

186. Shiretoko (Japan) (N 1193)

Year of inscription on the World Heritage List 2005

Criteria (ix)(x)

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

Previous Committee Decisions see page <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1193/documents/>

International Assistance

Requests approved: 0

Total amount approved: USD 0

For details, see page <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1193/assistance/>

UNESCO Extra-budgetary Funds

N/A

Previous monitoring missions

February 2008: joint World Heritage Centre/ IUCN Reactive Monitoring mission; September 2019: IUCN Advisory mission

Factors affecting the property identified in previous reports

- Water infrastructure (River engineering, in particular dams, impeding or restricting fish migration, including major runs of salmonids)
- Aquaculture (Management of commercial fisheries, including coordination and cooperation with neighbouring States Parties)
- Hyper-abundant species (Excessive population density of Sika Deer affecting forest regeneration and vegetation more broadly)
- Impacts of tourism/visitor/recreation and Management system/Management plan (Tourism and visitor management)
- Climate change and severe weather events (Anticipated effects of climate change)
- Management activities (Management of the Western Steller Sea Lion population)

Illustrative material see page <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1193/>

Current conservation issues

On 27 November 2020, the State Party submitted a report on the state of conservation of the property, which is available at <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1193/documents/> and provides the following updates:

- The joint Japan-Russia research indicates that the Steller Sea Lions (*Eumetopias jabatus*) migrating to the Nemuro Strait originate almost exclusively in the Kuril Islands. The State Party introduced a mark-recapture method to study the population levels instead of a direct count from onshore and is planning to develop a population dynamic model and a management model using data from sea lions captured in the Nemuro Strait;
- Non-lethal measures (relocation of fishing nets, firing of non-lethal bullets and use of reinforced gill nets) are being applied to reduce the continued financial damage to the fishing industry caused by the Steller Sea Lions. However, these methods have limited effectiveness, and therefore culling will be continued at the current levels;
- The 2012 Long-Term Monitoring Plan for the property was revised in 2019 to improve monitoring activities concerning climate change. In 2018, the Climate Change Adaptation Act was established and the Climate Change Adaptation Plan subsequently approved by the Cabinet, leading to the development of the “*Guidelines for considering climate change adaptation measures in Protected Areas such as National Parks*” in 2019. The development of an adaptive management strategy in Shiretoko will be accelerated based on the above policies, with reference to a World Heritage Paper Series “*Climate Change Adaptation for Natural World Heritage Sites – A Practical Guide*” (2014).

The IUCN Advisory mission to the property took place between 23 and 25 September 2019, and the resulting report is also available at the link above. The State Party responds to the mission recommendations as follows:

- Biological variables such as large woody debris cannot be included in simulation modelling, but dam modifications are progressing under a six-year plan based on hydraulic model experiments;
- An adaptive management approach is taken, including consultations with the River Construction Working Group and local stakeholders;
- Booms at the river mouth are not possible due to safety and technical concerns;
- The impacts of the riverbed path pilot project will be monitored and improvement measures will be taken accordingly;
- The Shiretoko Natural World Heritage Site Regional Liaison Committee holds regular meetings with experts who are members of the Scientific Committee of the property.

Analysis and Conclusions of the World Heritage Centre and IUCN

The continued positive cooperation between the States Parties of Japan and the Russian Federation to gather data on the Western Steller Sea Lion populations around the Kuril Islands is welcomed. The State Party reports again its plans to develop a population dynamic model to inform management, using a new method to estimate the population level. However, taking note of the State Party's intentions to continue the culling of sea lions at current levels until further data becomes available, it is of the greatest importance that the development of the population model is accelerated to the extent possible. As noted previously, the concerns for population trends of this subspecies remain valid, and the need for a precautionary approach should be re-emphasized. It is further recommended that international scientific advice is reflected in the precautionary approach needed, including through the IUCN Species Survival Commission.

The revision of the 2019 Long-Term Monitoring Plan to improve monitoring of climate change-driven impacts is appreciated. However, it is recommended that the State Party be requested to review the Plan to ensure that the definition of the biodiversity recognized under criterion (x) references aquatic biodiversity, specifically the salmonid species and marine mammals, to ensure that the OUV is fully and accurately captured in long-term monitoring plans in and around the property.

The national focus on climate change adaptation is a welcome development, considering that the expected impacts of climate change on the OUV of the property remain uncertain. Due to the complex interactions between the aquatic and terrestrial ecosystems within the property, there is a need to understand and assess vulnerability in order to underpin preparedness efforts. It is recommended that the climate change adaptive management strategy for the property is shared with the World Heritage Centre once it is available, and ensure that efforts extend beyond the development of a strategy and that the implementation of necessary actions be fully supported.

The 2019 IUCN Advisory mission observed that the simulations used to guide the restoration activities in the Rusha River were helpful, but that the models did not adequately represent the natural biological functions of river ecosystems, which are needed to accurately inform decision making. While taking note of the State Party's response regarding technical limitations to simulation modelling, it is recommended that the State Party continue to explore additional tools that could enhance the current understanding of river restoration approach and options. It is noted that the use of booms, an option suggested by the mission to capture large woody debris, is not feasible. The State Party should thus be encouraged to further explore alternative ways of balancing river restoration needs with the concerns of fishers. The State Party's confirmation that it continues to monitor the impacts of the riverbed path pilot project is appreciated, especially due to the periodic disturbance that it may cause to the benthic habitat, erosion and fish passage. As recommended by the mission, prompt remedial actions should be implemented as necessary, based on comprehensive scientific understanding.

Draft Decision: 44 COM 7B.186

The World Heritage Committee,

1. Having examined Document WHC/21/44.COM/7B,
2. Recalling Decisions **41 COM 7B.30** and **43 COM 7B.10**, adopted at its 41st (Krakow, 2017) and 43rd (Baku, 2019) sessions respectively,
3. Welcomes the national focus on climate change adaptation through the enactment of the 2018 Climate Change Adaptation Act, which will facilitate the development of an adaptive management strategy for the property, and requests the State Party to submit the final strategy to the World Heritage Centre for review by IUCN and to ensure that full support is provided for its implementation and the ongoing protection of the Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) of the property;
4. Also welcomes the continued cooperation between the States Parties of Japan and the Russian Federation to survey the Western Steller Sea Lion population, reiterates its concern however regarding the ongoing culling of the sea lions, given the continued absence of population data, and therefore urges the States Parties to accelerate the development of a population dynamic model, to the extent possible, in order to inform population management;
5. Urges again the State Party to reconsider, reduce or eliminate if necessary the current levels of culling of the Western Steller Sea Lion population, taking international advice into consideration and adopting a precautionary approach until accurate and comprehensive data on this subspecies become available;
6. Appreciates the revision of the Long-Term Monitoring Plan to improve monitoring of climate change-driven impacts, but also requests the State Party to ensure that the attributes of the property's OUV are fully reflected in the Long-Term Monitoring Plan to ensure aquatic biodiversity, specifically the salmonid species and marine mammals, are all included and monitored;
7. Also takes note of the State Party's response to the 2019 IUCN Advisory mission's recommendations, and also encourages the State Party to:
 - a) Take measures to improve the representation of biological variables in river ecosystems, to enhance the current understanding of river restoration approaches and options,
 - b) Consider alternative methodologies to capture large wooden debris as a way to better balance river restoration needs with the fishery stakeholders' concerns,
 - c) Continue to monitor the impacts of the riverbed path pilot project, especially in relation to erosion, fish passage and disturbance to the benthic habitat, and take prompt remedial actions in relation to any identified impacts, as necessary, based on comprehensive scientific understanding;
8. Further requests the State Party to submit to the World Heritage Centre, by **1 December 2022**, an updated report on the state of conservation of the property and the implementation of the above, for examination by the World Heritage Committee at its 46th session in 2023.