

ASIA / PACIFIC

HUBEI SHENNONGJIA

CHINA

WORLD HERITAGE MINOR BOUNDARY MODIFICATION PROPOSAL – IUCN TECHNICAL EVALUATION

HUBEI SHENNONGJIA (CHINA) – ID N° 1509bis

1. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Hubei Shennongjia was inscribed on the World Heritage List in 2016, consisting of two separate component parts encompassed within a single buffer zone. In its inscription decision, the Committee requested, *inter alia*, the State Party to: “*upgrade the legal protection to nature reserve standard of wildlife corridor and habitat stepping stone areas which are crucial to the property’s ecological integrity and consider nominating these as future extensions to the property*”. The Committee also noted that the “*relocation of people from the property (...) is a sensitive matter*” and therefore requested the State Party that “*further relocation activities should not be undertaken unless they are fully justified*” (Decision 40 COM 8B.7).

The relevant documentation is available at <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1509/documents/>.

IUCN has consulted the mission expert from the 2015 evaluation mission on the present proposal in providing its advice to the World Heritage Committee.

2. SUMMARY OF PROPOSED BOUNDARY MODIFICATION

The State Party proposes to add an additional 6,306 ha (8.6% increase) to the property, surrounded by a 1-3 km wide buffer zone of an additional 3,854 ha (9.3% increase). Whilst the Shennongding-Badong component would be extended westwards by adding Wulipo National Nature Reserve (NNR), the Laojunshan component would remain separate within a single buffer zone. The proposed addition is a strictly protected area (IUCN Protected Area Category I), in line with the existing property.

Wulipo NNR is listed as an Important Bird Area (IBA) and would contribute seven additional vegetation associations, 34 rare and endangered animal species and add four additional endangered animal species to the property. It benefits from a well-protected catchment that provides good quality water and habitat for the Chinese Giant Salamander (*Andrias davidianus*).

Wulipo NNR is reported not to be inhabited. The only noteworthy infrastructure is a road which cross a part of the buffer zone.

3. IMPACT ON OUTSTANDING UNIVERSAL VALUE

IUCN notes that, with the addition of Wulipo NNR, the protection of a significant corridor and habitat would be

enhanced, strengthening the ability of species to move and migrate between Shennongjia forests in Hubei Province and the karst forests and wetlands found in Wulipo NNR and the Daba Mountains. The latter area, as the submission emphasises, is recognized globally for its botanical importance. The proposed modification would also protect additional habitat for the endangered Golden snub-nosed monkey (*Rhinopithecus roxellana*) within the property. This species has been found to be also present in Wulipo NNR, thus further supporting the existing inscription under criterion (x) which noted the subspecies are “*entirely restricted to the property*”. The extension will thus support possible future genetic exchange opportunities and population movement. Furthermore, IUCN notes that the boundary modification would extend the altitudinal range of the property to include subtropical evergreen limestone forest within the lower elevations of Wulipo NNR, which offer a winter refuge for species that live in higher elevations during the summer months, thus improving population adaptability. IUCN considers that the minor boundary modification would appear to result in positive outcomes for the protection of the property’s OUV adding values and enhancing the property’s integrity.

In terms of legal protection, Wulipo NNR’s status as nature reserve, equivalent to IUCN Category I, protects a wildlife corridor and habitat stepping stone as suggested by the Committee in its Decision 40 COM 8B.7. The property as currently inscribed is confined to the administrative boundaries of Hubei Province, whilst Wulipo NNR is subject to the jurisdiction of Chongqing Province. However, after modification, all parts of the property are expected to jointly receive the highest-level protection as a National Park, which is expected to be announced in 2020 enabling unified management by state and provincial governments.

Overall, IUCN concludes that the proposed boundary modification would enhance the protection of the property’s OUV and hence recommends approval. At the same time, IUCN notes a number of points that should be considered along with the boundary modification:

A revised management plan encompasses the whole property including the extended area. However, the submitted files did not include this plan and no details have been provided on the update of the 2006-2015 Tourism Master Plan, which was requested in Decision 40 COM 8B.7. One aspect that remains thus unclear is how increased visitation demands will be managed following the minor boundary modification. Whilst on the one hand the reason for the proposed inclusion on the World Heritage List is to provide the area with

greater levels of protection, on the other hand, World Heritage listing may attract considerably increased levels of visitation, as noted in the property's Statement of Outstanding Universal Value (SOUV). Therefore, IUCN recommends that the State Party is requested to submit both the revised Management Plan and the currently valid Tourism Master Plan by 1 February 2022, in addition to confirming the proposed national park status and information on how potentially increased demands for visitation will be managed.

Recalling Decision 40 COM 8B.7, IUCN further notes that whilst connectivity is likely to be improved towards the west of the Shennongding-Badong, the boundary modification would not entail improvements of connectivity towards the Laojunshan component, which should be encouraged. The envisaged designation of the property as one of the State Party's first national park pilots could be an opportunity to further enhance connectivity in line with Decision 40 COM 8B.7.

While IUCN notes that Wulipo NNR is reported not to be inhabited, IUCN observed minor signs of inhabitation and/or land use based on satellite imagery. In light of Decision 40 COM 8B.7, IUCN recalls its position on the relocation of communities from protected areas laid out in its 2016 World Heritage Evaluations Report (working document WHC-16/40.COM/INF.8B2), which is in line with international rights-based agreements. IUCN has not received concerns about any relocation practices.

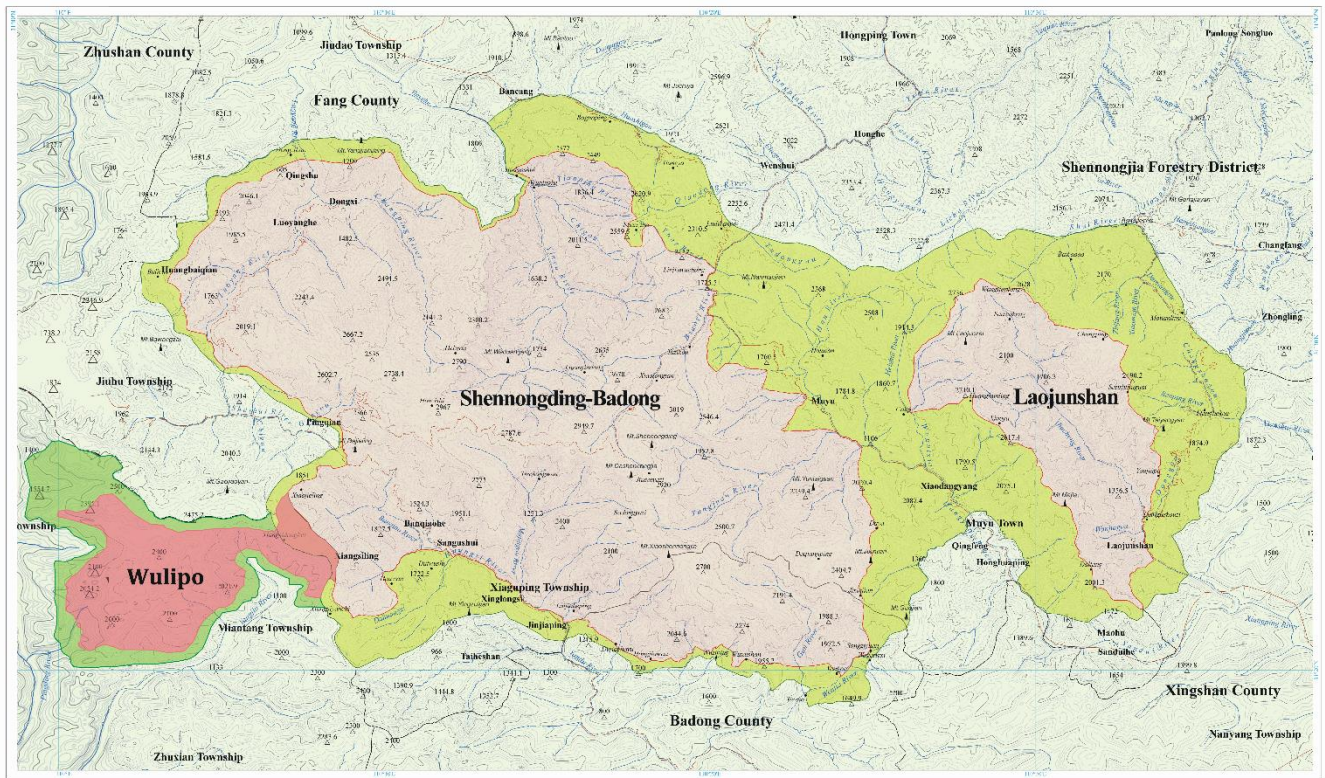
4. RECOMMENDATION

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

The World Heritage Committee,

1. Having examined Documents WHC/21/44.COM/8B.ADD and WHC/21/44.COM/INF.8B2.ADD;
2. Recalling Decision 40 COM 8B.7;
3. Approves the minor boundary modification request for **Hubei Shennongjia (China)**;
4. Encourages the State Party to continue enhancing connectivity conservation measures, so as to fully implement Decision 40 COM 8B.7, and including in particular the connection between the two components of the property.
5. Noting its request to the State Party on relocation of people from the property made in Decision 40 COM 8B.7, requests the State Party to also ensure in the modified property that any relocation activities are voluntary and fully respect international norms, and that further relocation activities should not be undertaken unless they are fully justified;
5. Requests the State Party to submit by **1 February 2022** the revised management plan for the property, including a confirmation of national park status for the property and on how potentially increased demands for visitation will be managed, including through the current Tourism Master Plan

Map 1: World Heritage property and proposed minor boundary modification



Legend		Shennongjia WH Property		Buffer Zone of Shennongjia		Proposed extension to property		Proposed extension to buffer zone		Provincial Boundary
		Road		River		Village/Town		Mountain Peak		Altimetric Point

Coordinate System: GCS
 Spheroid: WGS1984
 Mapping Date: Sep. 2019
 0 1.75 3.5 7 10.5 14 Km