

Joint NGO statement on no-go and no-impact measures for extractive activities in natural and mixed World Heritage sites



African Wildlife Foundation



Fauna and Flora International



Frankfurt Zoological Society



Royal Society for the Protection of Birds



The Nature Conservancy



The WILD Foundation



Wildlife Conservation Society



WWF



Zoological Society of London

UNESCO natural and cultural World Heritage sitesⁱ are recognised as being of Outstanding Universal Value to humanity. Natural World Heritage sites are the flagships of the global network of protected areasⁱⁱ. Although they cover less than 1% of the world's surfaceⁱⁱⁱ, they contain a wealth of irreplaceable flora, fauna and ecosystems that the international community has committed to safeguard for future generations.

Despite the legal protection bestowed upon World Heritage properties, humanity's growing demand for natural resources has placed an increasing number of UNESCO natural World Heritage sites under threat, in particular from extractive activities.^{iv, v, vi, vii} While recognising the economic benefits that mineral, oil and gas exploration and extraction can bring to host countries, the potential environmental impacts are vast, and include habitat destruction, deforestation, biodiversity loss, water pollution and topsoil contamination. Such environmental impacts and potential loss of World Heritage may limit the possibilities for alternative, longer-term, more community-focused, sustainable development.

Urgent action is required to stop the trend of increasing encroachment of extractive industries on natural World Heritage sites.^{viii} While a number of companies and industry groups in the mining, oil/gas and finance sectors have committed to no-go policies of varying scope for World Heritage sites,^{ix} many other companies have yet to make such a

pledge, and action by other key stakeholders beyond the private sector is also necessary to ensure effective, universal protection for World Heritage sites.

The World Heritage Committee, the body responsible for the implementation of the World Heritage Convention, and UNESCO's World Heritage Centre maintain that oil, gas and mineral exploration and exploitation is incompatible with World Heritage status. The Committee reiterated this position at its June 2014 meeting, calling "on other companies in extractive industries and investment banks to follow these examples to further extend the no-go commitment".^x

It is the position of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN), the formal advisory body to the World Heritage Convention on natural World Heritage, that both natural and mixed World Heritage Sites should be protected from extractive activities. IUCN states that "mineral and oil/gas exploration and exploitation (including associated infrastructure and activities) is incompatible with the Outstanding Universal Value of World Heritage sites and should not be permitted."^{xi}

IUCN further states that "mineral and oil/gas exploration and exploitation outside World Heritage sites should not, under any circumstances, have negative impacts on their Outstanding Universal Value" and "should be subject to an appropriate and vigorous appraisal process... prior to considering whether to grant consents and licences."^{xii, xiii} In reaction to the June 2014 World Heritage Committee meeting, IUCN reiterated its opposition to extractive activities in World Heritage sites.^{xiv}

We, the above organisations, support IUCN's position on extractive activities in and around natural and mixed World Heritage sites as detailed in IUCN's March 2013 advice note on mining and oil/gas projects.^{xv}

Specifically, we call for:

- 1. States Parties to the World Heritage Convention to fulfill their obligations regarding the preservation of these important properties. In particular, we encourage States Parties to:**
 - i. cancel all existing mining and oil/gas concessions that overlap World Heritage sites and allocate no such concessions in future;**
 - ii. include in national legislation a no-go provision for mining and oil/gas exploration and exploitation in World Heritage Sites;**
 - iii. include in national legislation a stipulation that appropriate and rigorous preemptive appraisal processes, such as international best practice environmental and social impact assessments, must be undertaken for all mining and oil/gas exploration and exploitation activities that may affect World Heritage sites.**
- 2. Extractive companies, financial institutions and industry groups that have not already done so to adopt and implement no-go and no-impact^{xvi} policies for all mineral and oil/gas exploration and extraction activities (including associated infrastructure and activities) in and around all natural and mixed World Heritage sites.**

Signed at IUCN World Parks Congress, Sydney, 18 November 2014.

ⁱ Sites are listed on the World Heritage List on the basis of either their natural or cultural values. Sites that have both natural and cultural values are generally referred to as ‘mixed’ sites (although the Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention does not formally use, refer to or define this term).

ⁱⁱ A protected area is defined by IUCN as “a clearly defined geographical space, recognized, dedicated and managed, through legal or other effective means, to achieve the long-term conservation of nature with associated ecosystem services and cultural values.”:

http://www.iucn.org/about/work/programmes/gpap_home/pas_gpap/

ⁱⁱⁱ There are currently 228 natural World Heritage sites covering over 270 million hectares, which equates to less than 1% of the Earth's surface and over 10% of the land and sea included in protected areas worldwide: <http://www.worldheritageoutlook.iucn.org/about-the-world-heritage-outlook>.

^{iv} By extractive activities, we refer to industrial-scale exploration, extraction and processing of minerals, metals, hydrocarbons and other geological materials. However, we recognise that other non-industrial extractive activities such as artisanal small-scale mining also have negative impacts on protected areas.

^v More than a quarter of natural World Heritage Sites worldwide are estimated to be under pressure from existing or future mining and energy activities (*Analytical summary of the state of conservation of World Heritage Properties*, UNESCO, Paris, 2009).

^{vi} High profile examples include Virunga National Park in Democratic Republic of the Congo, Selous Game Reserve in Tanzania, the Virgin Komi Forests in Russia and the Belize Barrier Reef System.

^{vii} While other industrial activities such as forestry, commercial agriculture, water infrastructure and transport infrastructure also threaten natural World Heritage sites, these threats are either less common or not increasing at a comparable rate to extractive threats, according to analysis of the properties’ State of Conservation reports submitted to the World Heritage Committee:

<http://whc.unesco.org/en/soc/action=list&mode=chart>.

^{viii} This statement focuses on natural and mixed World Heritage Sites, but recognises that cultural sites - and indeed many other important areas - are also threatened by extractive activities, and that steps must be taken to protect them as well.

^{ix} A no-go policy refers here to the public commitment by a company to not carry out or support extractives activities in a World Heritage site. Commitments by companies, however, vary widely between specific sectors (e.g. all extractives or just mining), activities (e.g. exploration, extraction, processing and/or associated infrastructure development), geographical coverage (e.g. within and/or in the vicinity of a World Heritage site), type of site (e.g. World Heritage site, natural World Heritage site and/or specific categories of IUCN protected area) and degree of responsibility (e.g. “will not fund” versus “will not knowingly fund”).

^x See WHC-14/38.COM/16: Decisions adopted by the World Heritage Committee at its 38th session (Doha, 2014), page 13, available at: <http://whc.unesco.org/archive/2014/whc14-38com-16en.pdf>.

^{xi} As outlined in the *IUCN World Heritage Advice Note: Mining and Oil/Gas Projects* (published by IUCN on 4 March 2013), available at:

http://cmsdata.iucn.org/downloads/iucn_advice_note_on_mining_in_wh_sites_final_060512_2_.pdf.

^{xii} *ibid.*

^{xiii} As detailed for example in the *IUCN World Heritage Advice Note: Environmental Assessment*, (published by IUCN on 18 November 2013), available at:

http://www.iucn.org/about/work/programmes/wcpa_worldheritage/policies/env_assessment/

^{xiv} See press IUCN press release dated 19 June 2014: <http://www.iucn.org/?uNewsID=16006>.

^{xv} Cited above under endnote xi.

^{xvi} A no-impact policy refers to the parallel industry commitment to not carry out or support extractive activities that may have adverse impacts on World Heritage Sites regardless of the location of the activity, as determined by the strategic and project-level impact assessments referenced in this paragraph.