



# IUCN World Heritage Strategy

New ambition for World Heritage



# 1. World Heritage and IUCN: a unique partnership

## About IUCN

IUCN is a membership Union uniquely composed of both government and civil society organisations. It provides public, private and non-governmental organisations with the knowledge and tools that enable human progress, economic development and nature conservation to take place together.

Created in 1948, IUCN is now the world's largest and most diverse environmental network, harnessing the knowledge, resources and reach of more than 1,400 Member organisations and around 15,000 experts. It is a leading provider of conservation data, assessments and analysis. Its broad membership enables IUCN to fill the role of incubator and trusted repository of best practices, tools and international standards.

IUCN provides a neutral space in which diverse stakeholders including governments, NGOs, scientists, businesses, local communities, Indigenous Peoples Organisations and others can work together to forge and implement solutions to environmental challenges and achieve sustainable development.

Working with many partners and supporters, IUCN implements a large and diverse portfolio of conservation projects worldwide. Combining the latest science with the traditional knowledge of local communities, these projects work to reverse habitat loss, restore ecosystems and improve people's well-being.

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The World Heritage Convention<sup>1</sup> was launched in 1972 with a vision to bring international support and protection to the world's most significant natural and cultural places, as the common heritage of humanity. Fifty years later the Convention is almost universally recognised, with 195 States Parties as signatories. In these five decades, 1,157 sites have been inscribed on the World Heritage List for their natural and cultural Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) to humankind, of which 257 are recognised for their global nature conservation significance, including 39 sites recognised for both natural and cultural values.

Natural World Heritage sites protect over 370 million hectares of land and sea, which cover about 7% of the total area covered by 270,000+ protected areas<sup>2</sup>. World Heritage designation has a fundamental role in protecting and conserving the world's most significant ecosystems and species, and natural phenomena – from the highest mountain peaks, through forests, deserts, wetlands and reefs. It includes areas of important biodiversity and provides protection for the world's most threatened and endangered species, as well as the most exceptional geological sites. The IUCN Species Threat Abatement and Restoration (STAR) metric<sup>3</sup> highlights that natural World Heritage sites offer more than 4% of the total potential opportunity for reducing global species' extinction risk, despite only covering around 1% of terrestrial land area. Given the World Heritage Convention helps protect some of the most undisturbed sites on Earth, and some of the largest, the Convention is in a unique position to contribute to the achievement of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, including regarding the key objectives of protecting ecosystem integrity and of promoting large-scale conservation to meet ambitious new protected areas targets. The Convention also has a unique role in protecting ecosystem integrity and promoting large-scale conservation, both on land and in the oceans. World Heritage also plays an important role in providing sustainable livelihoods for local communities and embraces the right of indigenous peoples to their traditional lands and territories and recognises traditional management systems.

## IUCN's unique role

IUCN was instrumental in the creation of the Convention, and the concept of World Heritage was proposed internationally at the 1966 IUCN General Assembly and fused with the efforts of UNESCO to create the Convention in 1972. IUCN, together with cultural heritage institutions – the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) and the International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property (ICCROM) – were named in the Convention text as the three Advisory Bodies to the Convention. It is a powerful and influential position for IUCN to be named in this key statutory role, offering a unique opportunity to advance IUCN's mission. Working closely and collaboratively with UNESCO, as the Secretariat of the Convention, IUCN has provided scientific and technical support for the protection and conservation of World Heritage. This work has been a whole Union effort, engaging the IUCN Commissions, particularly the World Commission on Protected Areas (WCPA) and the Species Survival Commission (SSC) as well as inputs across IUCN's Members and key partners<sup>4</sup>.

1. The 1972 Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage, is often shortened as the World Heritage Convention. [whc.unesco.org/en/convention/](http://whc.unesco.org/en/convention/). See, amongst other references [www.routledge.com/Many-Voices-One-Vision-The-Early-Years-of-the-World-Heritage-Convention/Cameron-Rossler/p/book/9781138248083](http://www.routledge.com/Many-Voices-One-Vision-The-Early-Years-of-the-World-Heritage-Convention/Cameron-Rossler/p/book/9781138248083) regarding the early history of the Convention.

2. [www.iucn.org/our-work/topic/world-heritage/natural-sites/facts-and-figures](http://www.iucn.org/our-work/topic/world-heritage/natural-sites/facts-and-figures)

3. [www.iucn.org/resources/conservation-tool/species-threat-abatement-and-restoration-star-metric](http://www.iucn.org/resources/conservation-tool/species-threat-abatement-and-restoration-star-metric);

4. Such as IUCN's collaboration with UNEP World Conservation Monitoring Centre (UNEP-WCMC), International Union of Geological Sciences (IUGS), International Association of Geomorphologists, and the International Speleological Union in the evaluation process for nominations to the World Heritage List.

Over the years IUCN has also built a complementary programme of work, coherent with IUCN's role as an Advisory Body and its broader conservation mission, to increase the relevance and support to World Heritage within the conservation movement, focused on:

- a portfolio of **gap studies and thematic advice**<sup>5</sup> based on leading global conservation science to inform priorities for future nominations, and key conservation issues;
- the **IUCN World Heritage Outlook** launched in 2014 as the leading IUCN knowledge product on World Heritage, providing comprehensive and regular assessment of the state of conservation of all natural World Heritage sites globally, building synergies with wider IUCN knowledge products, tools and standards;
- **Culture-nature practice**, pioneering new approaches to conserving nature and culture, through a major capacity-building programme, the **World Heritage Leadership Programme**, and research, development through the **Connecting Practice** initiative, and sharing lessons through **PANORAMA Solutions**.

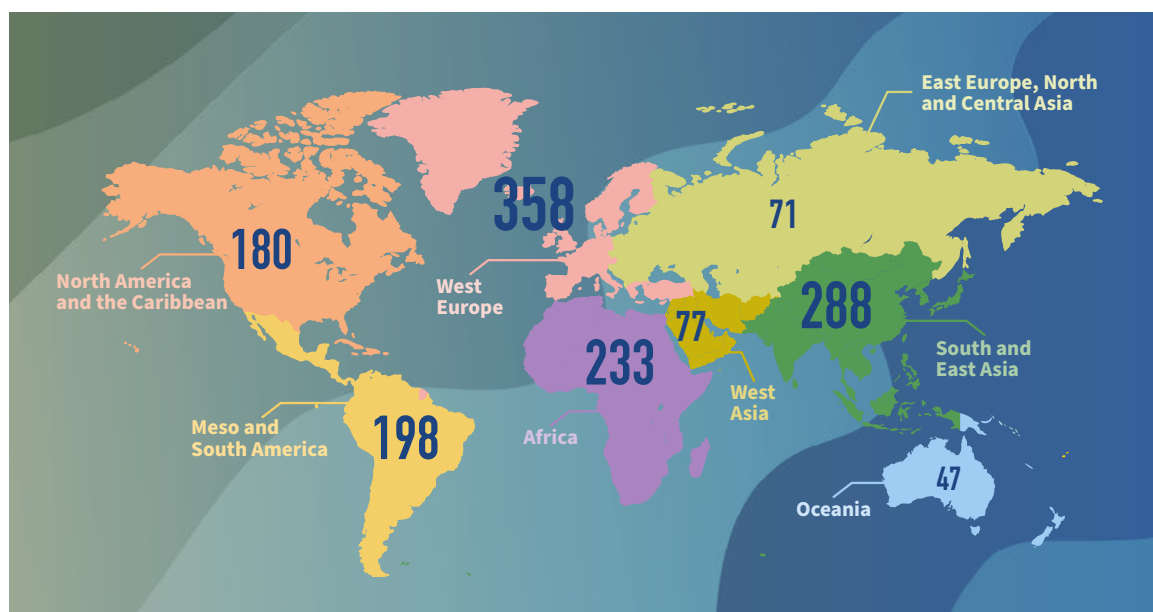


Figure 1. Spread of IUCN's membership

5. IUCN resources on World Heritage are available at: [iucn.org/our-work/topic/world-heritage](https://www.iucn.org/our-work/topic/world-heritage)

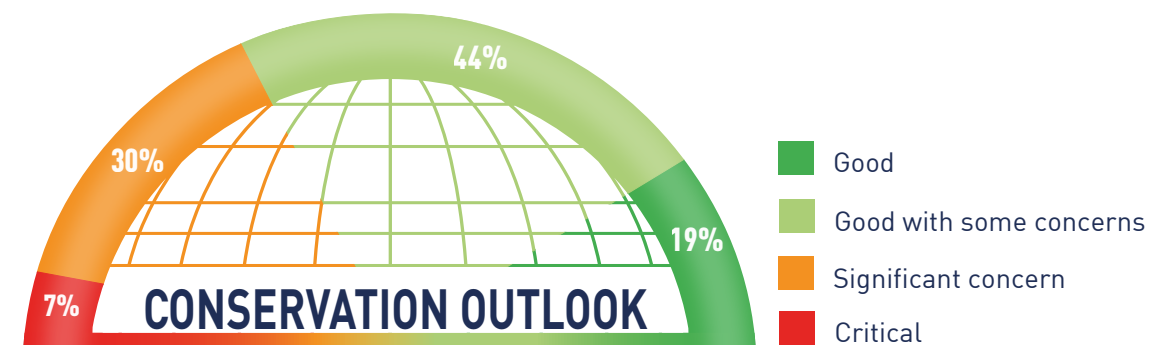


Figure 2. Conservation outlook 2020 for 252 World Heritage sites with nature conservation values

### The need for a new approach

It is critical to the long-term future of the World Heritage Convention that it remains relevant to current and pressing conservation challenges. There is a growing triple planetary crisis with threats from biodiversity loss, climate change and pollution. Despite the aspirations for a sustainable world, pressures on nature continue to grow and progress to ensure just and equitable futures for all peoples is increasingly challenged. These challenges are manifested in World Heritage Sites: the 2020 World Heritage Outlook shows one third of sites do not have secure prospects, and today there are 16 natural World Heritage sites included on the list of World Heritage in Danger.

As the Convention celebrated its milestone 50th anniversary in 2022, and with the adoption of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework in 2022 as well, there is a clear need to raise IUCN's ambition for the contribution of World Heritage to current conservation needs. It is in this context that IUCN chose 2022 to undertake a major independent Strategic Review of IUCN's contribution to World Heritage.

The Strategic Review provides a clear analysis, and IUCN has accepted its conclusions as a firm basis to scale up and strengthen IUCN's engagement on World Heritage. The Review confirms that the goals of the Convention align clearly with IUCN's ambitions including the IUCN's Nature 2030 Programme, and the global nature conservation priorities, which is made possible through the high profile of the Convention and its political leverage. World Heritage has a unique role to contribute to these global ambitions, with a particular emphasis on:

1. **Large-scale conservation:** The Convention is extremely well placed to assist with large-scale conservation efforts. The characteristics of the Convention to focus on protecting ecological integrity and biodiversity, the listing of sites that are frequently very large, and its flexibility in inscribing "serial" sites make it uniquely well suited to large-landscape and even continental-scale conservation. By extension, this means the convention is also extremely well placed to contribute to climate change mitigation and adaptation objectives.
2. **Culture and people-centred conservation:** The Convention remains the primary international mechanism to link culture and nature, through recognising the interaction of people with the natural environment, and embracing the stewardship and world views of Indigenous people and local communities. The Convention also protects many cultural sites that overlap with many of the most significant areas for biodiversity.
3. **Sustainable development linked to conservation:** Like IUCN, the Convention recognises the need to integrate sustainable development perspectives into conservation management and planning. By situating World Heritage as an integral part of national development strategies, conflicts between conservation and development can be avoided and shared solutions found. Enhanced education, targeted communication and integration of World Heritage by countries into their National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans is pivotal.

6. See also the following statement on World Heritage and the Global Biodiversity Framework: [iucn.org/sites/default/files/2022-09/post2020\\_statement\\_iucn\\_unesco\\_iccrom\\_icomos\\_icimod.pdf](https://www.iucn.org/sites/default/files/2022-09/post2020_statement_iucn_unesco_iccrom_icomos_icimod.pdf)

Increased ambitions of World Heritage can be tied clearly to the delivery of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF)<sup>6</sup> and can be at the forefront of delivering area-based and species conservation, and rights-based approaches to conservation, recognising and respecting the rights of Indigenous peoples and local communities including in stewardship of traditional and local territories. World Heritage could also be implemented in a way that creates and catalyses synergies with other biodiversity conventions and international instruments. By maximising outreach and leveraging IUCN's Union and wider constituencies, IUCN can help position World Heritage as a way to focus and to advance global agendas on nature conservation.

Several major challenges exist for the Convention to deliver an increased ambition. These include raising the profile of nature conservation within the work of States Parties, addressing the geographical imbalance of the World Heritage List, and opening the doors of the Convention to civil society. The Convention is facing a funding crisis, as the demand for support has risen dramatically while budgets have declined. It is also a Convention that faces governance challenges, as the number of highly political issues being brought into the World Heritage Committee's work has grown.

The Strategic Review also identified the Convention to be uniquely equipped with a range of measures to encourage strong conservation management practices, but that there are no reporting instruments to measure conservation impact of the Convention. While the Strategic Review made recommendations to IUCN, it also points to the responsibility that UNESCO, and the Member States must take for the future of the Convention.

IUCN accepted the conclusions of the Review, and its key recommendation to develop an inclusive Union-wide strategy for IUCN's World Heritage work. This Strategy is set out below, and provides a blueprint for IUCN's contribution to ensuring the delivery of the goals of the Convention, and ensuring it makes the fullest and most relevant contribution to wider conservation efforts.

## 2. IUCN World Heritage Strategy 2023–2030

IUCN's new World Heritage Strategy focuses on supporting the World Heritage Convention, and current and potential World Heritage sites, to make the greatest conservation impact, including maximising their contribution to the achievement of global goals for nature conservation, to 2030 and beyond. The vision and key components of the IUCN World Heritage Strategy are set out below.

### Vision

**IUCN's vision is that the World Heritage Convention is recognised and celebrated as protecting the world's most significant areas of natural and cultural conservation importance, and that World Heritage inspires innovation and best practices globally and locally.**

To deliver this vision, IUCN will focus on six priorities. For each priority IUCN proposes a goal for how World Heritage will contribute to successful conservation and sustainable development outcomes, and our ambition to support each goal.

The Strategy will be implemented by engaging the whole IUCN Union, including the key contributions of IUCN Members and IUCN Commissions, via:

- The unique role of IUCN as Advisory Body to the World Heritage Committee
- New and enhanced global IUCN initiatives on World Heritage
- A series of new regional World Heritage affirmative action plans, coordinated via IUCN's network of regional and country offices

### Priorities and goals

The six priorities and linked goals of the IUCN World Heritage Strategy are:

#### **Priority 1. Conservation: delivering global conservation action and outcomes**

*IUCN's goal:* Establishment and effective conservation and management of a balanced and inclusive World Heritage List of the most significant sites of Outstanding Universal Value, which provide exemplars that inspire global and national policy and best practice.

#### **Priority 2. Communities and constituency: delivering results for people**

*IUCN's goal:* World Heritage sites that create increased local benefits and realise the rights of Indigenous peoples and local communities, and which are supported by the largest possible constituency within IUCN and its partners.

#### **Priority 3. Culture: promoting innovation by linking nature and culture**

*IUCN's goal:* World Heritage supports the leadership of the diverse cultural, traditional and Indigenous stewards and custodians of heritage, and catalyses conservation approaches that promote the flourishing diversity of nature and culture.

#### **Priority 4. Communication: inspiring success and engagement**

*IUCN's goal:* World Heritage demonstrates and inspires success, and engages all for collective action to sustain humanity's common heritage, globally and locally.

#### **Priority 5. Capacity: increasing the ability to deliver through World Heritage**

*IUCN's goal:* Strengthened technical, institutional and financial capacity of World Heritage sites to enable effective protection, management and communication to be delivered.

#### **Priority 6. Credibility: upholding exemplary standards**

*IUCN's goal:* All aspects of World Heritage are implemented in an exemplary manner, through good governance, accountability, inclusivity and transparency.

# Priority 1.

## Conservation: delivering global conservation action and outcomes

### IUCN's goal:

Establishment and effective conservation and management of a balanced and inclusive World Heritage List of the most significant sites of Outstanding Universal Value, which provide exemplars that inspire global and national policy and best practice.

### IUCN's ambition:

- Update and promote its advice on the remaining **gaps on the World Heritage List** for sites of potential Outstanding Universal Value for biodiversity, geodiversity and the most superlative natural phenomena;
- Promote as a priority the role of World Heritage sites in **securing large-scale ecosystem integrity and connectivity** and their contribution to the Global Biodiversity Framework, and climate mitigation and adaptation;
- Advocate and enable **increased support to States Parties and to local stewards** promoting World Heritage nominations, with a priority to focus on underserved regions and countries;
- Scale up the **IUCN World Heritage Outlook** as a means to drive conservation actions, investments, and outcomes, starting with the next edition of the World Heritage Outlook in 2025;
- Integrate World Heritage science and advice fully with IUCN's broader **conservation science and practice**, to ensure they are informed by, and implemented consistently with IUCN's leading conservation tools and standards, including the IUCN Red List, the IUCN Green List of Protected and Conserved Areas, and the IUCN Species Threat Abatement and Restoration (STAR) metric;
- Include World Heritage systematically in IUCN's work supporting policy positions and **implementation of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework**, and to ensure the greatest possible **synergies between World Heritage and the implementation of other relevant biodiversity conventions**<sup>7</sup>.

<sup>7</sup>. Including the Convention on Biological Diversity, the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, CITES, CMS and many others.

# Priority 2.

## Communities and constituency: delivering results for people

### IUCN's goal:

World Heritage sites that create increased local benefits and realise the rights of local communities and Indigenous peoples, and which are supported by the largest possible constituency within IUCN and its partners.

### IUCN's ambition:

- Ensure IUCN's advice to the World Heritage Committee, and engagement with World Heritage sites continues to be informed by inclusive and equitable **multi-tiered approaches to engagement** in its site-level work. Such approaches will include governmental and non-governmental institutions responsible for World Heritage site management, and Indigenous Peoples and local communities, to foster collaboration, ensure equitable approaches to benefits and sustainable development results, share knowledge, and coordinate efforts to enhance effectiveness of conservation in benefitting nature and people;
- Advocate for improved integration of **rights-based approaches** and strengthen collaborations with the international Human Rights constituency and Indigenous peoples' Organisations in the realisation of rights and equitable benefit sharing in World Heritage sites;
- Incorporate implementation of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), including **Free Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) criteria** and other relevant principles into IUCN's protocols, reporting templates and site-level management guidelines in order to respect rights, realize benefits and safeguard Indigenous communities and constituencies;
- Integrate World Heritage into **IUCN's regional conservation strategies**, to ensure alignment with regional priorities and constituencies;
- Work closely with IUCN Commissions to ensure incorporation of elements of this strategy into their workplans;
- Work closely with IUCN Members and Council to ensure this strategy is reflected in the IUCN Programme to be adopted at the 2025 World Conservation Congress.

# Priority 3.

## Culture: promoting innovation by linking nature and culture

### IUCN's goal:

World Heritage supports the leadership of the diverse cultural, traditional and indigenous stewards and custodians of heritage, and catalyses conservation approaches that promote the flourishing diversity of nature and culture.

### IUCN's ambition:

- **Prioritise innovation through the connection of nature and culture** in IUCN's work on World Heritage, centred on the unique role of the World Heritage Convention and partnerships with UNESCO, ICOMOS, ICCROM and the International Indigenous Peoples Forum on World Heritage (IIPFWH), including through the World Heritage Leadership Programme, and the Connecting Practice initiative;
- **Promote the appropriate recognition of significant cultural values in all World Heritage sites**, and the interaction of nature and culture, whether or not this is the current basis for recognition of their Outstanding Universal Value or their inclusion on the World Heritage list;
- Promote **culture-centred conservation strategies in World Heritage sites** that fully engage the leadership of Indigenous peoples and local communities and protect traditional knowledge, while fostering reconciliation efforts that contribute to achieving positive conservation outcomes for nature and people;
- Ensure World Heritage provides a central contribution to the **Joint Programme on Linkages between Biological and Cultural Diversity** approved by the Convention on Biological Diversity in 2021, and the recognition of the connection of culture and nature as central to achieving effective and equitable nature conservation;
- Promote increased direct support for conservation actions by **custodians and stewards** of cultural World Heritage sites that hold global significance for nature;
- Focus on World Heritage as a means to innovative approaches to strengthen the wider recognition of **nature-culture linkages and biocultural diversity** through collaborations with IUCN Members, Commissions, and its broader constituencies.

# Priority 4.

## Communication: inspiring success and engagement

### IUCN's goal:

World Heritage demonstrates and inspires success, and engages all for collective action to sustain humanity's common natural heritage, globally and locally.

### IUCN's ambition:

- Develop and implement an innovative and **targeted engagement and communication strategy** for World Heritage to leverage the **high-profile nature of World Heritage sites** to motivate and mobilize action for nature and people at all levels, including through fostering collaborations and partnerships. This strategy will clearly communicate and differentiate IUCN's role as an Advisory Body to the World Heritage Committee, and its broader conservation mandate and activities;
- **Showcase best practices**, success stories, and lessons learned from conservation efforts related to World Heritage sites through the PANORAMA platform to serve as inspiration and models for effective conservation solutions;
- Broaden IUCN's communication in diverse languages, and **support linguistic diversity** inherent in World Heritage sites;
- Engage with **industries and businesses** to promote responsible practices, sustainable development, and investment that contribute positively to the protection of World Heritage sites with nature conservation values and that ensure damaging activities avoid World Heritage sites.



# Priority 5.

## Capacity: increasing the ability to deliver through World Heritage

### IUCN's goal:

Strengthened technical, institutional and financial capacity of World Heritage sites to enable effective protection, management and communication to be delivered.

### IUCN's ambition:

- Scale up the IUCN-ICCROM **World Heritage Leadership programme** to support World Heritage site managers, communities, and the building of a diverse network of specialists across IUCN and the other Advisory Bodies;
- Build national and local capacities for States Parties to successfully nominate **new candidate sites** for World Heritage status and to secure their conservation;
- Increase IUCN capacity to deliver effective **Regional World Heritage Affirmative Action Plans**, targeting underserved regions and anchored in the IUCN Regional Offices and working with the IUCN Commissions and Members, to support States Parties, site managers, communities and heritage institutions responsible for delivering conservation results in World Heritage sites;
- Promote increased funding for World Heritage sites, including through a potential new **IUCN natural Heritage financial mechanism** to provide scaled up, effective and responsive support to World Heritage sites and other places of global conservation significance.

# Priority 6. Credibility: upholding exemplary standards

## IUCN's goal:

All aspects of World Heritage are implemented in an exemplary manner, through good governance, accountability, inclusivity and transparency.

## IUCN's ambition:

- Deliver, and ensure stringent technical advice to assure **high quality, rigorous and independent recommendations to the World Heritage Committee**, fully in line with the requirements of the Convention and its Operational Guidelines;
- Prioritise the need for **effective dialogue and constructive advice** to be delivered continuously to the States Parties to the Convention;
- Enhance, monitor and report on the **diversity of engagement** and contributions from IUCN's extensive global network (particularly Members and Commission members) in both IUCN's work as Advisory Body and World Heritage activities, including in respect of regional diversity, gender, youth and the engagement of indigenous peoples;
- **Integrate World Heritage** systematically in IUCN's broader reporting efforts, especially in relation to protected and conserved areas and inclusive conservation, and engage and highlight the progress of World Heritage sites in meeting the IUCN Green List Standard, and in delivering on the Global Biodiversity Framework;
- Support the World Heritage Centre to develop and report against an **accountability framework** for the World Heritage Convention, to ensure transparency and recognition of the results achieved by the States Parties, and the World Heritage Committee.



## **Join IUCN to realise the ambition**

IUCN's goals and ambitions can only be achieved by working together, and increasing greatly the support for and profile of the World Heritage Convention, and World Heritage sites. IUCN will prioritise future work to achieve this strategy, and invites all actors, new and existing partners, who can assist implementation via both technical and financial support to join IUCN to help transform the future for World Heritage.



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