

LATIN AMERICA AND CARIBBEAN

15. Belize Barrier Reef Reserve System (Belize) (N 764)

Year of inscription on the World Heritage List

1996

Criteria

(vii) (ix) (x)

Year(s) of inscription on the List of World Heritage in Danger

2009 - Present

Threats for which the property was inscribed on the List of World Heritage in Danger

Sale and lease of public lands for the purposes of development within the property leading to the destruction of mangrove and marine ecosystems.

Desired state of conservation for the removal of the property from the List of World Heritage in Danger

The Desired state of conservation has yet to be set.

Corrective measures identified

- a) Implement the necessary legal measures to guarantee the permanent cessation of the sale and lease of lands throughout the property, and the cessation of mangrove cutting, coral dredging and other associated real estate development activities;
- b) Ensure that development rights on existing private or leased lands within the property are clearly defined and strictly controlled with a view to conserving the Outstanding Universal Value of the property;
- c) Develop and implement a restoration policy for lands degraded by unauthorized activities;
- d) Establish a clear institutional coordination mechanism ensuring that the conservation of the property receives priority consideration within relevant governmental decision-making processes;
- e) Develop a legal framework for co-management under which the respective responsibilities of the State Party and conservation NGOs can be effectively established, monitored and evaluated in relation to the conservation of the property;
- f) Systematically consider and address the threat of introduced species within the management plans for the property;
- g) Make publicly available the information on land ownership for all lands within the property, including mangrove islands, in easily accessible format, to ensure transparency in land use and allocations;
- h) Develop and implement a medium-term plan to increase the no-take zones within marine reserves, establishing ecologically effective protection and replenishment areas for heavily exploited fin fish, conch and lobster;

Timeframe for the implementation of the corrective measures

No specific timeframe has yet been set by the World Heritage Committee

Previous Committee Decisions

32 COM 7B.33; 33 COM 7B.33; 34COM 7A.13

International Assistance

N/A

UNESCO Extra-budgetary Funds

Total amount provided to the property: USD 140,000. i) USD 30,000 from the Rapid Response Facility for monitoring of unauthorized activities in the Bladen Nature Reserves, impacting the property; ii) USD 30,000 for emergency conservation actions in favour of the critically endangered wide sawfish (2010); iii) USD 80,000 in support of public use planning and site financing strategy development for the Blue Hole Natural Monument (2008-2009).

Previous monitoring missions

March 2009: joint World Heritage Centre / IUCN reactive monitoring mission

Factors affecting the property identified in previous reports

- a) Sale and lease of public lands within the property;
- b) Destruction of fragile ecosystems due to resort / housing development;
- c) Oil concessions within the marine area;
- d) Introduced species.

Illustrative material

<http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/764>

Current conservation issues

On 1 February 2011, a report on the state of conservation of the property was submitted by the State Party. The report provides information on the progress made in the implementation of the corrective measures adopted by the Committee at its 33rd session (Seville, 2009).

- a) *Implement the necessary legal measures to guarantee the permanent cessation of the sale and lease of lands throughout the property, and the cessation of mangrove cutting, coral dredging and other associated real estate development activities*
- b) *Ensure that development rights on existing private or leased lands within the property are clearly defined and strictly controlled with a view to conserving the Outstanding Universal Value of the property*

These corrective measure have not yet been fully implemented. The State Party notes the development of a number of legal, regulatory and institutional instruments to deal with development issues in Belize, and that it is in the process of refining the existing development guidelines, which will guard against ecologically harmful activities. These instruments include: i) an Integrated Coastal Zone Management Plan, a first draft of which is to be completed by August 2012; ii) the National Protected Areas Policy and System Plan (NPAPSP), which addresses development and sustainable use of resources within existing protected areas, including the property; iii) a framework "National Land Use Policy" (to be completed later in 2011), which is expected to integrate land use planning into development planning; iv) a policy on the development of shoals, which includes a ban on the issuance of titles or leases for shoals and prohibits development in areas found to be ecologically important; and v) the recent amendment to the Environmental Protection Act, which makes it a strict liability for irreversible damage caused to the property and other significant coral formations due to negligence or irresponsibility.

The World Heritage Centre and IUCN welcome this systematic approach to land use planning in Belize, but consider that insufficient information was provided to demonstrate if these instruments address specifically the conservation of the property's Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) as requested by the World Heritage Committee. Furthermore these instruments can only be helpful if effectively implemented and there is no indication on the financial and human resources that will be dedicated to the implementation and enforcement of these proposed instruments. They further note that no clear statement is made as to their relevance regarding dredging or real estate development in the property.

The State Party reports that the moratorium on mangrove cutting remains in effect within the property, and that the proposed mangrove regulations are in the final stages of legal review. The World Heritage Centre and IUCN have learned that an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) for a private resort, Yum Balasi, in the South Water Caye Marine Reserve is currently under review by the Belize Department of the Environment. The World Heritage Centre notes that it recently received reports that this development was not approved in a meeting held on 23 February 2011. IUCN also notes that it has received reports that dredging permits for this resort may have been issued in 2010. The State Party should be requested to clarify the status of the Yum Balasi resort, and to halt any development until its Environmental Impact Assessment has been reviewed and considered by the World Heritage Committee.

- c) *Develop and implement a restoration policy for lands degraded by unauthorized activities*

This corrective measure has not yet been implemented. The State Party reports that the Coastal Zone Planning Process is expected to include a systematic assessment of degraded coastal areas, including the property, which precedes the development of a strategy for the restoration of degraded areas, and further notes that “a restoration programme may be considered based on the strategy”.

- d) *Establish a clear institutional coordination mechanism ensuring that the conservation of the property receives priority consideration within relevant governmental decision-making processes*

These corrective measures have not yet been fully implemented. The State Party reports that the National Focal Point for Belize’s World Heritage Site established a National World Heritage Site Committee (NWHSC) in mid 2010 to act as its advisory body. The State Party notes that the NWHSC has been formally incorporated in the Natural Science Technical Committee (NSTC) of Belize National Commission for UNESCO, to ensure efficient communication and information exchange. Though a positive development, IUCN has received reports that some of the property’s co-management NGOs have not yet been invited to join this committee, and that some members of the NSTC have also not been informed of the formal status of the NWHSC. The absence of key partners in the management of the property on the NWHSC is a concern, as is the apparent absence of an official communication to pertinent government bodies on its creation, which puts into question its effectiveness and functioning.

- e) *Develop a legal framework for co-management under which the respective responsibilities of the State Party and conservation NGOs can be effectively established, monitored and evaluated in relation to the conservation of the property*

This corrective measure has not yet been fully implemented. The State Party reports that co-management agreements are expected to be legally recognized by 2013, upon completion of the NPAPSP. The State Party notes that, in the meantime, it will sign formal co-management agreements with its non-state partners.

- f) *Systematically consider and address the threat of introduced species within the management plans for the property*

This corrective measure is being implemented. The State Party reports that the management plans for the sites that make up the property recognize the threat of introduced and invasive species and that some actions have been identified and implemented, although the efficient implementation of these actions is impeded by a lack of funding. The State Party also reports that a National Coral Reef Monitoring Network (NCRMN) has been established.

- g) *Make publicly available the information on land ownership for all lands within the property, including mangrove islands, in easily accessible format, to ensure transparency in land use and allocations*

This corrective measure is being implemented. The State Party reports that the Protected Area Land Tenure assessment has been concluded for the entire protected area system, including the land areas that comprise the property. The State Party provided a subset of the land tenure information, and has previously indicated that the complete information was readily available to any interested person, though the report does not clearly describe exactly how this is done.

- h) *Develop and implement a medium-term plan to increase the no-take zones within marine reserves, establishing ecologically effective protection and replenishment areas for heavily exploited fin fish, conch and lobster*

This corrective measure is currently being implemented. The State Party reports that since 2009 it has doubled its no-take zone coverage from 1% to 2% of its territorial waters. The

largest no-take zone covers 8,935 ha of South Water Caye Marine Reserve. The State Party also considers that the current status of marine resources, especially conch and lobster populations (which the State Party reports to have been stable over the past 15 years), does not indicate the need for a significant increase in the no-take zones. Though the State Party also notes efforts to establish coral nurseries, and the imposition of a ban on shrimp trawling, the World Heritage Centre and IUCN are concerned over an apparent focus on conch and lobster, with little evidence that fin fish, which are an important attribute of the property's Outstanding Universal Value, are systematically addressed in the identification and design of no-take zones.

i) Other conservation issues – oil concessions

The State Party reports that the Overseas Petroleum Investment Corporation (OPIC) has relinquished the area it held under concession, which corresponds to 25% of Belize's offshore area. The State Party notes that it has made the decision not to re-issue any of the concession for this area at this time, and that it is considering the issue of oil exploration on a national scale, in light of national development needs and sustainable development commitments. The World Heritage Centre and IUCN note that this area represents only a small part of the property, and that a definite exclusion policy for the property has not yet been implemented.

j) Statement of Outstanding Universal Value, and proposal for the Desired state of conservation for removal of the property from the List of World Heritage in Danger

The State Party submitted an incomplete draft of a statement of Outstanding Universal Value in August 2010. The World Heritage Centre has informed it of the need to provide a complete version though no response has yet been received. No progress is reported in the development of a proposal for the Desired state of conservation for removal of the property from the List of World Heritage in Danger. It could be re-issued in the future. They recommend that the World Heritage Committee request the State Party to undertake a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) for offshore oil exploration and extraction, recalling the World Heritage Committee's clear position that oil and gas exploration and extraction are incompatible with World Heritage status, and that any such activities in the vicinity of World Heritage properties should not have negative impacts on the property's Outstanding Universal Value.

Conclusions

The World Heritage Centre and IUCN note that the State Party has embarked on several processes to address the corrective measures and that their full impact on the conservation of the property will only be confirmed once these processes are finalized and fully implemented. The main on-going concern is how development will be controlled within the property, including both considerations for real estate and hydrocarbon development – issues that have been clearly identified by the World Heritage Committee in previous Decisions. In this regard, the various planning processes underway should clearly reflect this concern. Furthermore, the multi-stakeholder management nature of the property calls for full co-manager participation in overall property decision-making processes. The World Heritage Centre and IUCN consider that as many of the corrective measures have yet to be implemented and/or finalized; it is premature at this time to consider removing the property from the List of World Heritage in Danger.

Draft Decision: 35 COM 7A.15

The World Heritage Committee,

1. Having examined Document WHC-11/35.COM/7A,
2. Recalling Decision **34 COM 7A.13**, adopted at its 34th session (Brasilia, 2010),
3. Welcomes the State Party's efforts at establishing a systematic set of instruments designed to provide an integrated legal, regulatory and planning framework over which to address conservation concerns, and urges it to complete this process as soon as possible;
4. Acknowledges the State Party's decision not to immediately re-issue any of the oil concession area relinquished by the Overseas Petroleum Investment Corporation (OPIC), reiterates its position that oil exploration and extraction are incompatible with World Heritage status, and also urges the State Party to make a clear and unequivocal commitment to eliminate the oil concessions granted within the boundaries of the property, which could seriously and irreversibly affect its Outstanding Universal Value and integrity if activated;
5. Takes note of the State Party's efforts to increase its national marine no-take zone coverage, and further urges the State Party to assess the suitability of the property's no-take zone coverage to provide effective protection and replenishment areas for fin fish species;
6. Requests the State Party to clarify the status of the Yum Balisi resort, and to halt any development until its Environmental Impact Assessment has been reviewed and considered by the World Heritage Committee;
7. Reiterates its request to the State Party to finalize, in consultation with the World Heritage Centre and IUCN, the draft Statement of Outstanding Universal Value for the property and the proposal for the Desired state of conservation for the removal of the property from the List of World Heritage in Danger, for examination by the World Heritage Committee at its 36th session in 2012;
8. Also requests the State Party to submit to the World Heritage Centre, by **1 February 2012**, a report on the state of conservation of the property, including on progress made in implementing the corrective measures and on eliminating oil concessions within the property, for examination by the World Heritage Committee at its 36th session in 2012;
9. **Decides to retain the Belize Barrier Reef Reserve System (Belize) on the List of World Heritage in Danger.**

16. Los Katios National Park (Colombia) (N 711)

See Document WHC-11/35.COM/7A.Add (Late receipt of the state of conservation report from the State Party ; Late mission)