

The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan

Aqaba Special Economic Zone Authority

Wadi Rum Protected Area

State of Conservation Report



Prepared by for the World Heritage Committee

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1. Executive Summary

The Wadi Rum Protected Area (WRPA), a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 2011, is undergoing a strategic and comprehensive conservation and development program led by the Aqaba Special Economic Zone Authority (ASEZA) with a focus on enhancing its cultural and natural values. The program aligns with the decision of the World Heritage Committee (45 COM 7B.102, 2023) and the government response includes a dedicated budget of 15 million Jordanian Dinars over 3-5 years. Key highlights of the report are:

Key Objectives and Strategic Review Process adopted by ASEZA and its partners:

1. Conservation of Values: Protect the Outstanding Universal Values (OUV) for culture and nature, nationally significant biodiversity, and geological diversity.
2. Sustainable Development: Promote sustainable tourism while ensuring the local community's socio-economic well-being.
3. Enhanced Visitor Experience: Improve visitor management, tourism services, and compliance with conservation principles.

Progress Highlights in response to the World Heritage Committee Decision:

1. Buffer Zone Reconfiguration:
 - A new buffer zone regulation has been developed, increasing the area by over 200% (1,341.3 km²). Final approval and submission to UNESCO are planned for early 2025.
2. Tourism Impact Assessment:
 - Comprehensive assessments have established a 2024 baseline to control the expansion of camps and off-road tracks.
 - Measures include strict regulations on desert camps (categorized by size and impact) and road expansions.
3. Integrated Management Plan (IMP) 2025-2030:

- Updated in collaboration with international and local experts, addressing conservation strategies, zoning, tourism management, and climate adaptation. Final approval is anticipated by mid-2025.
4. Geographic Information System (GIS):
- Over 150 updated maps developed to integrate cultural, natural, and socio-economic data for management and monitoring purposes.
5. Sanitation Solutions:
- Three pilot on-site sanitation units are operational. Further evaluations and feasibility studies are planned for 2025 to upscale solutions.
6. Community Empowerment:
- Initiatives focus on engaging local communities, especially women and youth, in sustainable tourism and conservation efforts.

New Development Projects:

Several projects intersect with WRPA and its buffer zone, requiring thorough impact assessments:

- National Railway Project: Scheduled to intersect the buffer zone, with mitigation measures under development.
- Fiber Optics Project: Undergoing re-evaluation due to potential cultural and environmental impacts.
- Rum Gate Project: Proposed to improve visitor regulation and minimize unauthorized access.
- Aqaba-Disi Water Pipeline: Impact assessments in progress, aiming for alignment with UNESCO guidelines.

Challenges and Next Steps:

1. Legal Frameworks: Finalize regulations for the buffer zone and ensure effective governance.
2. Financial Sustainability: Develop independent financial systems and sustainable financing mechanisms.
3. Stakeholder Engagement: Enhance participation of local communities and stakeholders in decision-making.
4. Implementation Monitoring: Regularly evaluate progress using key performance indicators (KPIs).

The WRPA's conservation efforts underline Jordan's commitment to preserving this globally significant cultural and natural heritage while balancing developmental needs.

The report highlights the commitment of the Aqaba Special Economic Zone Authority (ASEZA) to align with UNESCO standards through strategic, legal, and operational reforms. The upcoming five years will focus on sustainable management and conservation efforts, with anticipated milestones by mid-2025.