the corrective measures described in paragraph 11 of the draft decision. We stand ready to work with the State Party on a variety of interventions.

WCS would like to reiterate our commitment and pledge our continued support to local and national government agencies in Indonesia, including in northern Sumatra (Gunung Leuser National Park) and southern Sumatra (Bukit Barisan Selatan National Park), to help resolve ongoing natural resource use conflicts in the Tropical Rainforest Heritage of Sumatra World Heritage site. We share a common goal of removing this site from the List of World Heritage in Danger.





## State of Conservation of World Heritage Properties (Item 7B)

### Natural System of Wrangel Island Reserve (Russian Federation, 1023rev)

WCS has been fortunate to conduct scientific research within this World Heritage site as part of our collaboration with the State Party, local scientists and site managers. We look forward to continuing this collaboration in the future, and stress that biodiversity and ecological monitoring will be critical in a time of change for Arctic ecosystems.

WCS notes with appreciation the progress made by the State Party in the conservation of Wrangel Island Reserve, particularly in regards to the removal of garbage and the legal protection provided to the marine area around Wrangel Island, while recognizing that further progress may be necessary in areas highlighted by the draft decision. We concur with the recommendations of the UNESCO-IUCN Reactive Monitoring Mission. In particular, we note that fragile arctic ecosystems, particularly marine mammals, can be affected by seismic exploration and encourage the State Party to confirm that no exploration will take place in waters adjacent to the property without the proper EIA.

Finally, we would like to note that our staff based in the Arctic have expertise in remote oil spill response and critical habitat prioritization, automated ship tracking, etc. We believe that there is utility in bilateral or international working groups/workshops on key technical issues, and that this could offer a unique opportunity for collaboration and can help deliver on the Reactive Monitoring Mission's recommendations.

Natural System of Wrangel Island Reserve © Joel Berger/WCS





## Rwenzori Mountains National Park (Uganda, 684)

WCS has supported the Uganda Wildlife Authority (UWA), and other conservation partners such as WWF, on scientific surveys and biodiversity monitoring at Rwenzori Mountains National Park (RMNP) as part of our work across the Greater Albertine Rift. WCS has collaborated with the Institute of Tropical Forest Conservation (ITFC) and the Global Observation Research Initiative in Alpine Environments (known as GLORIA) to monitor the altitudinal movement of species in response to climate change. We continue this collaboration and stress that climate change presents a significant threat to this site over the long term.

We note that conducting biodiversity surveys at this site is challenging and UWA needs additional resources to ensure that the property and its natural values are adequately monitored. We concur with the findings of the 2<sup>nd</sup> World Heritage Outlook that sustainable financing of this property is a significant concern. We look forward to conversations with the State Party and others on the surveys requested in the draft decision, and how to develop a long-term plan for financial sustainability.

## Nominations to the World Heritage List (Item 8)

### Pimochiawin Aki, Canada

WCS supports the listing of Pimachiowin Aki as a mixed natural and cultural World Heritage site at 42COM.

We concur with the IUCN evaluation of this nomination that the reduction in the area of the site and its buffer zone from the previous nomination, has not resulted in a reduction of its protection of natural heritage values. At 29,040 square kilometres, the proposed site would continue to be the most complete and largest example of the North American boreal shield. The area is large enough and intact enough to support and maintain boreal processes such as fire regimes, species at risk ranges including woodland caribou, predator-prey relationships, hydrological regimes, and social-ecological relationships with First Nations. In Ontario's Far North, a focus of WCS engagement since 2003, the proposed property includes Woodland Caribou Provincial Park and Eagle-Snowshoe Conservation Reserve, both of which are protected under provincial legislation and seek to protect ecological integrity.

We appreciate the acknowledgement that climate change will require adaptive management of this site moving forward. Anticipated impacts include more intense and shorter fire regimes that will continue to shape the boreal landscape as well as the communities that depend on it. Many of the indicators listed in the nomination package will need to be considered more carefully in light of a changing climate.

We agree with the IUCN's statement that it will be important to monitor the implementation and impacts of the Whitefeather Forest Management Plan on forests adjacent to the Whitefeather Dedicated Protected Areas and in the proposed buffer zone. We remain concerned about the placement of a general use area in key caribou wintering habitat (and old growth forest). While the community-led commercial forestry operation in the Whitefeather Forest Planning Area of Pikangikum First Nation is still not functioning, it is not clear when this will occur. We appreciate the more precautionary language in this submission relative to the previous evaluation reports.



## Pimochiawin Aki, Canada (continued)

We agree that the current management approach between First Nations and the two provincial governments seems effective and appropriate. We acknowledge this region as a social-ecological system, and the integrity of the landscape supports and encourages social cohesion and resilience in First Nations communities within the landscape. The importance of First Nations in both driving the process for this nomination and creating their own governance process both among First Nations and with provincial governments is highly significant as the State Party focuses on a formal process of reconciliation and implementation of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. We encourage conversations within IUCN, ICOMOS, and other institutions about the need to link cultural integrity with ecological integrity within the WHS process more explicitly if WHS are to contribute as an effective means to conservation, particularly in northern regions like Pimochiawin Aki where the main population are Indigenous peoples.

Our main concerns remain focused on the current and cumulative impacts of threats associated with the East Side Road in Manitoba. It will be important to monitor the development of a wildlife refuge along the transportation corridor and assess traffic levels, intensity and use on ecological systems in proximity to this road. While we assume this road is primarily for community use - given the low mining potential and limited opportunities for commercial forestry in the area - we remain cautious as any new linear development creates new access opportunities that require management for social, ecological, and economic reasons. The development of the western route for Bipole III in Manitoba effectively reduces the possible threat of any new transmission in the nomination area within Manitoba.

## Progress Report on the Draft Policy Compendium (Item 11)

WCS commends the States Parties, the World Heritage Centre and other stakeholders on the progress made with respect to the Policy Compendium, and we thank Australia for their extrabudgetary contribution that enabled this important work. WCS was pleased to have been invited by the World Heritage Centre to provide stakeholder feedback on the outline of the Policy Compendium in early 2018. We note, however, that civil society organizations, including organizations with a conservation mission, are not explicitly mentioned as one of the “other stakeholders” in the Introduction. Although such a reference is implicit, we note that organizations like WCS have significant technical experience and mobilize significant resources for the conservation of World Heritage. WCS would be pleased to contribute to any further intersessional work on the Policy Compendium.

We appreciate the articulation of previous Committee decisions around key threats to World Heritage. As part of this, we note that mining activities, and oil and gas exploration and exploitation, are considered incompatible with World Heritage status and protection of OUV. We also note that infrastructure development in or around natural World Heritage facilitates access to rural areas and increases opportunity for intentional and opportunistic taking and trade of wildlife and other living resources, which must be considered in relevant impact assessments. Finally, we note that Parties, as signatories to the World Heritage Convention, are obligated to cooperate on a global effort to protect these sites. Where one country, or an entity originating in one country, affects the Outstanding Universal Value of a World Heritage site, it is encouraged that all Parties to work together to intervene where possible. We remind Parties of this obligation in an increasingly interconnected world.





## World Heritage, Sustainable Development and the Future

### World Heritage and sustainable development

WCS commends the adoption of the Policy for the Integration of a Sustainable Development Perspective into the Processes of the World Heritage Convention ('Sustainable Development Policy'), which acknowledges the contribution that World Heritage can make to sustainable development. We note that sustainable development should never negatively impact sites' Outstanding Universal Value, and remind the Committee that "States Parties should ensure that biological and cultural diversity, as well as ecosystem services and benefits for people that contribute to environmental sustainability, are protected and enhanced within World Heritage properties, their buffer zones and their wider settings."

### World Heritage and the post-2020 framework for biodiversity

We note the Centre has continued to discuss the global framework for biodiversity conservation with other members of the Biodiversity Liaison Group (BLG), including at the most recent meeting at the headquarters of FAO in September 2017. We commend this cooperation between multilateral fora, and we strongly encourage this cooperation to continue in light of the ongoing negotiations around the post-2020 framework for biodiversity to be adopted at CBD CoP15 in 2020.

As mentioned previously, a key conservation strategy for WCS has been assisting governments, communities and other stakeholders to propose, create, or expand more than 250 protected areas. However, many existing protected areas around the world are too small, too isolated, or do not prioritize conservation interests correctly in a time of climate change. We believe strongly that the global community must focus on *effectively* implementing protected areas as a tool to protect biological diversity and intact, natural ecosystems. WCS works closely with the World Heritage Convention because we believe it is essential as a tool to ensure the representation, and, importantly, the effectiveness and intactness of protected areas.

WCS strongly encourages the international community to adopt a global target at CBD CoP15 in 2020 that focuses on a key result: a mechanism that delivers the retention of nature and intact natural systems (not simply targets). The experience of States Parties with ensuring long-term conservation of natural World Heritage can, and should, inform these discussions between now and 2020.





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