
WORLD HERITAGE NOMINATION – IUCN TECHNICAL EVALUATION

CAVES OF AGGTELEK KARST AND SLOVAK KARST (HUNGARY / SLOVAKIA) – ID No. 725 Bis

IUCN carried out a desk review of the proposed modifications to the boundaries and buffer zones of the Caves of Aggtelek Karst and Slovak Karst, Hungary / Slovakia, taking into consideration comments from eight external reviewers.

1. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The transnational property was inscribed on the World Heritage List in 1995 under natural criterion (viii). A buffer zone was identified at that time in Slovakia only. The property was extended in 2000 by adding Dobšinská ice cave in Slovakia and identifying a surrounding buffer zone. In response to the Retrospective Inventory, the World Heritage Centre received on 28 January 2008 a proposal from the States Parties for a number of modifications to the boundaries and buffer zones of the property, which was transmitted to IUCN on 14 February 2008 for review.

With their proposal the States Parties submitted topographic maps clearly showing the boundaries of the World Heritage property and the proposed modifications. The States Parties also provided information on the surface area of the World Heritage property as inscribed and as proposed to be modified. The States Parties note that the World Heritage property currently comprises three components with a total surface area of 19,797.2 ha in Hungary and four components with a total surface area of 36,765.57 ha in Slovakia. Two buffer zones with a total surface area of 58,097.33 ha exist in Slovakia, which are not part of the World Heritage property.

2. SHORT SUMMARY OF PROPOSAL

On the Hungarian side of the property it is proposed to extend the surface area of the Esztramos Hill component from 107.2 ha to 195 ha to strengthen the integrity of the component. This extension has become possible due to changes in tenure: ownership of the extension area has been transferred to the Hungarian State, following cessation of quarrying activities in this area, and the Aggtelek National Park Directorate is now in charge of managing the extension area. The area provides access to additional caves and associated values. It is also proposed to create a 28,000 ha buffer zone on the Hungarian side of the property to help to protect the natural values and integrity of the property by preventing and reducing negative human impacts on the delicate cave systems.

On the Slovakian side of the property it is proposed to reduce the total surface area of the property from 36,765.57 ha to 35,109.8 ha and to reduce the total surface area of the buffer zones from 58,097.33 ha to 12,070.53 ha. As a result the number of components of the property in Slovakia would rise from four to five. The State Party explains that the Slovak Karst protected landscape area became a national park in 2002, with certain changes to the delimitation of the protected area, and the proposed boundary modifications reflect these changes. The substantial reduction in the Dobšinská ice cave component (17% reduction) and its buffer zone (98.7% reduction) is justified by management experience that shows a much smaller area is adequate to protect this component.

3. IMPLICATIONS FOR OUTSTANDING UNIVERSAL VALUE AND INTEGRITY

Given that the Outstanding Universal Value and integrity of the delicate cave systems within the property are highly sensitive to changes in their environment, any changes in the protection and management of their environment need to be carefully assessed. This applies also to the proposed modifications to the boundaries and buffer zones of the property, in particular within Slovakia, where substantial reductions are proposed in the total surface area of the property and buffer zones.

IUCN considers that the extension of the Esztramos Hill component from 107.2 ha to 195 ha strengthens the integrity of the component through improved protection of caves and associated values. The creation of a 28,000 ha buffer zone that encompasses all the components on the Hungarian side of the property will also help to protect the natural values and integrity of the property by preventing and reducing negative human impacts on the delicate cave systems. Protection is afforded to the caves in the buffer zone by Hungarian Law LIII of 1996 On the Protection of Nature and the Aggtelek National Park Directorate has administrative authority over all activities that may affect the integrity of these caves.

IUCN considers that the proposed modifications on the Hungarian side of the property are minor and

strengthen the integrity of the World Heritage property, and should therefore be approved.

accepted as minor modifications or will require a full re-nomination including a field evaluation.

IUCN considers, however, that it is not possible, based on the information provided, to adequately assess the implications of the proposed reductions in the surface area of the property and buffer zones in Slovakia for the Outstanding Universal Value and integrity of the property. More detailed information on the proposed reductions, including large scale topographic, geological, and in the case of Dobšinská and Ochtinská caves also hydrogeological maps, and their implications for the Outstanding Universal Value and integrity of the property is required. Based on this information IUCN will consider whether the proposed modifications can be accepted as minor modifications or will require a full re-nomination including a field evaluation. At this stage IUCN considers that, given their scale, the proposed reductions are unlikely to represent a minor modification.

IUCN considers that, based on the information provided, the proposed modifications on the Slovakian side of the property appear to be significant and should not be approved at this stage.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS

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

The World Heritage Committee,

1. *Having examined Documents **WHC-08/32.COM/8B** and **WHC-08/32.COM/INF.8B2**,*
2. *Approves the proposed extension of the Esztramos Hill component from 107.2 ha to 195 ha and the proposed creation of a 28,000 ha buffer zone on the Hungarian side of the **Caves of Aggtelek Karst and Slovak Karst, Hungary / Slovakia**, in order to strengthen the integrity of the World Heritage property;*
3. *Refers the proposed reductions in the surface area of the property and buffer zones on the Slovakian side of the **Caves of Aggtelek Karst and Slovak Karst, Hungary / Slovakia**, back to the State Party of Slovakia to provide further justification and information;*
4. *Requests the State Party of Slovakia to provide more detailed information on the proposed reductions, including large scale topographic, geological, and in the case of Dobšinská and Ochtinská caves also hydrogeological maps, and their implications for the Outstanding Universal Value and integrity of the property. Based on review of this information, IUCN will recommend whether the proposed modifications can be*

Map 1: Boundaries of the property and buffer zones and proposed modifications

