

AFRICA

COMOÉ NATIONAL PARK

CÔTE D'IVOIRE

WORLD HERITAGE MINOR BOUNDARY MODIFICATION PROPOSAL – IUCN TECHNICAL EVALUATION

COMOÉ NATIONAL PARK (CÔTE D'IVOIRE) – ID NO. 227BIS

1. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Comoé National Park was inscribed on the World Heritage List in 1983 (Decision 07 COM VIII) with the boundaries of the national park as delineated in 1968. This delineation covered an area of 1,150,000 ha. The property has been subject to the Reactive Monitoring process since 1999 and on the List of World Heritage in Danger from 2003 to 2017. Following successful action on enhancing management capacities, improving monitoring and surveillance, and addressing pressures from mining and transhumance, the Reactive Monitoring was suspended in 2021 (Decision 44 COM 7B.200).

In its 2018 State of Conservation report, the State Party noted that the boundaries of Comoé National Park have been changed, reducing the area from 1,150,000 ha to 1,148,756 ha as a result of a participatory process initiated in 2014. Consequently, the Committee requested the State Party to “*provide fuller information on the revised boundaries, and in particular maps clearly showing the changes in respect of the boundaries of the inscribed property*” (Decision 43 COM 7B.32).

The relevant documentation is available at <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/227/documents/>.

2. SUMMARY OF PROPOSED BOUNDARY MODIFICATION.

The minor boundary modification proposal consists of a narrow excision at the northern boundary of the property, and two small excisions and two small additions in the southwest of the property (see map 1).

The boundaries as inscribed in 1983 did not take into account that the boundaries of the national park had been changed in 1977, having reduced the area to 1,149,150 ha through the excision at the northern limit of the national park in 1977. In 2018, the State Party modified the national park boundaries again, slightly reducing the area in its south-western part whilst adding areas in the Mount Gorowi mountain range. According to the State Party, this second modification was motivated by concerns raised by local communities about the need for additional land for agriculture.

Comparing the original 1968 delineation of the national park boundaries as inscribed in 1983 with the 2018 delineation, IUCN notes that the entire boundary is slightly different, apparently as a result of improved precision, whilst noting that this also results in the excision of a small area in the north-western part and at the south-western tip of the property.

3. IMPACT ON OUTSTANDING UNIVERSAL VALUE

IUCN notes that the proposed minor boundary modification consists, firstly, of a correction of the boundaries to align with the national park boundaries as established prior to inscription in 1977; secondly, to improve the precision of the boundary delineation of the entire national park; and thirdly of a land swap agreed with local communities.

First, regarding the correction of the boundaries, IUCN notes that this would result in a reduction of the property by 850 ha from 1,150,000 ha to 1,149,150 ha, excising the area located in the department of Tehini in the northern part of the property (see map 1). In 2010, the State Party noted the error at the time of inscription in the process of establishing the retrospective Statement of Outstanding Universal Value (rSOUV) for the property. The Committee adopted the rSOUV at its 34th session considering that the property comprises an area of 1,149,150 ha (Decision 34 COM 8E). IUCN considers that this correction is fully justified as this change would reflect the boundaries of the national park at the time of inscription and be in line with the rSOUV as adopted.

Second, regarding the precision of the boundaries, IUCN notes that the boundary definition tools used in 2018 are more accurate than those used back in 1977. The specified boundaries largely follow the original boundaries and do not result in the excision of significant areas. Therefore, IUCN considers that this precision of boundaries is acceptable.

Third, regarding the land swap, IUCN recalls that at the time of inscription, the Committee recommended the State Party consider extending the national park to include Mounts Gorowi and Kongoli to enhance the value of the property (Decision 07 COM VIII). The 2018 modification of the national park boundaries would include parts of this area around Mount Gorowi. IUCN welcomes this proposed addition, as this would enhance the integrity of the property.

IUCN further notes that in response to the Committee's Decision 43 COM 7B.32, efforts have been undertaken to address intrusion of livestock inside the property; to rehabilitate degraded areas; and to improve income for local communities, and thus limit the extension of cashew plantations whilst addressing conflicts with farmers and livestock breeders. The results of aerial inventories undertaken in 2014, 2016 and 2019 confirm that improved control of pressures has resulted in an increase of populations of large fauna and the gradual recolonization of the entire property by animal species representative of the park.

Furthermore, the facilitation through local committees to manage agro-pastoralism has contributed to improving the participatory management of the natural resources on the periphery of the property. Based on a participatory process launched in 2014, the State Party agreed with local communities to include a part of Gorowi Mountain in the national park in exchange for additional land for agriculture to be excised from the national park. This would improve the food security for local communities. The new consensual boundaries were formalised through Decree n°2018-497 of 23 May 2018. While IUCN considers that boundaries of the protected area underpinning a World Heritage property should not be changed before the submission and adoption of a boundary modification request, IUCN welcomes the participatory process that has resulted in the addition of an important area to the existing property whilst ensuring the livelihoods of local communities are respected.

Based on the information available, IUCN also considers that this minor boundary modification would not appear to affect the Outstanding Universal Value of the property. Nevertheless, to ensure the integrity of the property in future, IUCN considers that the national park and the World Heritage property should not be subject to any further net reductions in area. IUCN recommends that the newly defined boundaries of the property should progressively be demarcated in the field through a participatory process. Finally, IUCN also notes that further areas could be considered for future extensions of the property to fully include Mount Gorowi and Mount Kongoli into the property as recommended by the Committee in 1983 if such an extension received the free, prior and informed consent by local communities.

In conclusion, IUCN considers that the minor correction, the boundary precision and the slight adjustment of boundaries in the southwest of the property, as agreed with local communities, and as presented on map 1, would appear to improve the protection of the property's OUV, based on the information available, and is therefore acceptable.

However, while IUCN considers the boundaries as shown on map 1 acceptable, IUCN notes an inconsistency in area figures provided, which requires further clarification:

IUCN notes that the State Party reports a total reduction in area of 1,244 ha compared to the inscribed property. The reduction of 1,244 ha consists of the reduction by 850 ha in 1977, from 1,150,000 ha to 1,149,150 ha, and of a net reduction by 394 ha in 2018, from 1,149,150 ha

to 1,148,756 ha. However, the State Party reports at the same time that the 2018 modification would consist of an excision of 68 km² and an addition of 24 km², hence a net reduction of 44 km², i.e. 4,400 ha and not 394 ha. While the boundaries as presented on map 1 are acceptable in the view of IUCN, it is recommended that the Committee request the State Party to clarify the reasons for this inconsistency and confirm that the modified boundaries comprise 1,148,756 ha.

4. RECOMMENDATION

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

The World Heritage Committee,

1. Having examined Documents WHC/22/45.COM/8B.ADD and WHC/22/45.COM/INF.8B2.ADD;

2. Recalling decisions 07 COM VIII, 34 COM 8E, 43 COM 7B.32 and 44 COM 7B.200 taken at its 7th (Florence, 1983), 34th (Brasília, 2010), 43rd (Baku, 2019) and 44th (Fuzhou/Online, 2021) sessions respectively,

3. Approves the minor boundary modification request for **Comoé National Park (Côte d'Ivoire)**;

4. Welcomes the successful conservation action undertaken by the State Party to date and encourages the State Party to continue implementing effective protection measures based on the modified boundaries of Comoé National Park;

5. Also encourages the State Party to proceed progressively, and through a participatory process, to a physical demarcation of the boundaries of the property;

6. Considers that the property should not be subject to any further net reductions in area, and invites the State Party to consider a future extension of the property, in consultation with local communities, to fully include Mount Gorowi and Mount Kongoli into the property as recommended by the Committee in its Decision **07 COM VIII**;

7. Requests the State Party to confirm that the modified boundaries of the property comprise 1,148,756 ha and to clarify the reasons for inconsistent area figures being reported.

Map 1: World Heritage property and proposed minor boundary modification