

ASIA / PACIFIC

**GREAT HIMALAYAN NATIONAL PARK
CONSERVATION AREA**

INDIA



WORLD HERITAGE NOMINATION – IUCN TECHNICAL EVALUATION

GREAT HIMALAYAN NATIONAL PARK CONSERVATION AREA (INDIA) – ID No. 1406 Rev

IUCN RECOMMENDATION TO WORLD HERITAGE COMMITTEE: To inscribe the property under natural criterion (x).

Key paragraphs of Operational Guidelines:

Paragraph 77: Property meets natural criterion.

Paragraph 78: Property meets conditions of integrity and protection and management requirements.

Background note: The Great Himalayan National Park (GHNP) was nominated in 2012 and considered by the World Heritage Committee at its 37th Session in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, 2013. IUCN recalls the Committee's decision (Decision 37COM 8B.11) to refer the nomination back to the State Party to allow it to address a number of issues related to the need to add the Tirthan and Sainj Wildlife Sanctuaries to the nominated area; strengthen engagement with local communities; undertake additional comparative analysis to confirm the values of the property within the Western Himalayas; and continue longer term plans to progressively increase the size of the property through the addition of other areas within the wider ecological complex.

The State Party of India submitted a response to Decision 37COM 8B.11 in September 2013 which provides information in relation to the issues raised as well as revised maps showing the expanded nomination. The evaluation below draws upon the previous assessment taking into account re-submitted material. The Committee's attention is drawn to the previous evaluation (WHC13/37.COM/INF.8B2) in order to avoid repeating information.

1. DOCUMENTATION

a) Date nomination received by IUCN: Original nomination received on 25 March 2012. Revised version after 37COM referral decision received on 22 November 2013.

b) Additional information officially requested from and provided by the State Party: Supplementary information on the original nomination was requested from the State Party on 20 December 2012. The information was received on 11 February 2013 and was considered in IUCN's 2013 evaluation report. No additional information has been requested over and above this.

c) Additional literature consulted: Various sources listed in the nomination, and in the earlier IUCN evaluation report.

d) Consultations: The IUCN representative from the 2012 field visit, in addition to earlier consultees.

e) Field visit: Original field mission undertaken by Graeme Worboys, 03-16 October 2012.

f) Date of IUCN approval of this report: March 2014

2. SUMMARY OF NATURAL VALUES

The State Party has advised in September 2013 of two proposed changes to the original nomination of GHNP. The first concerns redefinition of the boundaries of the nominated property to include two adjacent wildlife sanctuaries, namely the Tirthan Wildlife Sanctuary and the Sainj Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS). The second

concerns removal of the request to consider the nominated property under criterion (vii). The additional information therefore focuses on biodiversity values pertinent to criterion (x).

The enlarged nominated property now covers 90,540 hectares. This comprises the 75,440 ha GHNP which is a formerly declared national park (equivalent to IUCN Protected Area Management Category II) plus the 9,000 ha Sainj WLS plus the Tirthan WLS of 6,100 ha. Together these comprise the Great Himalayan National Park Conservation Area (GHNPCA). The buffer zone of 26,560 ha remains unchanged from the original nomination. Wildlife sanctuaries in India are equivalent to IUCN Category IV protected areas. The State Party advises that, whilst the two WLSs have been added to the nominated area, they are undergoing the process of formal designation to be incorporated within GHNP, in other words conversion from wildlife sanctuary to national park status.

Additional information provided by the State Party concentrates on the values of the nominated property compared with Nanda Devi and Valley of the Flowers National Parks in accordance with the Committee's request. The values description provided in the previous nomination is noted as relevant for the enlarged property as well.

Additional material also highlights the values of the nominated property with respect to global warming. It notes the importance of GHNPCA's diversity of intact habitats related to elevational range which will become increasingly important because of the impact of global warming. Climate change will force flora and fauna to find refuge as temperature and precipitation tolerances shift.

3. COMPARISONS WITH OTHER AREAS

The re-submitted nomination is requested for consideration under criterion (x) alone.

The State Party has clarified earlier confusion by confirming that the comparative analysis previously tended was based on the enlarged property (GHNP plus the two WLSs). Additional information therefore refers predominantly to the comparison with Nanda Devi and the Valley of the Flowers National Parks (ND/VF). IUCN's previous evaluation noted that GHNP was most closely compared with ND/VF which is inscribed under criterion (vii) reflecting the presence of India's second highest mountain, (Nanda Devi West) at 7,817 metres; spectacular features including glaciers, moraines, alpine meadows, a high altitude Himalayan Valley (the Valley of the Flowers), a deep gorge; and the area's remote wilderness character. These attributes are similar to many of GHNPCA's values, but the mountains are higher, glaciers are bigger and there is the presence of a large and aesthetic high mountain valley.

The climate and environments of the Himalayas are not uniform, with wet conditions in the east and drier conditions in the west. Distinctly different assemblages of plants and animals have consequently evolved for the Eastern and Western Himalaya and both areas have been recognised for their special conservation status. The Western Himalaya includes part of Conservation International's Himalayan Hotspot; WWF's Western Himalayan Temperate Forest Global 200 Ecoregion; the Tibetan Plateau Steppe Global 200 Ecoregion and part of Birdlife International's "Western Himalaya" Endemic Bird Area (EBA 128). The additional comparative analysis confirms that the nominated property possesses values which match or surpass those of ND/VF, furthermore that the nominated property is now contiguous and has greater potential for expansion adding to its ecological viability. The greater elevational range in the nominated property compared to ND/VF is also argued as contributing to its distinctive values. The State Party also point to the fact that DN/VF is 80% covered with snow, ice and rock, whereas the nominated property has larger areas of forested cover.

A more detailed comparative table of species is provided to argue conclusions related to the high concentration of species within the nominated property when compared with ND/VF. However, IUCN notes that these conclusions need to be considered in light of the fact that the much larger ND/VF Biosphere Reserve area has been used to analyse species densities. The table notes the area of ND/VF as 640,700 ha when the World Heritage area at 71,183 ha is approximately ten times smaller. It is not clear if the species data provided relate to the smaller World Heritage site but it appears to reinforce that the values of these two areas in the Western Himalayas share much in common.

In terms of integrity comparisons it is noted that ND/VF consists of two separate parts in different catchments with no ecological connectivity. This is contrasted to

the new nomination which is now a single contiguous area with opportunities for future expansion across the wider ecosystem complex.

The additional information submitted highlights of the nominated property's values with respect to buffering climate change. Whilst this is true in the case of conservation of Western Himalayan species, it is a typical feature of many high mountain ecosystems with a reasonable elevational range and diversity of habitats.

The additional comparative analysis confirms that the nominated property includes more transitional biotic elements between the Palearctic and Indomalayan Realms than the ND/VF site. Furthermore, that ecoregional variation across the Himalayas, demonstrates that the nominated property shows distinct differences with the ND/VF site which has a more eastern faunal and floral composition, and lacks the lower altitude zones which are considered to make the nominated property important.

4. INTEGRITY, PROTECTION AND MANAGEMENT

4.1 Protection

The two additions, Tirthan and Sainj WLSs, do not enjoy the same levels of strict protection as the 1999 declared GHNP which is a national park. National parks under the Indian Wildlife Protection Act, 1972 provide for strict protection without human disturbance. Tirthan and Sainj WLSs are designated in recognition of their ecological and zoological significance and are subject to wildlife management objectives. However, the newly nominated property as well as the buffer zone is managed as a single unit and is subject to a single management plan overseen by a single Director.

Sainj WLS includes 120 inhabitants, whilst Tirthan WLS is free of inhabitants but is subject to traditional grazing. The State Party advises that the process of conversion from WLS to national park is underway and essentially irreversible. IUCN is of the view that despite the lower protective status of the two WLSs there is sufficient protection to ensure World Heritage values are conserved and any shortcomings in protective status is outweighed by the integrity benefits of a larger contiguous nominated area with a more ecologically sound boundary.

IUCN considers the legal protection status of the nominated property meets the requirements set out in the Operational Guidelines.

4.2 Boundaries

The boundaries of the nominated property have been significantly improved through the addition of the two WLSs. The property is now contiguous and has been enlarged by approximately 20% in area. The addition of valley bottom areas within the WLSs adds valuable lower elevation habitats within the Sainj and Tirthan River Valleys, providing for more complete protection

of water catchment areas. A large part of the southern aspect of the Sainj River Valley formerly excluded from nomination is now incorporated and is a more complete habitat protection for notable species such as Western Tragopan, Musk Deer and others.

The nominated property has a buffer zone only along its south-western side (the 26,560 ha Ecozone) reflecting the areas of greatest human population pressure. The property is, however, afforded good protection in the north, east and south due to the rugged and difficult to access high mountains. The larger ecological complex of protected lands ensures this acts as an effective buffer to the nominated area. In fact the larger ecological complex represents the single largest area of formal protection for the entire Himalayas after Jigme Dorji National Park in Bhutan.

IUCN considers that the boundaries of the nominated property meet the requirements of the Operational Guidelines.

4.3 Management

The management emphasis within the two WLSs, which have been included within the nomination, is on mitigating the impacts of the three small villages within Sainj WLS and on regulating shepherds to minimize the grazing impacts of sheep and other livestock within Tirthan WLS. IUCN has concerns regarding the extent and long term impacts of grazing and recommends the phasing out of this use as soon as possible and in line with established processes of negotiated transition from WLS to national park. This should also be fully consistent with India's established legal processes to resolve community rights issues.

The State Party has also advised that GHNP is now participating in a management effectiveness evaluation (MEE) programme consistent with the IUCN MEE Framework. IUCN welcomes this advice noting the benefits of such a comprehensive approach to improving management at all stages of the management cycle.

IUCN considers the management of nominated property meets the requirements of the Operational Guidelines.

4.4 Community

As noted in IUCN's previous evaluation, the management of the park has taken notable steps to work with the community over many years. Updated information from the State Party has highlighted further advances in this regard.

The State Party advises of its ongoing commitment to work with local people who will be affected by changes to the protection status of the two WLSs. Programmes are in place to formally compensate affected people, to provide for alternative livelihoods and to accommodate input to park management decision-making. It is noted that demand for access and use rights to the two WLSs is in excess of the numbers of people with traditional rights, due in part to more recent migration

into the region. This requires an assessment of the legitimacy of such claims. IUCN recognizes that these are sensitive processes that require time and careful management to ensure transparency, equity and the recognition of legitimate claims. Legal processes in India guide these processes and IUCN is advised they are underway, however a timeframe has not been provided as to when such process might be finalised such that both WLS will become national parks.

IUCN welcomes the findings of MEE processes completed in 2007 which point to improved, more positive perceptions of local people toward the park. This has resulted from sustained effort to address threats and work with communities to settle rights and provide fair compensation. IUCN welcomes these ongoing efforts whilst noting that some concerns remain related to empowering stakeholder in management decision making beyond advisory roles.

4.5 Threats

The range of threats noted in IUCN's previous evaluation persists, although the reconfigured and enlarged property results in a more robust conservation unit, more resilient to impacts. Ongoing monitoring of threats and particular attention to uses within the adjoining populated Ecozone buffer zone will be needed.

The addition of the two WLSs has improved the overall integrity of the nomination; however it opens up concerns regarding traditional grazing in Tirthan WLS and small human settlements in Sainj WLS. Both these aspects are being actively managed, a process that will need to be maintained. As noted above grazing within Tirthan WLS should be prohibited as soon as legal transition to national park status can be completed.

In summary, IUCN considers the addition of Sainj and Tirthan Wildlife Sanctuaries and the resultant reconfiguration of the boundaries of the nominated property have greatly improved integrity. IUCN considers that the nominated property meets the overall conditions of integrity and protection and management as outlined in the Operational Guidelines.

5. ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

None.

6. APPLICATION OF THE CRITERIA

The **Great Himalayan National Park Conservation Area** (GHNPCA) has been nominated under criterion (x).

Criterion (x): Biodiversity and threatened species
GHNPCA is of significance for the conservation of Western Himalayan biodiversity. It is located in steep Himalayan mountain environments at the junction of the Indo-Malayan and Palearctic Biogeographic

Realms and protects important biodiversity within the “Western Himalayan Temperate Forests” globally significant ecoregion. GHNPCA also protects part of Conservation International’s Himalaya “biodiversity hot spot” and is part of the Birdlife International’s Western Himalaya Endemic Bird Area. The Park is home to 805 vascular plant species, 192 species of lichen, 12 species of liverworts and 25 species of mosses. Some 58% of its angiosperms are endemic to the Western Himalayas. The Park also protects some 31 species of mammals, 209 birds, 9 amphibians, 12 reptiles and 125 insects. The nominated property provides habitat for 4 globally threatened mammals, 3 globally threatened birds and a large number of medicinal plants. The enlarged area of this nomination to include the Sainj and Tirthan Wildlife Sanctuaries has significantly enhanced the value of the property for biodiversity conservation, as a contiguous highly protected area that will allow the effective conservation management of important habitats and endangered species such as the Western Tragopan and the Musk Deer.

IUCN considers that the nominated property meets this criterion.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

IUCN recommends that the World Heritage Committee adopt the following draft decision:

The World Heritage Committee,

1. Having examined Documents WHC-14/38.COM/8B and WHC-14/38.COM/INF.8B2;

2. Inscribes the **Great Himalayan National Park Conservation Area (India)** on the World Heritage List under natural criterion (x).

3. Adopts the following Statement of Outstanding Universal Value:

Brief synthesis

The Great Himalayan National Park Conservation Area (GHNPCA) is located in the western part of the Himalayan Mountains in the northern Indian State of Himachal Pradesh. The 90,540 ha property includes the upper mountain glacial and snow melt water source origins of the westerly flowing Jiwa Nal, Sainj and Tirthan Rivers and the north-westerly flowing Parvati River which are all headwater tributaries to the River Beas and subsequently, the Indus River. The property includes an elevational range from high alpine peaks of over 6,000m a.s.l to riverine forest at altitudes below 2,000m a.s.l. GHNPCA encompasses the catchments of water supplies which are vital to millions of downstream users.

The property lies within the ecologically distinct Western Himalayas at the junction between two of the world’s major biogeographic realms, the Palearctic and Indomalayan Realms. Displaying biotic elements from both these realms, GHNPCA protects the monsoon affected forests and alpine meadows of the Himalayan

front ranges which sustain a unique biota comprised of many distinct altitude-sensitive ecosystems. The property is home to many plants and animals endemic to the region. GHNPCA displays distinct broadleaf and conifer forest types forming mosaics of habitat across steep valley side landscapes. It is a compact, natural and biodiverse protected area system that includes 25 forest types and an associated rich assemblage of fauna species.

GHNPCA is at the core of a larger area of surrounding protected areas which form an island of undisturbed environments in the greater Western Himalayan landscape. The diversity of species present is rich; however it is the abundance and health of individual species’ populations supported by healthy ecosystem processes where the GHNPCA demonstrates its outstanding significance for biodiversity conservation.

Criteria

Criterion (x)

GHNPCA is located within the globally significant “Western Himalayan Temperate Forests” ecoregion. The property also protects part of Conservation International’s Himalaya “biodiversity hot spot” and is part of the Birdlife International’s Western Himalaya Endemic Bird Area. GHNPCA is home to 805 vascular plant species, 192 species of lichen, 12 species of liverworts and 25 species of mosses. Some 58% of its angiosperms are endemic to the Western Himalayas. The property also protects some 31 species of mammals, 209 birds, 9 amphibians, 12 reptiles and 125 insects. GHNPCA provides habitat for 4 globally threatened mammals, 3 globally threatened birds and a large number of medicinal plants. The protection of lower altitude valleys provides for more complete protection and management of important habitats and endangered species such as the Western Tragopan and the Musk Deer.

Integrity

The property is of a sufficient size to ensure the natural functioning of ecological processes. Its rugged topography and inaccessibility together with its location within a much larger ecological complex of protected areas ensures its integrity. The altitudinal range within the property together with its diversity of habitat types provide a buffer to climate change impacts and the needs of altitude sensitive plants and animals to find refuge from climate variability.

A 26,560 ha buffer zone known as an Ecozone is defined along the south-western side of the property. This buffer zone coincides with the areas of greatest human pressure and is managed in sympathy with the core values of the GHNPCA. The property is further buffered by high mountain systems to the north-west which include several national parks and wildlife sanctuaries. These areas also offer scope to progressively increase the size of the World Heritage property.

Human settlement related threats pose the greatest concern and include agriculture, localised poaching, traditional grazing, human-wildlife conflicts and

hydropower development. Tourism impact is minimal and trekking routes are closely regulated.

Protection and management requirements

The property is subject to sound legal protection, however, this needs to be strengthened to ensure consistent high level protection across all areas. This pertains to the transition of some areas from wildlife sanctuary to national park status. Tirthan and Sainj Wildlife Sanctuaries are designated in recognition of their ecological and zoological significance and are subject to wildlife management objectives, and a higher level of strict protection is provided to GHNPC which is a national park. National parks under the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972 provide for strict protection without human disturbance.

The property's boundaries are considered appropriate and an effective management regime is in place including an overall management plan and adequate resourcing. The property has a buffer zone along its south-western side which corresponds to the 26,560 ha Ecozone, the area of greatest human population pressure. Continued attention is required to manage sensitive community development issues in this buffer zone and in some parts of the property itself.

The sensitive resolution of access and use rights by communities is needed to bolster protection as is fostering alternative livelihoods which are sympathetic to the conservation of the area. Local communities are engaged in management decisions; however more work is needed to fully empower communities and continue to build a strong sense of support and stewardship for the GHNPCA.

Included within the property is the Sainj Wildlife Sanctuary with 120 inhabitants and the Tirthan Wildlife Sanctuary, which is uninhabited but currently subject to traditional grazing. The inclusion of these two Wildlife Sanctuaries supports the integrity of the nomination; however, it opens up concerns regarding the impacts of grazing and human settlements. Both these aspects are being actively managed, a process that will need to be maintained. The extent and impacts of high pasture grazing in the Tirthan area of the property needs to be assessed and grazing phased out as soon as practicable. Other impacts

arising from small human settlements within the Sainj area of the property also need to be addressed as soon as practicable.

4. Requests the State Party to:

- a) expedite, in accordance with legislated processes, the resolution of community rights based issues with respect to local communities and indigenous peoples in the Tirthan and Sainj Wildlife Sanctuaries, including in relation to the phasing out of grazing in the Tirthan Wildlife Sanctuary;
- b) expedite the formal designation of Tirthan and Sainj Wildlife Sanctuaries as national parks to improve their legal protection and advise the Committee of an estimated timeframe for this to occur;
- c) continue, in consultation with communities and stakeholders, longer term plans to progressively increase the size of the property, in order to increase integrity and better provide for the conservation of wide-ranging species, through extensions of other surrounding protected areas potentially including the Rupi Bhabha Wildlife Sanctuary, Pin Valley National Park, Khirganga National Park and the Kanawar Wildlife Sanctuary.

5. Recommends relevant States Parties, including Pakistan, India, China, Nepal and Bhutan, to consider undertaking a regional comparative study with the support of the IUCN and other partners such as the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) to fully assess the scope of ecosystems within the Himalayas and adjacent mountain regions with a view to identifying potential World Heritage candidate areas and boundary configurations in this region, including potential serial nominations/extensions.

6. Commends the State Party and the range of stakeholders in the nominated property for their efficient and effective action to address concerns related to the property's integrity, protection and management, as previously raised by the World Heritage Committee.

Map 1: Nominated property and buffer zone



Map 2: Great Himalayan Conservation Landscape

