

WORLD HERITAGE NOMINATION

IUCN TECHNICAL REVIEW

1. IDENTIFICATION NUMBER AND NAME 159 Darien National Park
2. LOCATION: Southern Panama, 78°W, 7°45'N
3. NOMINATED BY: Government of the Republic of Panama
4. DOCUMENTATION:
 - (i) Nomination form, including maps
 - (ii) Supplementary documentation (IUCN)
 - a) Files on IUCN/WWF Project 1648, "Management of the Darien National Park, Panama"
 - b) "Plan Maestro" Parque Nacional Darien, (1978)
 - c) Consultation, Dr. Kenton Miller, Chairman, IUCN Commission on National Parks and Protected Areas
 - d) Consultation, Bernardo Zentilli, IUCN Regional Desk Officer for Latin America
 - e) Consultation, Dr. Arne Dalfelt, Secretary-General, World Wildlife Fund, Norway (helped prepare management plan for Darien)

5. BACKGROUND AND SUMMARY

The Darien National Park (approximately 575,000 hectares) presents the best prospect in Central America for conserving the great diversity of ecosystems, habitats, and species characteristic of tropical rainforest environments. The Park, established by Presidential Decree in 1980, includes a wide range of habitats: sandy beaches, rocky coasts, mangroves, freshwater marshes, palm forest swamps, and both lowland and upland moist tropical forest. It supports populations of considerable numbers of species of plants and animals, including endangered species such as bush dog, jaguar, ocelot, Baird's tapir, spider monkey, harpy eagle, Central American caiman, and American crocodile. Scientific opinion is that thousands of species remain to be discovered, and that many of these will prove to be endemic to Darien. The site is in a unique situation, forming the bridge between the two continents of the Western Hemisphere; it has emerged from the seas on several occasions in the distant past, most recently in the early Pleistocene. The Park is one of the richest anthropological zones in the New World Tropics, with two major indigenous groups -- Chocos and Kunas -- and a number of smaller cultures. It is one of the first national parks in Middle America which includes conservation of major cultural resources as part of its management objectives.

6. INTEGRITY

The Darien National Park is sufficiently large to ensure the continuation of evolutionary processes and the survival of the endangered species contained therein. The Master Plan for the Establishment and Management of the Park is complete and very modern in its approach to integral and rational management of a large wildland area for the benefit of local people. The area is under

powerful pressures from north and south for a wide range of purposes, many of them inimical to the national park's interests (and the interests of Panama as a whole). Of particular concern is the possible extension of the Pan American Highway through Darien. This would open up the area for settlement, but would also greatly increase the danger of transmitting hoof and mouth disease from South American cattle into Central America. Awarding World Heritage status to this unique and particularly important area will provide additional leverage for long-term protection of the area.

7. COMPARISON WITH OTHER AREAS

In size and diversity -- both natural and cultural -- there is only one other area which can compare with Darien in Middle America, the Mosquita region of Honduras and Nicaragua; however, Darien has different cultural features and species composition. Further, it is in a unique situation forming a land bridge between two continents, forming the northern limit of such species as capybara and bush dog.

8. EVALUATION

Darien National Park is important for conservation and science because of its great diversity and size, forming the best available example of Central American Rainforest ecosystems. The area contains rare and endemic species, and its size is adequate to conserve species which require large areas of habitat (jaguar, tapir). From a biological, ecological and anthropological perspective, it is unique for the region. The pressure for colonization is very strong from the south, particularly the cattle ranching, so Panama is very concerned to establish political control over the area. The early awarding of support to the newly-established national park will help ensure its proper management and development, with particular reference to boundary demarcation and to integration of the area into overall regional development plans.

9. RECOMMENDATION

Darien National Park should be added to the World Heritage List. In view of the newness of the Park, the Committee might wish to go on record as encouraging an application for training support for Park staff.



July 1981 (rev)