

Report on the State of Conservation of the UNESCO World Heritage Site “Western Caucasus” (Russian Federation, No. 900) in 2024

1. Response by the Russian Federation in accordance with World Heritage Committee Decision 46 COM 7B.54

Recalling that the Lagonaki Plateau is essential in expressing the Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) of the property, in particular for its rich biodiversity, especially its high carabid species diversity, and the fact that the area contains two thirds of the vascular plant species of the property, including many endemics, expresses its utmost concern at the confirmation that the construction of a ski resort in the Lagonaki area of the property remains under consideration;

In accordance with Article 5 of the Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage of 1972 (hereinafter referred to as the Convention), State Parties of the Convention shall endeavor, as far as possible, to ensure the best possible protection and conservation and the best possible promotion of the cultural and natural heritage located on their territories, under conditions specific to each country.

In accordance with paragraph 96 of the Operational Guidelines, the protection and management of World Heritage properties must ensure that the WHC, including the conditions of integrity and/or authenticity existing at the time of inscription, are maintained or improved in the future.

Thus, the Convention contains a requirement to preserve the authenticity and integrity of the property, its OUV. At the same time, clear, quantitative criteria for assessing the authenticity and integrity of objects have not been developed.

Earlier, as part of the third cycle of periodic reporting in 2020 and 2021, the Federal State Budgetary Institution (hereinafter — FSBI) “Caucasus State Reserve” prepared a geographical description and map of the UNESCO World Natural Heritage Site “Western Caucasus” in accordance with the requirements of the World Heritage Center (hereinafter also - WHC). The information was sent to the WHC. The proposal for a minor change in the boundaries of the World Heritage property in question was rejected by the WHC in 2022.

According to the information provided in the letter of the Committee of the Republic of Adygea on Tourism and Resorts from 06.02.2024 № 103-28, the realization of the complex tourist project “All-season mountain eco-resort ‘Lagonaki’ (hereinafter - the Project) is carried out within the framework of the national project ‘Tourism and Hospitality Industry’.

The purpose of the Project is to create a modern and safe tourist complex, including collective accommodation facilities and tourist infrastructure.

The functional zoning of the Project objects is envisaged, namely: the functional zone “Upper Village” includes collective accommodation facilities, restaurants, health centers, hospitality zone, head communal facilities. Placement of objects of the functional zone “Upper Village” is provided within the boundaries of the lands of settlements (municipal formation “Dakhovskoye Rural Settlement”).

Functional zone “Ski Complex” includes ski slopes, passenger ropeways, multifunctional centers to ensure the operation of the ski complex and the safety of guests.

The objects of the functional zone “Ski Complex” are supposed to be located within the boundaries of the land plot, which is part of the Lagonak biosphere polygon of the Caucasus State Natural Biosphere Reserve with a special regime of use, which allows recreational activities on this territory.

In 2020 FSBI “Caucasus State Natural Biosphere Reserve” conducted a strategic environmental assessment of the impact of the All-Season Mountain Resort “Lagonaki” on the natural environment and Outstanding Universal Value of the World Natural Heritage Site “Western Caucasus”.

According to the environmental assessment, the Project has been developed in accordance with the requirements of environmental legislation and provides for all necessary measures to protect the environment and regulate anthropogenic impacts.

Currently, design and survey works are underway for the Project facilities, environmental impact assessment and development of environmental protection measures, including assessment of impact on groundwater. Upon completion of the design work, the project documentation will be submitted to the Federal Service for Supervision of Natural Resources for state environmental expertise.

Taking into account the high importance of the unique natural complex of the Caucasus State Natural Biosphere Reserve, the position of the Republic of Adygea is that during the design, construction and operation of the Project facilities it is necessary to comply with all the requirements of the current natural legislation aimed at preserving the fauna and flora and the unique natural features of the territory under consideration.

Reaffirms its position that the construction of large-scale infrastructure within the property, including on the Lagonaki Plateau, would constitute a case for inscription of the property on the List of World Heritage in Danger, in accordance with Paragraph 180 of the Operational Guidelines, and urges the State Party not

to proceed with plans for a ski resort within the property, to immediately cease all ongoing preparatory work at Lagonaki and to identify alternative locations outside the property;

The response is provided in the paragraph above.

Reiterates its utmost concern about the plans for the construction of a new highway and railway connecting the North Caucasus to the Black Sea, including routes that would bisect the property, and urges again the State Party not to proceed with these developments, in accordance with the assurances provided at the time of inscription that no linear infrastructure projects such as highways or railways would be allowed within the property;

When considering the possibility and expediency of constructing a new highway and railroad to the Black Sea from the North Caucasus, which will cross the territory of the heritage site, the Russian Federation will follow the provisions of the Convention in accordance with the established procedure.

Requests the State Party to provide further information on the proposals to develop a 13 km tunnel, through the property, for the road between Arkhyz and Krasnaya Polyana, including its exact location, and further urges the State Party not to proceed if it is inconsistent with the protection requirements outlined in the Operational Guidelines, or if it may negatively impact the OUV of the property;

No documents were submitted to the Ministry of Natural Resources of Russia for consideration.

When considering the construction of a 13-kilometer tunnel through the site for the road between Arkhyz and Krasnaya Polyana, the Russian Federation will follow the provisions of the Convention in accordance with the established procedure.

Noting the information that the Lunnaya Polyana road is used for forestry and fire management purposes, recalls the importance of ensuring that all infrastructure, even if deemed necessary for management and research purposes, does not have a negative impact on the OUV of the property, and further requests the State Party to clarify whether the road provides access to the private ski resort / Biosphere Centre at Lunnaya Polyana;

The unpaved road in the direction from the Vodopadny tract to the Lunnaya Polyana tract has an exclusive fire protection and conservation purpose, is envisaged by the long-term planning documents that have received a positive conclusion of the state expertise of the Ministry of Natural Resources and Ecology of the Russian Federation, has no negative impact on the outstanding universal value of the site, and is not intended to provide access to the Biosphere Center in Lunnaya Polyana.

Reiterates its request to the State Party not to allow the construction of large-scale infrastructure in the Sochi Federal Wildlife Refuge and the Sochi National Park immediately adjacent to the property, given its potential impact on the OUV of the property, and also requests the State Party to immediately halt the notified infrastructure projects until their potential impacts have been adequately assessed in accordance with the Guidance and Toolkit for Impact Assessments in a World Heritage Context and the resulting Environmental Impact Assessments submitted to the World Heritage Centre for review by IUCN;

The territories of the Sochi All-Republican State Nature Reserve and Sochi National Park are not part of the Western Caucasus World Natural Heritage Site.

With regard to these territories, the Russian Federation has only the obligation set out in Article 96 of the Operational Guidelines. The Russian Federation confirms its intention to fulfill the requirements of this article.

Also reiterates its request to the State Party to define a strategic approach to tourism development, including through the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) reported to be underway, by identifying suitable alternative locations for tourism infrastructure development outside the boundaries of the property, as well as appropriate mitigation measures to ensure that any tourism-related development in the vicinity of the property is consistent with the preservation of the OUV of the property;

In 2023, the Government of the Russian Federation adopted a number of basic normative legal acts to improve the regulation of recreational activities in specially protected natural areas. The main of these documents is the Federal Law of 18.03.2023 No. 77-FZ “On Amendments to Certain Legislative Acts of the Russian Federation”. Pursuant to this Federal Law, a number of orders and resolutions of the Government of the Russian Federation necessary for its implementation and regulating issues in this area have been adopted.

In particular, the Government of the Russian Federation approved the relevant rules by Resolution No. 1811 of 31.10.2023 “On Approval of the Rules for Calculation of Maximum Allowable Recreational Capacity of Specially Protected Natural Territories of Federal Significance in the Course of Tourism”.

In connection with the adoption of these regulations in the future will be carried out scientifically-based assessment of the recreational capacity of the territory of the Caucasus State Natural Biosphere Reserve.

Expresses further concern about the protection status of different components of the property managed by the Republic of Adygea, and urges again the State Party to ensure that the legal regulations applying to all components of the property are brought into line with the protection requirements of the Operational Guidelines, and to provide detailed information on the legal status of all components of the property ahead of the Reactive Monitoring mission;

In accordance with the Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Adygeya of 21.05.2020 No. 97 the nature monument of republican significance “Headwaters of the Pshekha and Pshehashkha Rivers” was reorganized into the nature park “Mountain Adygeya”.

In accordance with the resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Adygeya from 17.06.2020 № 116 the nature monument of republican importance “The Tsitsa River Verkhovye” was reorganized into the nature park “The Tsitsa River Verkhovye”.

The regime of these specially protected natural territories of regional significance meets the requirements of the legislation of the Russian Federation.

Notes the proposal by the State Party to hold the joint World Heritage Centre/IUCN Reactive Monitoring mission in October 2024 and reiterates the need for the mission to assess the state of conservation of the property, in particular the status of planned infrastructure and road development projects within and in the vicinity of the property and their cumulative impacts, the status and adequacy of the legal protection of the property and whether the property meets the conditions for inscription on the List of World Heritage in Danger in accordance with Paragraph 180 of the Operational Guidelines, and to assess other threats to the property, including the extent of the impact of invasive alien species;

In the period from September 16 to 22, 2024 a Reactive Monitoring Mission to the Western Caucasus HC VF took place. The Mission included a representative

of the UNESCO World Heritage Center and an expert from the International Union for Conservation of Nature.

During the Mission, a series of meetings were held with representatives of the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment of Russia, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russia, staff of the Federal State Budgetary Institution “Caucasus State Reserve”, and representatives of scientific organizations on the issues of the Mission's Terms of Reference. A meeting with representatives of public environmental organizations was also organized.

During the Mission the delegation visited the sites that are part of the World Natural Heritage Site “Western Caucasus”, located on the territory of the Caucasus State Reserve, as well as regional specially protected natural areas located in the Republic of Adygea.

At present, the Russian Federation has not received a report on the results of the mission from the UNESCO World Heritage Committee.

2. Information on other current issues related to the conservation of the heritage site

Conservation of natural complexes of the World Heritage Site “Western Caucasus”

In 2024, as before, the core of the nomination - the Caucasus State Natural Biosphere Reserve (93.6 % of the total area of the World Heritage Site “Western Caucasus”) - has not experienced anthropogenic impact and is in a natural state.

Also, anthropogenic impact on remote and hard-to-reach areas of the Heritage remains minimal: the Natural Park of the Republic of Adygeya “Verkhovye Tsitsa River” (until 2020 - Nature Monument of the Republic of Adygeya “Verkhovye Tsitsa River”), the Natural Park of the Republic of Adygeya “Mountainous Adygeya” Nature Park of the Republic of Adygea “Mountain Adygea” (until 2020. - Nature Monument of the Republic of Adygeya “The upper reaches of the Pshekha and Pshehashkha Rivers”), Nature Park of the Republic of Adygeya “Bolshoi Tkhach”, Nature Monument of the Republic of Adygeya “Buiny Ridge”.

Conservation of biodiversity of the Western Caucasus World Heritage Site

1. Preservation of the main types of landscapes:

- mountain-forest landscape - full conservation, no economic activity is carried out;

- mountain-meadow landscape - full conservation, no economic activity;
- mountain-meadow landscape of the biosphere polygon of the Caucasus Reserve on the Lagonaki Plateau - the state of meadows has positive dynamics, the restoration of plant communities of the Lagonaki Plateau after excessive pasture loads of 1980-90s of the XX century continues;
- high-mountainous landscape - full preservation, no economic activity is carried out;
- water bodies - full conservation, not used for economic activities.

2. Preservation of species and species richness:

2.1 Species richness (species composition) is fully conserved. No species of flora or fauna have been lost. Slow natural regeneration of Colchis boxwood continues due to the last generation of preserved undergrowth. Repeated outbreaks and formation of centers of boxwood firefly (*Cydalima perspectalis* (Walker, 1859)) are not registered.

2.2 The condition of populations of rare animal and plant species is not deteriorating. The condition of seed chestnut (*Castanea sativa* Mill.) is monitored, which is suffering from the suppressive effects of the phytopathogenic fungus *Cryphonectria parasitica* and the eastern chestnut nutcracker (*Dryocosmus kuriphilus* Yasumatsu, 1951).

2.3 There are no negative trends in the population dynamics of the main protected mammal species, which are the most sensitive to anthropogenic impact. Stabilization of the number of these populations with optimal spatial, sex and age structure is confirmed.

Management of the Western Caucasus World Natural Heritage Site

The management of the World Heritage Site “Western Caucasus” remains unchanged compared to 2023.

1. Overall control and management:

General control and management of the World Heritage Site “Western Caucasus” is carried out by the federal executive body - the Ministry of Natural Resources and Ecology of the Russian Federation.

2. Management of Regional Specially Protected Natural Areas within the Western Caucasus World Heritage Site:

As in 2023, the Bolshoi Tkhach Nature Park is directly managed by the regional state institution “Bolshoi Tkhach Nature Park”, which is under the jurisdiction of the Department of Environmental Protection and Natural Resources of the Republic of Adygea.

Direct management of the natural park “Gornaya Adygeya” is carried out by the special regional state institution of the Republic of Adygeya “Nature Park ‘Gornaya Adygeya’, which is under the jurisdiction of the Department of Environmental Protection and Natural Resources of the Republic of Adygeya.

Direct management of the natural park of the Republic of Adygeya “Verkhovye Tsitsa River” is carried out by a special regional state enterprise of the Republic of Adygeya “Natural Park ‘Verkhovye Tsitsa River’, which is also under the jurisdiction of the Department for Environmental Protection and Natural Resources of the Republic of Adygeya.

The management of the natural monument “Buiny Ridge” is directly carried out by the executive authority of the region of the Russian Federation - the Department for Environmental Protection and Natural Resources of the Republic of Adygea.

The management of regional natural territories takes place on the basis of planning documents approved by the executive authorities of the Republic of Adygeya. Financing and control over the management, protection, conservation and study of these territories is carried out by the Republic of Adygeya.

3. Management of the federal specially protected natural territory within the Western Caucasus World Heritage Site:

The management of the Caucasus Reserve is still carried out by the federal state budgetary institution “Caucasus State Natural Biosphere Reserve named after Kh. G. Shaposhnikov”, which is under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Natural Resources and Ecology of the Russian Federation.

The main management directions and guiding documents have not changed.

In 2023, the Caucasus Reserve was protected by a staff of state inspectors consisting of 65 state inspectors. The number of violations of environmental legislation and protection regime of the Caucasus Reserve detected in 2024 and their structure are generally maintained at the level of 2023:

71 % - illegal presence on the territory;

1% - illegal fishing;

28% - other violations.

3. Serious changes within the boundaries of the World Heritage property under consideration - are not observed and are not predicted.

Klichevsky



Yuzhno-Kamchatsky



Nalychevo

