

WORLD HERITAGE MINOR BOUNDARY MODIFICATION PROPOSAL – IUCN TECHNICAL EVALUATION

MALOTI-DRAKENSBERG PARK (LESOTHO/SOUTH AFRICA) – ID No. 985ter

1. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The Maloti-Drakensberg Park World Heritage property was first inscribed on the World Heritage List, as “uKhahlamba/Drakensberg Park” (area 242,813ha) under cultural criteria (i) and (iii) (today criteria (i) and (iii)) and natural criteria (iii) and (iv) (today criteria (vii) and (x)) in 2000 (Committee Decision 24 COM X.B1). In 2013, the World Heritage Committee approved the extension of the property to include the Sehlabathebe National Park, Lesotho, to become the “Maloti-Drakensberg Park” World Heritage property (current area 249,313 ha), designated under criteria (i), (iii), (vii) and (x).

The 2013 IUCN evaluation recommended the States Parties to finalise “without delay the formal gazettal of the buffer zones surrounding the property”. This was reiterated in the World Heritage Committee Decision 37 COM 8B.18 with the request to formalize the buffer zones surrounding the property. This has been reinforced through several requests by the World Heritage Committee for the State Party to submit a minor boundary modification, including in decisions 39 COM 7B.33, 41 COM 7B.38 and, 43 COM 7B.38.

IUCN’s previous evaluations are available at <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/985/documents/>.

2. SUMMARY OF PROPOSED BOUNDARY MODIFICATION.

A minor boundary modification has been submitted jointly by the States Parties of Lesotho and South Africa to formalise the creation of a buffer zone along the eastern side of the property within the Republic of South Africa.

The proposed buffer zone has an area of 283,279 ha and is divided into two sub-zones, called layers, which have been determined based on a sensitivity gradient relating to the property’s values. The First Layer (69,754 ha) is directly adjacent to the property and is regarded as highly sensitive by the State Party. Its primary purpose is to preserve - or rehabilitate the area to - the pristine state (or as close to pristine state) which supports the area within the property. The Second Layer (213,525 ha) borders the First Layer and is regarded as less sensitive given its distance from the property. Its primary purpose is the conservation and sustainable management of natural resources while maintaining its value. According to the State Party, the wider purposes of the buffer zone are to better protect the OUV of the property (including the attributes and areas that contribute to this) while enabling local

communities to secure sustainable benefits from the property and buffer zone itself. Within the first layer, the management authority must be party to all decision making, whereas in the second layer, the authority has the right to advise, be consulted and, if necessary, appeal all decisions.

This additional buffer zone supplements the existing buffer zone to the southwest of the property in Lesotho and would increase the buffer zone’s total area to 329,909 ha (from 46,630 ha).

The buffer zone development process involved an extensive public consultation process, including engagement with local communities, and the State Party plans to co-manage the proposed buffer zone with communities through a cooperative governance framework.

3. IMPACT ON OUTSTANDING UNIVERSAL VALUE

The minor boundary modification proposal is part of broader conservation efforts by the States Parties to address threats and management issues highlighted in various state of conservation reports. This includes, but is not limited to, the potential construction of a cable car, and oil and gas exploration (both within the boundaries of the proposed buffer zone). IUCN notes that, with the addition of the buffer zone and associated policies, these proposed activities appear to be incompatible.

In line with IUCN’s 2013 evaluation, the proposed buffer zone would enhance the protection of the Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) of the property. The boundaries of the proposed buffer zone have been designed to foster the protection of the property’s OUV, which also depends on the integrity of adjacent areas for natural and cultural attributes linked to the property’s OUV, including the viewshed, in support of the property’s aesthetic values under criterion (vii), and the catchment, in support of criterion (x).

The buffer zone will also provide an additional layer of protection through a new buffer zone policy. This policy would guide land use activities, by promoting compatible land use activities with minimal impacts on OUV, whilst implementing stronger control measures on negative activities. The policy, together with a spatial development framework, plans to identify appropriate land use activities to promote positive incentives for the local community thereby enabling the sustainable benefits of the property to be more widely experienced by the broader community.

In conclusion, IUCN considers this minor boundary modification would reinforce the protection of the OUV of the property, in line with paragraph 104 of the *Operational Guidelines*, and assist in the mitigation of threats, such as development pressures. Therefore, IUCN recommends that the Committee approve the minor boundary modification proposal, in line with previous Committee decisions.

4. RECOMMENDATION

IUCN recommends that the World Heritage Committee adopts the following draft decision, noting that this will be harmonised as appropriate with the draft recommendations of ICOMOS regarding their evaluation of this mixed site nomination under the cultural criteria and included in the working document WHC/24/46.COM/8B.Add.

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

The World Heritage Committee,

1. Having examined Documents

WHC/2000/CONF.204/21, WHC/13/37.COM/INF.8B2, WHC/14/38.COM/16, WHC/15/39.COM/7B, WHC/17/41.COM/7B, WHC/19/43.COM/7B, WHC/21/44.COM/7B.Add, WHC/23/45.COM/7B.Add, WHC/24/46.COM/8B and WHC/24/46.COM/INF.8B2,

2. Recalling Decisions **37 COM 8B.18**, **39 COM 7B.33**, **41 COM 7B.38**, **43 COM 7B.38**, **44 COM 7B.170**, and **45 COM 7B.101** adopted at its 37th (Phnom Penh, 2013), 39th (Bonn, 2015), 41st (Krakow, 2017), 43rd (Baku, 2019), Extended 44th (Fuzhou/Online, 2021) and Extended 45th (Riyadh, 2023) sessions respectively,

3. Approves the proposed minor boundary modification for **Maloti-Drakensberg Park** (Lesotho/South Africa).

Map 1: World Heritage property and proposed minor boundary modification