

**State of Conservation Report
Sagarmatha National Park (Nepal) (N 120)**

Submitted to
World Heritage Center
United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)
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Prepared and Submitted by
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Kathmandu, Nepal
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State of Conservation Report of Sagarmatha National Park (Nepal) (N 120)

1. Executive Summary

Sagarmatha National Park (SNP), a world heritage property since 1979 is an example of superlative and exceptional natural beauty, which is embedded in the vivid mountains, glaciers, deep valleys and majestic peaks including the world's highest peak, Mt. Everest. The park is home to several rare species of wildlife including snow leopard, musk deer and red panda. The area contains the world's highest ecologically characteristic flora and fauna, intricately blended with the rich Sherpa culture. The intricate linkages of the Sherpa culture with the ecosystem are a major focus of the park and they form the basis for the sustainable conservation of the natural resources, which eventually contributes for the wellbeing of the local communities.

The World Heritage Committee in its 40th session in the year 2016 has raised issues regarding the State of Conservation of Sagarmatha National Park as a world heritage property. In decision 40 COM 7B.89, the committee has requested the State Party to update and submit the relevant information to the World Heritage Centre as well as suggested the necessary actions to address the issues raised by the committee. In this context, this report is an update on the status of the UNESCO World Heritage Site, Sagarmatha National Park. Furthermore, this report underlines the view of the State Party to the issues raised by the World Heritage Committee. The report has been prepared using integrated approach; field observation, stakeholders' consultation, independent consultants' input and expert review.

The Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation (DNPWC) in the center and Sagarmatha National Park in the site coordinated and closely monitored the Community Based Flood and Glacial Lake Outburst Risk Reduction project activities to ensure compliance with environmental measures. Environmental auditing is also conducted by independent consultants in order to ensure environmental compliances. The Management Plan of Sagarmatha National park and its Buffer Zone 2016-2020 is in implementation. Relevant recommendations of the IUCN advisory mission have been incorporated in the plan. Supreme Court has made final verdict with respect to the Kongde view resort. Full text of final verdict is under write up. SNP Authority has been regularly monitoring the operation and waste management activities of the resort. Similarly, the park authority has been mobilizing the Sagarmatha Pollution Control Committee (SPCC) for waste and garbage management. Helicopters are largely used for rescue and relief works. Sagarmatha National Park and Buffer zone map was updated, it clearly reflects the park zonation i.e. core area and buffer zone area. Optical fiber project and ropeway project has been planned in SNP. Permission to conduct Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) study for optical fiber project has already been granted by Ministry of Population and Environment.

2. Introduction

Sagarmatha National Park (SNP) was designated as one of the pioneer protected areas of Nepal in 1976 and it covers an area of 1,148 square kilometers. The highest peak of the world, Mt. Everest, is located inside the park core area. The park represents the high altitude pristine ecosystems. Local communities, known as Sherpa ethnic groups, are native to the area and famous for their mountain climbing skills. The park was enlisted as the UNESCO World

Heritage site in 1979 as the first UNESCO natural world heritage site of Nepal. In addition, Gokyo Lake, situated inside the park, is enlisted in the Ramsar List as a high-altitude wetland of global significance.

SNP is a suitable habitat for snow leopard, musk deer, red panda, Himalayan tahr and many globally significant birds. Ecotourism is the major source of income, which not only benefits the local communities, but also generates considerable amount of government revenue. Mountaineering and trekking are the major attractions for the visitors. Proximity to Mt. Everest is a prime factor in the area's popularity.

In 1963, 20 tourists visited Everest region whereas the number of tourists increased to 3,500 in 1973. In 2000, the number of tourists to SNP peaked at 26,500. However, number of visitors dropped to 14,000 in 2002 due to political instability of the country. With improved political situation in 2004, the number of tourists increased to 21,000 and there were slightly more than 30,000 annual visitors before the 2015 earthquake. Due to the impact of the earthquake, the number of visitors again dropped to around 25,000 for that year. Afterwards, the number of visitors to SNP has increased and reached a record 45,000 tourist in the fiscal year 2016-2017.

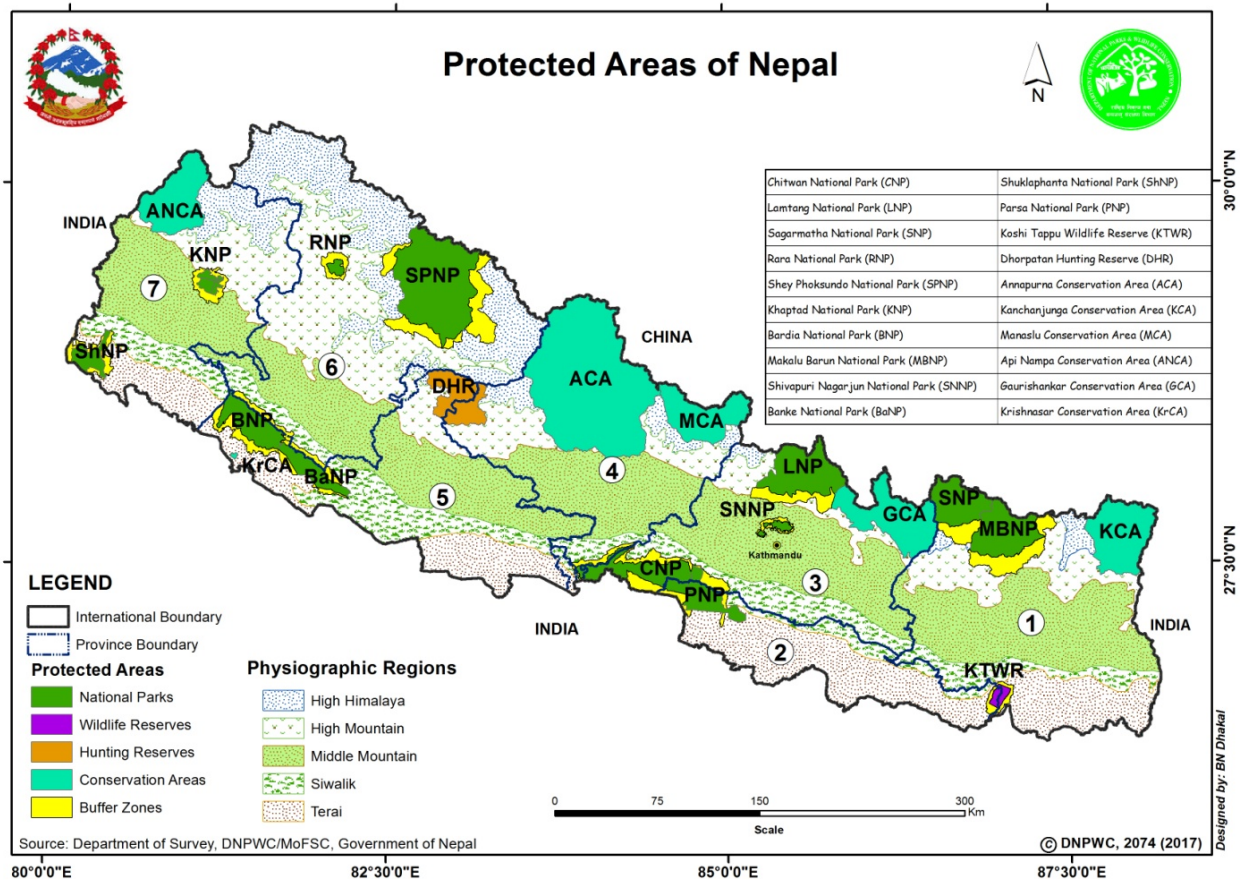


Figure-1: Location map of Sagarmatha National Park



3. Response to the Decision of the World Heritage Committee

3.1. Having examined Document WHC/16/40.COM/7B.Add,

Response: NA

3.2. Recalling Decision 38 COM 7B.68, adopted at its 38th session (Doha, 2014),

Response: NA

3.3. Welcomes the initiation of the UNDP funded “Community Based Flood and Glacial Lake Outburst Risk Reduction project”, especially considering the potential threat arising from climate change, and urges the State Party to ensure that the implementation of this State of conservation of properties WHC/16/40.COM/7B.Add, p. 100 Inscribed on the World Heritage List project is closely monitored to ensure compliance with environmental measures and in cooperation with local communities to ensure respect of their cultural and spiritual values and practices;

Response: The Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation in the center and Sagarmatha National Park in the project site coordinated and closely monitored the project activities. Environmental auditing is also conducted by independent consultants in order to ensure environmental compliances. Most of the potential impacts were predicted accurately during the project formulation stage; environmental and social condition as well as cultural condition of the project area judged effective.

3.4. Also welcomes the progress made by the State Party with the development of the draft 2016-2020 Management Plan for Sagarmatha National Park and its buffer zone, which was reviewed by the IUCN Advisory mission, and encourages the State Party to reflect the findings of the Advisory mission in the Management Plan and submit the completed plan (in English) to the World Heritage Centre by 1 December 2017, for review by IUCN;

Response: Management plan is a key guiding document to park management. The relevant recommendations of the IUCN Advisory Mission have been incorporated in the plan. Currently, the Management Plan of Sagarmatha National park and its Buffer Zone 2016-2020 is in implementation. The State Party always welcomes the suggestions from the World Heritage Center for the effective implementation of the activities outlined by the approved management plan of SNP and its buffer zone.

3.5. Reiterates its concern that no verdict of the Supreme Court of Nepal has yet been made with respect to the Kongde View Resort to determine whether or not it is located inside the property, notes with concern that the resort is permitted to continue to operate until the verdict is issued, and also urges the State Party to take urgent measures to ensure that any impacts from the continued operation of the Kongde View Resort on the Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) of the property are adequately mitigated;

Response: Supreme Court has made final verdict with respect to the Kongde view resort. As per the letter of Supreme Court dated 23rd November 2017, full text of final verdict is under

write up. Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation will inform the World Heritage Center after receiving full text of final verdict of Supreme Court.

National Park Authority has been regularly monitoring the operation and waste management activities of the resort. A joint monitoring by a team from Ministry of Population and Environment, Ministry of Forests and Soil Conservation, Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation and Eastern Regional Forestry Directorate has been proposed.

3.6. Also notes with concern the reported increase in illegal wood collection from the property and its buffer zone, the continued challenge of solid waste management and other reported impacts from increasing visitation, including noise and visual impacts from uncontrolled and unregulated helicopter use, and also requests the State Party to include in the Management Plan adequate measures to address these issues, based on the recommendations of the Advisory mission and, where necessary, additional assessments of impacts on the OUV of the property;

Response: The state party has already carried out a number of law enforcement activities in close collaboration of local communities and Nepalese Army. There is no reporting of illegal activities during last six months. SNP is planning to initiate real time SMART patrolling in SNP as it is already in practice in Terai protected areas of Nepal. Likewise, park authority has planned to launch web based Visitors Tracking System in SNP and BZ.

The park authority has been mobilizing Sagarmatha Pollution Control Committee (SPCC) for waste management. It is a local environmental institution and has been actively engaged in waste management in Sagarmatha National Park and its Buffer Zone. In direct coordination with SNP and local communities, SPCC also manages garbage in major settlements and along trekking trails. This NGO with the permission from SNP built some solid waste containers along the trekking route (Lukla to Namche, Namche to Tengboche and Namche to Thame). SNP has been providing technical, financial and legal assistance to SPCC as required in order to implement waste management activities in SNP and its bufferzone. SPCC has been doing its best and an exemplary work to manage all types of wastes and garbage in this region.

Helicopters are largely used for rescue and relief works. There are random checks of rescue operation at Lukla and Namche at regular interval by SNP in order to validate that the helicopter flight is a real rescue flight.

3.7. Appreciates the State Party's intention to submit a park zonation map to the World Heritage Centre once completed, and reiterates its encouragement to the State Party to submit a minor boundary modification to formally recognize the buffer zone of Sagarmatha National Park as a buffer zone to the property, consistent with the Operational Guidelines;

Response: Sagarmatha National Park Office has prepared the updated map of Sagarmatha National Park and its Buffer zone (Fig-2). This map clearly reflects the park zonation i.e. core zone and buffer zone. Core area of SNP is 1,148 km² and buffer zone 275 km². Most detailed and authentic maps available are the topographical maps published by Department of Survey of Government of Nepal in 1996/97 based on 1:50,000 scale aerial photography of 1992 and field verification in 1996, used as base maps. Six topographic map sheets (2886 15, 2886 16,

2786 03, 2786 04, 2786 07 and 2786 08) of 1:50,000 scales covered the Sagarmatha National Park and Buffer Zone. Both National Park and Buffer Zone boundary was delineated in digital format of merged GIS layers of those six map sheets. At the time of declaring Sagarmatha as World Heritage Site, better resolution maps were not available. In case of mountainous regions including the Everest, map quality was also low as compared to currently available maps. So, it might have caused major discrepancy in area measurements. Obviously, area measured using different projection systems differ. In case of SNP also, it might have cause some discrepancy in area measurement. All the settlements inside the park are also considered as buffer zone, as per the Nepal gazette of buffer zone declaration.

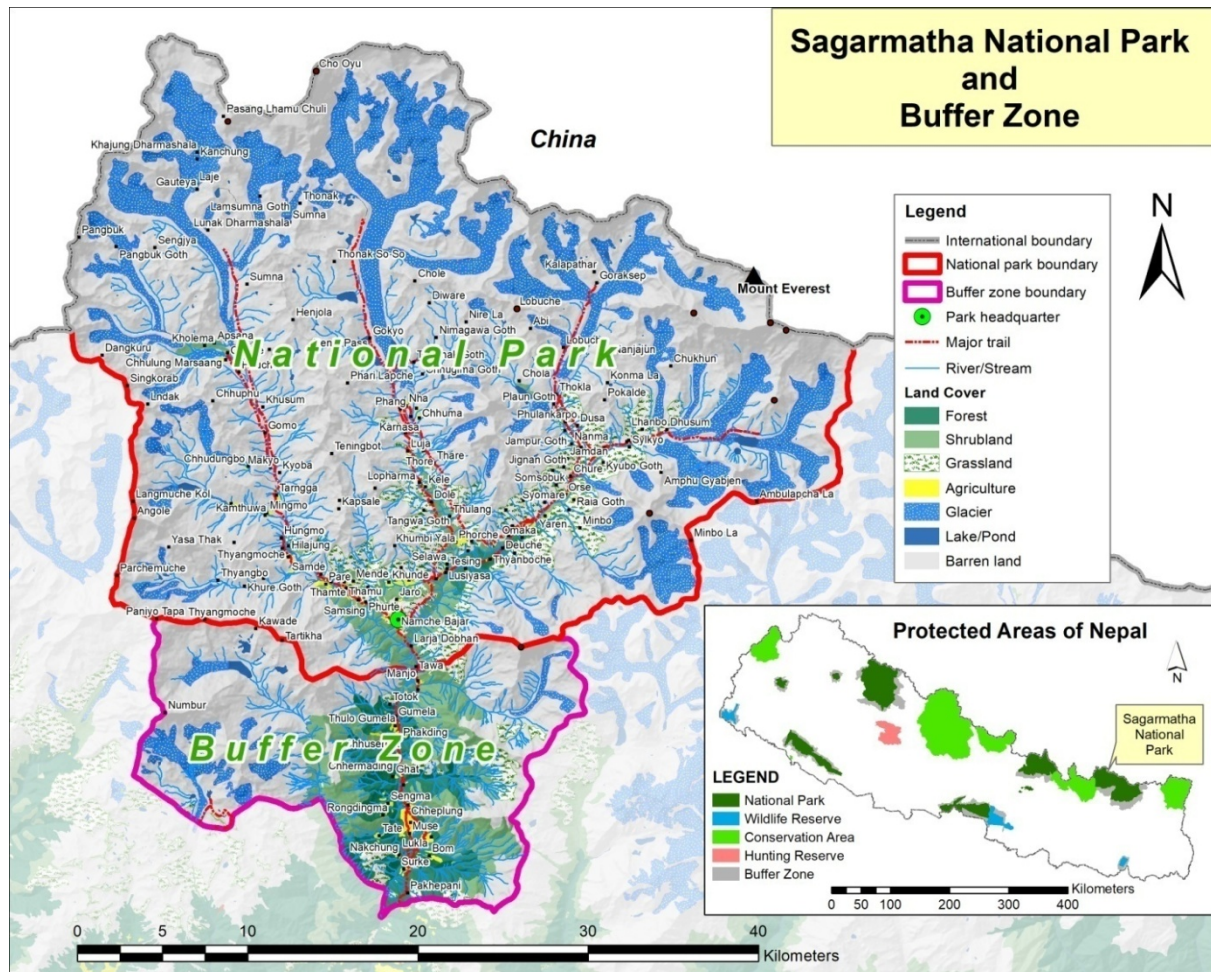


Figure-2: Zonation map of Sagarmatha National Park

National Park Authority also conducted stakeholders' consultation meeting in order to know local people's opinion regarding declaration of the Buffer Zone of SNP as the Buffer Zone of the World Heritage Property. However, the newly elected local body of Khumbu Pasang Lhamu Rural Municipality did not support this proposal.

3.8. Further requests the State Party to submit to the World Heritage Centre, by 1 December 2017, an updated report on the state of conservation of the property and the



implementation of the above, for examination by the World Heritage Committee at its 42nd session in 2018.

Response: DNPWC has prepared State of Conservation Report of Sagarmatha National Park to submit it to the World Heritage Center by 1 December 2017. The report has been prepared through integrated approach including field observation, stakeholders' consultation, independent consultants' input and expert review.

4. Other Current Conservation Issues identified by the State Party which may have an Impact on the property's Outstanding Universal Value.

Climate change has been one of the most serious challenges for biodiversity conservation over the last decades. One of the most likely impacts of climate change is shift in spatial and temporal pattern in availability of suitable habitats for terrestrial species. The main potential impact of climate change to SNP is related to glacial hazards such as avalanches, debris flow, glacial lake outburst flood, glacial fluctuations and glacial surge. If the appropriate measures are not taken to minimize the risk, the potential impact of climate change might have devastating loss to SNP and its Outstanding Universal Value.

5. In conformity with Paragraph 172 of the *Operational Guidelines*, describe any potential major restorations, alterations and/or new construction(s) intended within the property, the buffer zone(s) and/or corridors or other areas, where such developments may affect the Outstanding Universal Value of the property, including authenticity and integrity

Response: Optical fiber project has been planned from Lukla to Everest base camp. Permission to conduct EIA study for this project has already been granted by Ministry of Population and Environment. Consideration for minimal impact has been proposed and the optical fiber will be aligned along the existing trekking routes. After completion of this project, reliability of the internet service in the region will be strengthened which will directly contribute IT based monitoring of wildlife and its habitat, development of visitors tracking system and better rescue and relief operation.

Proposed Ropeway project from Lukla to Namche for Goods and materials transportation is under feasibility study. This project will replace the problems associated with the mules carrying essential supplies in the area.