

WORLD HERITAGE NOMINATION – IUCN COMMENTS TO ICOMOS

THE CULTURAL LANDSCAPE OF HAWRAMAN/URAMANAT (IRAN, ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF)

The IUCN World Heritage Panel considered this cultural landscape nomination based on a desk review of the nomination dossier, a wide range of studies, and the comments of two external desk reviewers to provide inputs to ICOMOS on the natural values of this nominated property.

Located in the Zagros Mountains in the Kurdistan and Kermanshah provinces of Iran, the Hawraman/Uramanat nominated property has been inhabited for thousands of years, especially by the *Hawrami* people, who until today have been practicing farming, including orchard-making, livestock rearing and transhumance in a complex human-environment interaction. The nominated property consists of two component parts totalling 106,307 ha and a buffer zone of 303,623 ha surrounding them. The smaller component part in the Western Valley (Lahun) overlaps partially with the Buzin and Markhil protected areas. This protected area was established in 2000 and corresponds to IUCN Management Category V (Protected Landscape/Seascape). The larger component part (The Central Valley) includes the Kosalan and Shahu protected areas.

According to several studies, biodiversity hotspots for threatened mammal species are located along the Zagros and Alborz mountain range. High biodiversity of endemic flora, herpetofauna and amphipod biodiversity has also been identified in the endangered Irano-Anatolian and Caucasus biodiversity hotspots. The Zagros Mountains form an important part of the Irano-Anatolian biodiversity hotspot, which was identified as a gap in the 2013 IUCN study on Terrestrial Biodiversity and the World Heritage List. The Zagros Mountains forest steppe ecoregion, in which the property is located, has no natural World Heritage property to date.

With an altitudinal gradient from 710 to 3,390 metres, the nominated property boasts a wide range of habitats resulting in a high biodiversity. In addition to the valleys, high mountain ridges, steep-sided valleys, and rivers, the nominated property includes many other natural values, such as chestnut forests, scrubby woodland, and steppe habitats. Recent research³ highlighted the significance of endemism in the Zagros Mountains and suggested that high endemism is correlated with higher elevations and topographic complexity. The ecosystems are fragile and often very isolated and restricted, and therefore prone to impacts from overgrazing and ongoing climate change. This underlines the importance of prioritizing these habitats at higher altitudes for conservation in the Zagros Mountains, likely including those of the nominated property.

Located in the Irano-Anatolian biodiversity hotspot, the nominated property overlaps with an Important Bird Area, the Western Zagros north of Nowsud. It also overlaps with the range of at least one Critically Endangered species on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species, the Kurdistan Newt (*Neurergus microspilotus*). The nominated property also provides habitat to the Endangered White-headed Duck (*Oxyura leucocephala*) and the Egyptian Vulture (*Neophron percnopterus*), as well as several Vulnerable species, such as the Lesser White-fronted Goose (*Anser erythropus*), Long-fingered Bat (*Myotis capaccinii*), Leopard (*Panthera pardus*), and Goitered Gazelle (*Gazella subgutturosa*). The nomination dossier further highlights the floristic importance of Hawraman/Uramanat. The Zagros area falls within a Vavilov Center of Plant Diversity, and according to research, it has been identified as an area of domestication of the Wild Goat (*Capra aegagrus*).

Overall, IUCN considers that the wider region of the Zagros Mountains may boast areas of global significance for biodiversity conservation, potentially including those areas that have been nominated.

In terms of the protection of the nominated property, IUCN notes that existing forest protection programs, national and regional environmental plans, regulations and laws (e.g., Article 45 of the Constitution on Natural Resources, Law on Conservation and Development of Green Space and Prevention of Excessive Logging, Zagros Sustainable Development and Conservation Plan) support the conservation and management of the landscape and natural values. All rangelands and pastures are publicly owned. However, local communities usually manage the rights to use these lands. All national lands such as mountains, forests and natural areas belong to the state, and are under the control of the Natural Resources Organization, Environment Protection Organization and National Forestry, Rangeland and Watershed Management.

IUCN further notes that the nominated property includes an overall action plan with a short-, medium- and long-term perspective. Indicators have been established to monitor the state of conservation of the natural and cultural values.

³ Noroozi, J., Talebi, A., Doostmohammadi, M. *et al.* Hotspots within a global biodiversity hotspot - areas of endemism are associated with high mountain ranges. *Sci Rep* **8**, 10345 (2018). <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-018-28504-9>; see also Noroozi, J., Talebi, A., Doostmohammadi, M. *et al.* Endemic diversity and distribution of the Iranian vascular flora across phytogeographical regions, biodiversity hotspots and areas of endemism. *Sci Rep* **9**, 12991 (2019). <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-019-49417-1>

In the Integrated Management and Conservation Plan of the nominated property, the Iranian Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts (IMCHTH) is responsible for overseeing the management and preservation of the area. One of the main objectives of the management is guaranteeing the continued participation of the local communities in the process of managing the nominated property.

However, the IUCN World Heritage Panel notes several threats to the nominated property's natural values, which include climate change, desertification, industrial development, visitor pressure, dams for hydropower or irrigation schemes for agriculture, affecting the natural water cycle, as well as river contamination caused by the use of pesticides and fertilizers, affecting both livelihoods and natural values such as the Critically Endangered Kurdistan Newt (*Neurergus microspilotus*). IUCN further notes that mining reportedly occurs in the nominated property, whilst no information is provided on the extent and impact of this activity. Similarly, IUCN takes note of environmental legislation providing for exploration and exploitation of minerals in the areas specified as national park, national natural heritage, wildlife refuge, and protected area. IUCN recommends this matter should be considered further by ICOMOS in its evaluation, and that any areas of active modern mining should not be included within the boundaries of the nominated property, and to ensure that there are no indirect impacts on the nominated property.

In conclusion, IUCN considers that the nominated property exhibits a potential for more in-depth consideration of its natural values, without prejudice to integrity issues that may exist, and recommends ICOMOS to encourage the State Party to explore further, through upstream consultations with IUCN, if the nominated property and/or further areas in the Zagros Mountains could potentially be nominated under natural criteria.