

Hyrceanian Forests



Transnational Serial Extension of the existing World Heritage property “Hyrceanian Forests”, Islamic Republic of Iran (Ref.: 1584) and proposed modifications to the criteria used to justify inscription on the World Heritage List

Republic of Azerbaijan

Islamic Republic of Iran

**Nomination Dossier to the UNESCO World Heritage Centre
for Inscription on the World Heritage List**

Baku and Tehran, January 2021

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Cover photo: Hyrcanian Forests cover the mountain ridges, slopes and valleys of the Talish Mountains in the southern part of Hirkan National Park, Republic of Azerbaijan (Photo by H. D. Knapp, July 9, 2019)

Executive Summary

State Parties

Republic of Azerbaijan

Islamic Republic of Iran

State, Province or Region

The inscribed Hyrcanian Forests serial property in the Islamic Republic of Iran is comprised of 15 components primarily located in three Northern Iranian provinces: Golestan, Mazandaran and Gilan, with small parts extending into the provinces of Semnan and North Khorasan.

In the Republic of Azerbaijan, the proposed extension nomination is comprised of three components located in Lenkoran District and Astara District, respectively.

In the Islamic Republic of Iran, the proposed extension nomination is comprised of two components located in Eastern Azarbaijan Province.

Name of Property

Hyrcanian Forests

Geographical coordinates to the nearest second

Table 1-1: The proposed new component parts and corresponding coordinates

| Id n° | Name of the component part | Region(s) / District(s) | Coordinates of the Central Point | Area of Nominated component of the Property (ha) | Area of the Buffer Zone (ha) |
|---------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------------|---|---|-------------------------------------|
| 01 | Dangyaband (Northern HNP) | Lenkoran District (Rep. Azerbaijan) | 38°45'16.11" N 48°40'57.02" E | 2,703 | 20,670 |
| 02 | Khanbulan (Central HNP) | Astara District (Rep. Azerbaijan) | 38°38'11.71" N 48°44'22.26" E | 9,068 | 19,330 |
| 03 | İstisuchay Valley (Southern HNP) | Astara District (Rep. Azerbaijan) | 38°27'17.88" N 48°40'45.49" E | 12,817 | 21,632 |
| 04 | Dizmar West | East Azarbaijan (I.R. Iran) | 38°47'03" N 46°28'17" E | 4,706 | 55,725 |
| 05 | Dizmar East | East Azarbaijan (I.R. Iran) | 38°52'38" N 46°39'30" E | 2,416 | |
| Total area (in hectares) | | | | 31,710 ha | 117,357 ha |

Textual description of the boundary(ies) of the nominated property

Note that the description refers to the status after the proposed modification. For a description of the boundaries of the existing property please refer to the earlier nomination dossier.

The Hyrcanian Forests form a green arc of deciduous mixed broad-leaved forests stretching across some 900 kilometres along the Caspian Sea, from the Talish Mountains in the Republic of Azerbaijan across the Alborz Mountains all the way to Golestan Province in the Islamic Republic of Iran.

The serial World Heritage nomination of carefully selected representations of the Hyrcanian Forests located in the Islamic Republic of Iran was inscribed on the occasion of the 43rd session of World Heritage Committee in Baku, Azerbaijan, according to criterion (ix) (Decision 43 COM 8B.4). The serial property encompasses 15 component parts representing key examples of the various stages and features of natural Hyrcanian forest ecosystems. All are precisely described in the nomination dossier for the existing property.

The nominated area is based on a serial approach adding carefully chosen new components according to the following selection criteria:

- Coverage of the largest and most intact remnants of primary forests;
- Representativeness in terms of the diversity of forest types, and of the specific plant and animal life including the endemic and relic species and most important wildlife habitats;
- Effective conservation and unambiguous governmental commitment to consolidate the conservation efforts for the selected components.

The boundaries of the property after proposed modification follow the green arc of deciduous mixed broad-leaved forests across the Caspian Sea to the 'Hirkan National Park' in Azerbaijan, proposing three component sites as a component cluster located in the northern, central and southern parts of the national park, respectively. The proposed component cluster in the mountain ridges of the Talish Range in Azerbaijan represent a meaningful and highly particular extension of the Hyrcanian Forests.

In the Iranian part, the borders of the property after proposed modification incorporates the important transitional forests within the Dizmar Protected Area, and specifically two particularly intact and valuable parts of this protected area as two additional components. This proposed component cluster is a transition type of the mountainous Hyrcanian Forests along steep and rugged slopes at the meeting point of three different plant geographical regions, in the northwest of Iran.

Map(s) of the nominated property, showing boundaries and buffer zone

The overview map shows the location of the proposed component parts in both the Republic of Azerbaijan and the I.R. of Iran in addition to the 15 components of the existing World Heritage Property. More detailed maps of all components and their buffer zones can be found in chapters 1, 2 and in the annex).

All maps used do not imply the expression of any opinion concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city or area of its authority, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries.



Figure 1-1: Location of the proposed component parts for extension nomination (blue 1-5) in relation to the existing World Heritage Property (red 1-15)

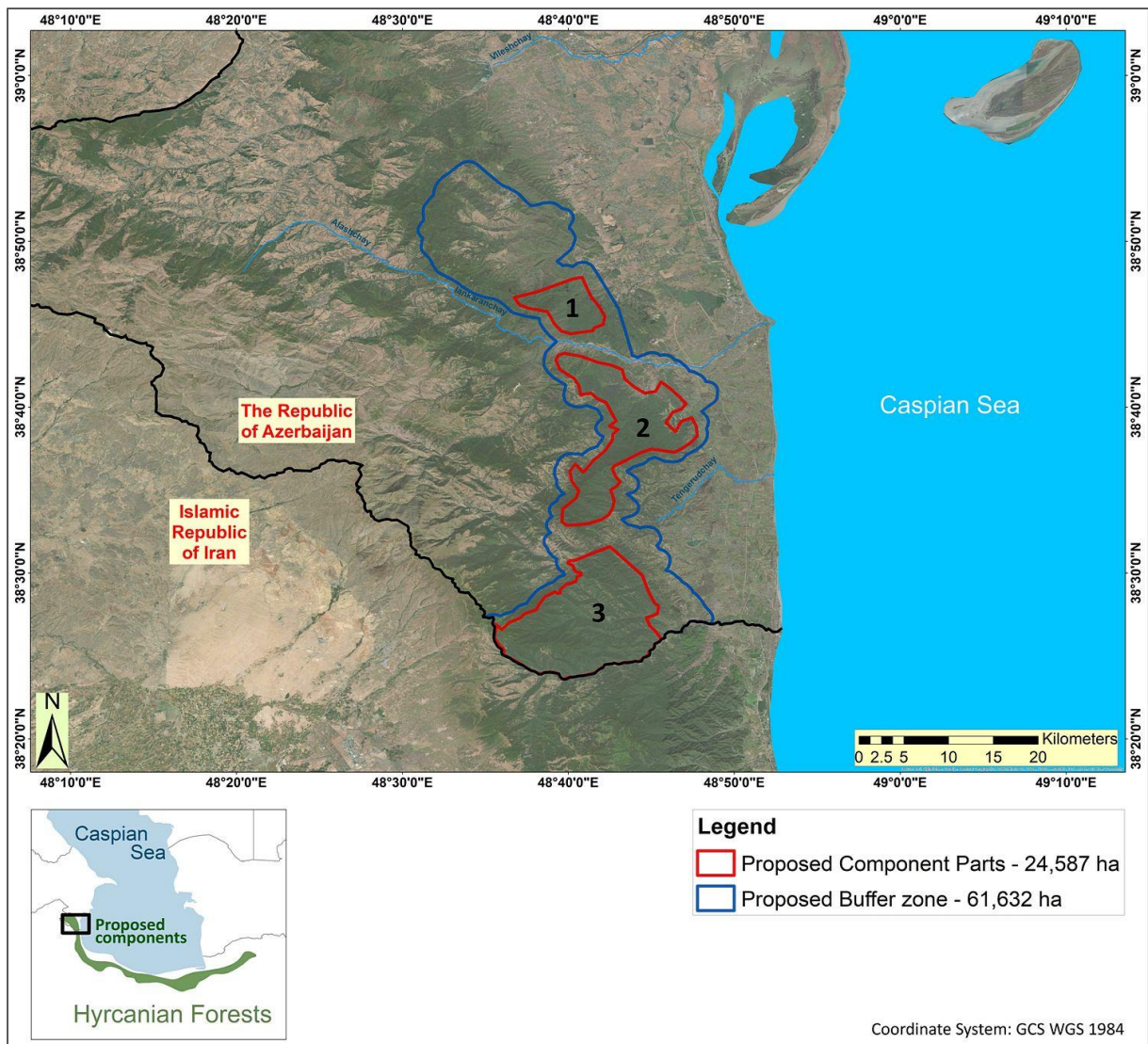


Figure 1-2: The three newly proposed component parts in the Hirkan National Park, Republic of Azerbaijan (Dangyaband, Khanbulan and İstisuchay Valley)

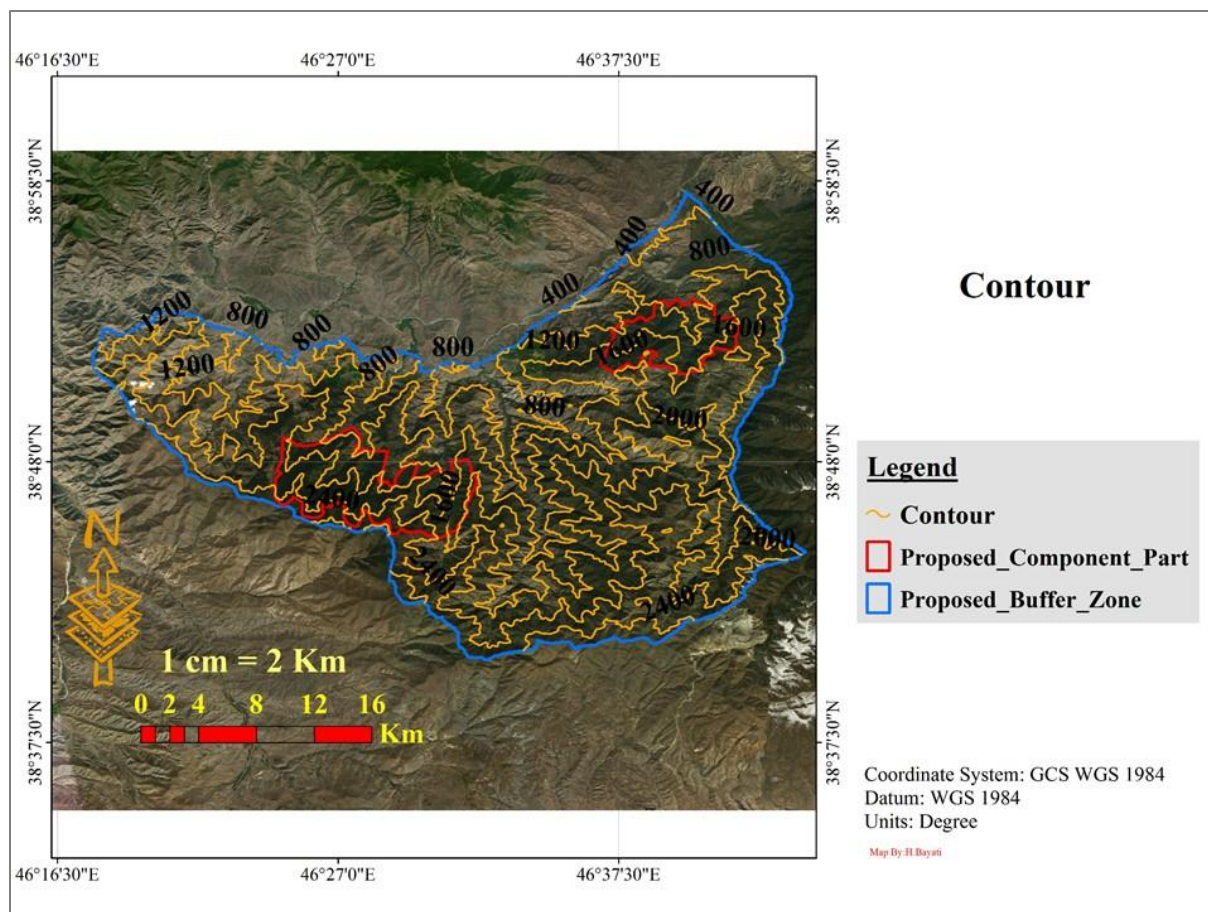


Figure 1-6: Two newly proposed component parts in the Dizmar Protected Area, Islamic Republic of Iran (Dizmar West and Dizmar East)

Criteria under which the property is nominated

Selected parts of the Hyrcanian Forests located in the Islamic Republic of Iran were inscribed on the World Heritage List under criterion (ix) in 2019. The proposed transnational serial extension is based on criteria (ix) and (x).

Criterion (ix): The existing property brings together a carefully selected series of intact representations of the Hyrcanian forest ecosystems. The serial property contains exceptional and ancient broad-leaved forests, which retreated during periods of glaciation and later expanded again under milder climatic conditions. The property covers most ecological and biological values of the Hyrcanian region, thereby displaying key environmental processes illustrating the genesis of these forests, including succession, evolution and speciation. The proposed component parts for extension will further enhance the completeness and integrity of the property and the conservation of these remarkable forests located in the territory of two States Parties.

Criterion (x): The Hyrcanian forests are home to globally significant plant and animal diversity. Because of the uninterrupted and ongoing evolution, the floristic biodiversity of the Hyrcanian region is highly remarkable for a temperate forest ecosystem at the global level. The ancient forests display all phases of natural regeneration cycles at a large scale. As a result, the intact parts of the Hyrcanian Forests continue to harbour

all of the features of natural temperate broad-leaved forests and offering habitat to numerous relic, rare, endangered and endemic species.

Draft Statement of Outstanding Universal Value

Brief synthesis

The Hyrcanian Forests form a green arc of deciduous mixed broad-leaved forests stretching across some 850 kilometres along the Caspian Sea, from the Talish Mountains in the Republic of Azerbaijan across the Alborz Mountains all the way east to Golestan Province in the Islamic Republic of Iran. In addition to a small patch in the north west of Iran at the border of Azerbaijan and Armenia (including the Dizmar Protected Area), as a transition type of the mountainous Hyrcanian Forests.

In 2005, the Republic of Azerbaijan submitted a nomination dossier named “Hirkan Forests of Azerbaijan” for inscription on the World Heritage List (MENR 2004). The nomination was subsequently evaluated by IUCN (2006). In line with the IUCN recommendation, the World Heritage Committee deferred the inscription on the occasion of its 30th session in 2006 in Vilnius, Lithuania (Decision 30COM 8B.24); “to allow the State Party to consider options for re-nominating the property as part of a transnational serial property with other Hyrcanian forests areas in Iran”.

In 2018, the Islamic Republic of Iran submitted the World Heritage nomination of the “Hyrcanian Forests”, as a serial property. In its nomination, the Islamic Republic of Iran explicitly invited the Republic of Azerbaijan to consider a serial transboundary extension in case of a successful inscription (ICHHTO 2018).

The serial World Heritage nomination of carefully selected representations of the Hyrcanian Forests located in the Islamic Republic of Iran was inscribed on the occasion of the 43rd session of World Heritage Committee in Baku, Azerbaijan, according to criterion (ix). The serial property encompasses 15 component parts representing key examples of the various stages and features of natural Hyrcanian forest ecosystems. While most of the ecological particularities characterizing the Hyrcanian Forests are represented in the inscribed property, there is considerable potential for further serial extension to include additional areas of global conservation value in both the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Islamic Republic of Iran. It deserves to be emphasized that the Committee explicitly encouraged a transnational approach (see Decisions 30COM 8B.24 and 43 COM 8B.4).

The Hyrcanian forests are geographically separated and biogeographically distinct from Caucasus mountain forests, but linked with the latter by transition types found in Dizmar Protected Area (Islamic Republic of Iran). Due to highly particular topographic and climatic conditions, the Hyrcanian Forests survived the ice age periods as extremely rare “Tertiary relict forests” and have subsequently been adapting to the postglacial climate changes. These irreplaceable forest relics tell a unique story of the uninterrupted and ongoing evolution of temperate deciduous forests over some 25 million years from the Tertiary period to this day, a fascinating story of continuity and survival, persistence and flexibility, adaptation and diversification.

The new proposed component parts are further based on a serial approach uniting components, which are carefully selected according to the following criteria:

- Coverage of the largest and most intact remnants of primary forests;
- Representativeness in terms of the diversity of forest types, and of the specific plant and animal life including the endemic and relic species and most important wildlife habitats;
- Effective conservation and unambiguous governmental commitment to consolidate the conservation efforts for the selected components.

The proposed extensional component parts in Azerbaijan are situated in the 'Hirkan national park' in the Talish Mountains, which are remarkable for their peculiar natural representation of the Hyrcanian Forests. All phases of the natural forest regeneration cycles can be found in the selected component parts.

The proposed extensional component parts in Iran are situated in the 'Dizmar protected area', in the Iranian highlands containing a transitional type of the mountainous Hyrcanian forests along steep and rugged slopes in the northwest of Iran.

Justification for Criteria

Selected parts of the Hyrcanian Forests located in the Islamic Republic of Iran were inscribed on the World Heritage List in 2019 under criterion (ix). The proposed transnational serial extension is based on criteria (ix) and (x).

The serial property contains exceptional and ancient broad-leaved forests, which retreated during periods of glaciation and later expanded again under milder climatic conditions. Due to this isolation, the serial property hosts many relict, endangered, and regionally and locally endemic species of flora as well as fauna, contributing to the high ecological value of the property and the Hyrcanian region in general.

Criterion (ix): The existing property brings together a carefully selected series of intact representations of the Hyrcanian forest ecosystems. Its component parts contain exceptional broad-leaved forests with a history dating back 25 - 50 million years ago, when such forests covered most of the Northern Temperate Region. These huge ancient forest areas retreated during Quaternary glaciations and later, during milder climate periods, expanded again from these refugia. Globally, it is extremely rare that the evolution of a temperate deciduous forest region has never been interrupted over such a long period of time and is ongoing at such a large scale and with such a high degree of naturalness. The forests could thereby diversify into an exceptional range of forest types along a gradient from sea level up to the tree line at some 2,500 to 2,800 m a.s.l., as well as in a gradient of decreasing humidity along the southwestern and southern shore of the Caspian Sea from the northwest to the east. The property covers most ecological and biological values of the Hyrcanian region, thereby displaying key environmental processes illustrating the genesis of these forests, including succession, evolution and speciation. Additionally, the proposed component parts for extension will further enhance the completeness and integrity of the property and the conservation of these remarkable forests located in the territory of two States Parties.

Criterion (x): The Hyrcanian forests are a critically important and irreplaceable refuge for countless species of flora and fauna associated with the relic Arcto-Tertiary forest.

Because of the uninterrupted and ongoing evolution, the floristic biodiversity of the Hyrcanian region is highly remarkable for a temperate forest ecosystem at the global level with over 3,200 documented vascular plants. Due to its isolation, the property hosts populations of many relict, endangered, and regionally and locally endemic plant species, contributing to the ecological significance of the forests, and the Hyrcanian region in general. About 300 taxa are endemic and sub-endemic for the Hyrcanian region, and many plant species are endemic for Azerbaijan and/or Iran. The most conspicuous “living fossils” include tree species like the Persian Ironwood (*Parrotia persica*), a monotypic endemic tree genus, Caucasian Wingnut (*Pterocarya fraxinifolia*) and Caucasian Elm (*Zelkova carpinifolia*).

The ancient forests display all phases of natural regeneration cycles at a large scale. As a result, the intact parts of the Hyrcanian Forests continue to harbour all of the features of natural temperate broad-leaved forests, many of which are missing in degraded and/or managed forests. These features include a high share of ancient trees which offer habitat for an enormous array of life forms. The same holds true for the massive quantities of standing deadwood and coarse woody debris on the ground. For this reason, the Hyrcanian Forests offer, for example, habitat for an extraordinary number of highly specialized and endemic saproxylic beetles (Coleoptera). The ancient forests are associated with hundreds of mosses and rare insect and fungal specialists. The presence of numerous so-called “Urwald relict species” illustrates the unusually high level of integrity. Charismatic large mammals include, for example, the main populations of the endangered Persian Leopard (*Panthera pardus saxicolor*), two other cat species (*Lynx lynx*, *Felis chaus*), Wild Goat (*Capra aegagrus*), Wild Sheep (*Ovis ammon arkal*). The Hyrcanian Forests encompass several internationally recognized Important Bird Areas with a noteworthy total number of some 180 species. Impressive 18 bat species indicate both intact habitat and a great amount of insects within the forest ecosystem. Many of the reptiles and amphibians occurring in the Hyrcanian Forests are endangered or near threatened according to the IUCN Red List.

Statement of Integrity

The component parts of the inscribed property as well as the new proposed component parts are functionally linked through the shared evolutionary history of the Hyrcanian mixed forest ecoregion and there are no major barriers (with the exception of the border fence between the two States Parties) to the ecological connectivity of the Hyrcanian forest region.

While the lowland forests near the Caspian Sea have been subject to major conversion and degradation, most of the selected components continue to be embedded in a much larger forest landscape, which continues to constitute a vast and almost uninterrupted forest. All inscribed component parts have been selected based on careful analysis of conservation values, representativeness and integrity. The same approach is applied to the serial extension.

Both the inscribed component parts and the ones additionally proposed through a transnational serial extension therefore represent the most intact representations of the various forest sub-types of the vast Hyrcanian forest region. A successful extension would round off the completeness of this representation. The high degree of

naturalness is in most cases a function of natural protection due to remoteness and rugged terrain and explicit conservation efforts. All phases of natural forest regeneration cycles are present in a spatial and temporal mosaic. Accordingly, the full spectrum of species depending on such characteristics is present, the extinct Caspian tiger being the only species missing in the natural mammalian species assemblage. Jointly, the inscribed components constitute a meaningful and representative portion of one of the world's most remarkable forest regions. The additional components are intact representations of the enormous diversity of the Hyrcanian Forests not yet represented, including the important transition forests found in the proposed component parts in Iran, nominated as a serial extension. The proposed component parts are nearly unsettled except for a few small households in a traditional way of life, adapted to the special conditions of the Hyrcanian mountain forests.

Requirements for protection and management

The 'Hyrcanian Forests' serial property integrates the two protection and management systems of natural resources in Iran by bringing together the Forest, Range and Watershed Organization (FRWO)¹ and the Department of Environment (DoE)² as well as the Iranian Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts³ under one coherent umbrella of World Heritage.

The three proposed components in Azerbaijan, are all situated within Hirkan National Park, which is managed by the State National Park Administration under the supervision of the Ministry for Environment and Natural Resources. The main office of the National Park Administration is located in Lenkoran City.

The two additionally proposed components in Iran, are situated within the Dizmar Protected Area, which is state owned and is under the management of Department of Environment.

The entire property in addition to the proposed areas and buffer zones are under strict protection and management by governmental institutions, ensuring an adequate framework for long-term protection and management of the component sites.

Following the inscription of the Hyrcanian Forests in Iran in 2019, a project was established bringing together the two States Parties in order to ensure coordinated follow-up. In line with Decision 43 COM 8B.4 of the World Heritage Committee (Baku, 2019) and also recalling Decision 30 COM 8B.24 (Vilnius, 2006), a 'Declaration of Intent', formulated jointly by both States Parties and agreed in March 2020. Specifically, the two State Parties agreed on the following pillars for the path towards transnational communication, coordination and cooperation among others:

1. Full support by both States Parties for the serial transnational extension of the Hyrcanian Forests World Heritage property based on a carefully selected and coherent network of the remaining forest areas of highest conservation value in both countries;

¹ In charge of the overall protection, rehabilitation, development and harvesting of forests and rangelands. FRWO is also responsible for Forest Reserves, Natural Forest Parks and Nature Parks.

² In charge of identifying and protection the areas of particular conservation importance across Iran. (categories: National Park, Wildlife Refuge, Protected Area and National Natural Monument)

³ In charge of developing and submission the World Heritage nomination dossiers and protection the World Heritage properties among the other tasks.

(...)

5. Designated national focal points shall communicate the steps of the process with each other and to the responsible bodies;

(...)

12. Full support to develop a coordinated approach for eventual joint management of a serial transnational World Heritage between Iran and Azerbaijan as well as the individual sites during the project and beyond.

The desired transnational inscription will consolidate the envisaged cooperation with the eventual ambition to manage all inscribed and currently nominated components under a single and comprehensive umbrella of an overarching management plan for the Hyrcanian Forests. Preparatory work is already underway.

The overall goal of the comprehensive management plan for the Hyrcanian Forests is the protection of the property's Outstanding Universal Value (OUV), including its extension, if applicable. The plan is being prepared in the form of long-term (covering a period of 30 years), mid-term (10 years) and short term planning (1-5 years).

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Additional Background

This current nomination dossier proposes modification to the inscribed World Heritage Property “Hyrcanian Forests” (Decision 43 COM 8B.4, Baku). The changes concern one additional criterion, as well serial extensions in order to incorporate some parts of the Hyrcanian Forests located in the Republic of Azerbaijan in addition to new components in the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Adding a new criterion

The ‘Hyrcanian Forests’ property located in the Islamic Republic of Iran was nominated under criteria (ix) and (x), and inscribed on the World Heritage List under criterion (ix) only in 2019. However, the States Parties are confident that the Hyrcanian Forests meet both criteria (ix) and (x) (see 3.1.b Criteria under which inscription is proposed).

The additional criterion (x) is considered to complementarily reflect the Outstanding Universal Value of the Hyrcanian Forests both as an extraordinary ecosystem and a haven of species richness across numerous taxonomic groups.

Serial extension, including transnational

In 2005, the Republic of Azerbaijan submitted a nomination dossier named “Hirkan Forests of Azerbaijan” for inscription on the World Heritage List (MENR 2004). The nomination was subsequently evaluated by IUCN (2006). In line with the IUCN recommendation, the World Heritage Committee deferred the inscription (Decision 30 COM 8B.24) “to allow the State Party to consider options for re-nominating the property as part of a transnational serial property with other Hyrcanian forests areas in Iran”.

In its Decision 43 COM 8B.4, in which the Hyrcanian Forests in Islamic Republic of Iran is inscribed on the World Heritage List, the World Heritage Committee again recalled its recommendation and ‘encourages the States Parties of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Republic of Azerbaijan to consider options for further serial and transboundary extension of the property to include other areas in Azerbaijan of internationally significant conservation value’.

This extension nomination is therefore developed in pursuit of the World Heritage Committee recommendation to establish an extensional transnational serial nomination including some forest areas of high conservation value in both States Parties to the existing Hyrcanian Forests property.

The proposed added area in the Republic of Azerbaijan through its three proposed component sites is 24,588 ha (in addition to 52,817 ha as a buffer zone) Please refer to the corresponding maps in chapter 1 for more detail).

In the Islamic Republic of Iran the proposed added surface area amounts to 7,122 ha through two component sites (in addition to 55,725 ha as a buffer zone). Please refer to the corresponding maps in chapter 1 for more detail).