IUCN Conservation Outlook Assessment 2014 **(archived)**
Finalised on 31 October 2014

Please note: this is an archived Conservation Outlook Assessment for Yakushima. To access the most up-to-date Conservation Outlook Assessment for this site, please visit https://www.worldheritageoutlook.iucn.org.

Yakushima

SITE INFORMATION

Country:
Japan
Inscribed in: 1993
Criteria:
(vii) (ix)

Site description:

Located in the interior of Yaku Island, at the meeting-point of the palaearctic and oriental biotic regions, Yakushima exhibits a rich flora, with some 1,900 species and subspecies, including ancient specimens of the sugi (Japanese cedar). It also contains a remnant of a warm-temperate ancient forest that is unique in this region. © UNESCO

SUMMARY

2014 Conservation Outlook

Good with some concerns

Overall, the conservation outlook for the site is positive but only on the assumption that the management regime and systems are updated, streamlined and operate more strategically. Boundary improvements would likely improve the value of the site as well as enhance the long-term optimism for a positive conservation outlook. Yakushima World Heritage Area in its present form and with its current inappropriate boundaries is like an island within an island; it is so inextricably linked, both physically and ecologically, with the surrounding forested lands that management will fail if confined to within the rather arbitrary boundaries of the site.
The site is very vulnerable to external threats from activities in surrounding lands and so management must be closely collaborative, if not integrated, across the boundaries. Threats of an ecological nature are already appearing and can be expected to increase over time, especially from invasive species (e.g. raccoon dog), overpopulation of native species (e.g. deer) and can only be effectively addressed with a holistic approach on a whole-of-island level.

Current state and trend of VALUES

Low Concern
Trend: Stable

Overall the values of the site appear stable but various indicators and threats are evident or emerging that suggests a longer term trend towards deterioration in some attributes and values. The longer-term prognosis needs to be taken seriously. There is a distinct risk that management focus will continue to be driven by visitor management issues and wildlife management given little attention. The existence of the invasive species, the Raccoon Dog (Nyctereutes procyonoides) on the island should be a warning of the need for control of invasive species and that must be done at a 'whole-of-island' level. The identification of excessive impact of deer (a local endemic), die back of old-

growth White Pine (Pinus amamiana) together with evidence of airborne pollution underline the potentially deteriorating state that demands a more proactive approach.

Overall THREATS

Low Threat

A number of the identified threats to the site's values and integrity are from natural processes (earthquake, typhoon, landslides). A number of identified threats and potential threats are problematic to assess for significance but never the less could become serious threats; it is these threats that require further research as a matter of priority (invasive species, deer impacts, air pollution)
The biggest current threat so far is undoubtedly the threat posed by visitor impacts, which is exacerbated by a management regime that appears not to be meeting the challenge of increasing numbers and impacts. The management plan, albeit recently revised, has not been effective in guiding address of the visitor issue.

Overall PROTECTION and MANAGEMENT

Some Concern

For such a small site, the overall protection and management systems in place appear unnecessarily complex (tenure, management plan, zoning, management agency) and in the 20+ years since listing, only relatively minor changes have been made, mostly adding to the bureaucratic complexity rather than simplifying. The question arises as to whether these components of protection and management deliver a high order of protection and management. It is apparent that whilst there is a reasonable level of protection for the OUV of the site, there is an on-going issue relating to visitor management.
The reality is that given the shape and boundaries of the site, it is vulnerable to external threats and effective management can only be achieved if there is a high level of coordination and collaboration on management of surrounding lands. This is especially the case with visitor management, feral species management and deer management. Air pollution is a shared threat that requires further research attention.
There is considerable scope for improving protection and management. There is also a case for extending the property to include relevant forest areas to form a physically consolidated tract with greater opportunity for direct integrated

management at the landscape scale.

FULL ASSESSMENT

Description of values

Values

World Heritage values

▶ Forests of outstanding natural beauty

Criterion:(vii)

An outstanding feature of Yakushima World Heritage site is the remnant old-growth forests of often very large and aesthetically impressive conifers, in particular the Japanese Cedar, some of which are thousands of years old. This is a now rare and outstanding example of the original primeval cedar forests that were once extensive in Japan (SoOUV). The very high rainfall results in a mantle of mosses through the forests, enhancing their natural beauty; the very wet conditions mean that the forests are often shrouded in mist, adding to the romance for the visitor of these ancient forests. The numerous large cedar trees, the largest of which are known as 'Yakusugi', are revered by the Japanese community and are sought out as special attractions by visitors, probably representing the main attractions for the many tourists that visit the site. The lowland evergreen broadleaved forest (dominated by evergreen oaks, Lauraceae and Distylium racemosum) is also valuable in that the old-growth forests are preserved in large area (probably the largest block in Japan).

▶ Outstanding scenic beauty

Criterion:(vii)

Yakushima World Heritage site embraces some of the more spectacular mountainous landscape that dominates this small island, the central peak rising to almost 2,000 metres from the surrounding sea. The multiple rocky

peaks and sculpted granite outcrops are subtended by fast running streams created by the abundant rainfall, cutting deep rocky gorges down to the sea. The largely treeless summits, often blanketed in snow during winter, provide for extensive views across the whole of the forested island to the sea beyond.

► An island ecosystem with an unbroken sequence of old-growth forests from subtropical to cool-temperate climate

Criterion:(ix)

Yakushima is an island ecosystem with high mountains––a characteristic rare in the region at around 30 degrees north latitude. It contains a unique remnant of a warm-temperate primeval forest which has been much reduced elsewhere in the region (SoOUV, 2013). The insular nature combined with the very rugged terrain has ensured survival of a full sequence of vegetation from the alpine vegetation of the summits down to warm temperate rainforest that extends down to sea level. Much of the conservation value of the site is reflected in the 200 plant species that have the southern limit of their natural distribution on the island. (WCMC Data Sheet 1993)
The property is very important for scientific studies on evolutionary biology, biogeography, vegetation succession, interaction of lowland and upland systems, hydrology, and warm-temperate ecosystem processes (SoOUV, 2013).

► A diverse biota exhibiting significant endemism

Criterion:(ix)

Yakushima is an island ecosystem that supports a comparatively diverse biota, comprising some 1,900 species and subspecies of flora (94 of which are endemic), 16 mammal species and 150 bird species and more than 1900 species of insect. Of the plants, there are more than 600 species of moss recorded, testament to the wet forest environment. (Management Plan 1995)
The biota demonstrates a significant degree of endemism, evidence of on-going evolution during relatively long-term isolation from other landmasses. (WCMC Data Sheet 1993; SoOUV)

Assessment information

Threats

Current Threats

Low Threat

Management of an increasing major tourism population is creating unacceptable levels of impacts on vulnerable parts of the natural environment and evidence suggests that management is not meeting the challenge of the visitor numbers or impacts.
Two items listed as threats are typhoons and landslides; although an on-going threat to OUV's they are a natural element of the natural environment of the island. Management needs to factor in these natural processes to avoid exacerbating their impact.
The threat of air pollution and invasive species is present but not yet adequately understood.

▶ Tourism/ visitors/ recreation

High Threat
Inside site

It is evident that there is an ongoing and growing problem with managing the impact of the increasing numbers of visitors to the area. (Periodic Report 2003, Forbes 2011)

▶ Air Pollution

Data Deficient
Inside site

Research has detected fall out from air pollution allegedly derived from China. (Fackler 2013)
There is debate about the role of the air pollution on the threatened Yakushima white pine (Pinus amamiana) trees that are dying. (Gymnosperm

Database 2014)

▶ Avalanches/ Landslides

Low Threat
Inside site

Landslides are relatively common on steep terrain but can be regarded as a largely natural process. Roads may aggravate the impact. (Yukiyoshi Teramoto and Etsuro Shimokawa 2009, Yakumonkey Guidebook)

▶ Earthquakes/ Tsunamis

Low Threat
Inside site

Yakushima is within the northern hemisphere typhoon zone and is occasionally hit by typhoons that bring strong winds and cause landslips. (Witham 2014)

Potential Threats

Low Threat

The 'octopus' shape of the property, with long narrow 'arms' and an exceptionally high perimeter to area ratio means that the area is very vulnerable to the impacts of threats emanating from adjacent lands. Fortunately most of the adjacent lands are public lands but a different management regime applies and there is never-the-less some potential for threats to arise from these adjacent lands. Some adjacent areas of plantations in these forests raise the real possibility of logging well into the future.
The deer population of course knows no boundaries and the population within the site and associated impacts is very dependent on the management of deer on surrounding lands. There are strong suggestions that the deer population is excessive and having an adverse impact on the forest ecosystem. If so, the mobility of deer means that deer control in reality is not within the control of the site management and must depend on a whole-of-island approach; a landscape or ecosystem level of management.

▶ Logging/ Wood Harvesting

Low Threat

Inside site

Commercial logging continues in some adjoining forest lands and there are significant areas of cedar plantations established that may attract future logging operations when plantations are mature. (Forbes 2011, Google Earth imagery 2014)

▶ Hyper-Abundant Species

Data Deficient
Inside site

The deer population, in the opinion of some, is over abundant and damaging natural values. (Japan Forestry Agency in Fackler 2013)

▶ Invasive Non-Native/ Alien Species

Data Deficient
Inside site

The raccoon dog is now well established on the island but the nature of the ecological impact is not clear. (NIES 2014)

▶ Earthquakes/ Tsunamis

Low Threat
Inside site

Although Yakushima appears to be geologically stable, surrounding regions are prone to earthquakes and which could impact on Yakushima and create landslides on the steep topography. (Google Earth earthquake data base 2014)

Protection and management

Assessing Protection and Management

▶ Monitoring

Some Concern

Documentation indicates that participating agencies do some monitoring such as visitor numbers. No evidence was located to suggest that there is a

formal monitoring program linked to the management plan or similar. Indeed, the management plan (2012) is of a type that it is not readily apparent just what monitoring priorities should be. (The management plan is more a 'strategic directions' document with little prescriptive instruction or prioritizing)

► Research

Some Concern

There is no evidence of a management driven research agenda but rather research activities appear opportunistic, generated by external researchers pursuing their own interests. Some useful intersections have occurred but apparently more by chance (e.g. air pollution and death of endangered white pine)

► Management system

Some Concern

Article 3: The Committee (Yakushima World Heritage Liaison Committee) shall be composed of the following organizations:
• Kyushu District National Parks and Wildlife Office
• Kumamoto Regional Forestry Office
• Kagoshima Prefecture
• Kagoshima Prefecture Board of Education
In addition, the Committee may decide to ask representatives of the local governments of Yakushima-cho to attend Committee meetings to express their opinions." (Management Plan 2012)
Not withstanding some small but significant changes in the Management Plan (2012), the management system for Yakushima remains overly complex. Local Governments on the island "may" be consulted, far from being active partners in management. The combination of multiple legislative mechanisms, a complex composite management agency, a management plan that provides only limited and outdated guidance, unnecessarily complicated sub-tenures (Yakushima Wilderness Area, Yakushima National Park, Special Natural Monument and Yakushima Forest Ecosystem Reserve), an overly complicated zoning plan and multiple agency field operations in such a relatively small site is inefficient and cumbersome. It is apparent that the management system has failed to anticipate and be innovative in

responding to increasing visitor pressures and other emerging threats (deer, raccoon dog, air pollution). (Management Plan 1995 and 2012, Forbes 2011)

► Relationships with local people

Mostly Effective

Local government is not integrated into management of the site but in more recent documentation appears to be consulted. (Periodic Report 2003, WHC Website 2014) Information available is not adequate to fully address this issue but it is apparent that there is significant involvement of local people in at least tour guiding businesses. Local government is engaged on maintenance of facilities.

► Legal framework and enforcement

Some Concern

For such a relatively small property, the number of different legal statutes that apply seems unnecessarily complex. Enforcement is the responsibility of respective different agencies, there appears to be no inter-agency delegation and so complicates enforcement. (Management Plan 1995 and 2012, Periodic Reporting 2003)

► Integration into regional and national planning systems

Data Deficient

Available documents fail to reveal what if any links there are between the property and regional/national planning systems.

► Management effectiveness

Some Concern

Management appears to have limited effectiveness in responding to threats, in particular management of increasing visitor numbers and impacts. Management appears overly reactive rather than proactive. (Forbes 2011, Management Plan 2012)

► Implementation of Committee decisions and recommendations

Some Concern

The original evaluation recommended "Suggestions for improvements to the

boundaries and strengthening the management of the site should be sent to the Japanese authorities along with noting concern over the impacts on the site from tourism." (IUCN Evaluation, 1993). No improvements in the boundaries have been forthcoming. The concerns over the impacts on the site of tourism have only increased with the major increase in tourism numbers. (Forbes 2011)

► Boundaries

Some Concern

It is likely that if Yakushima were nominated in the present, the current boundaries would be rejected as inappropriate. Not only does the boundary design appear illogical it is mostly quite illogical when related to the landscape, topography, conservation attributes and manageability. It also fails to include some attributes that would make a valuable contribution to the integrity of the site.
The need for boundary review was noted at the time of original listing (IUCN Evaluation 1993) but no improvements have been achieved in the 20+ years since listing and remains an issue more than ever.

► Sustainable finance

Some Concern

It is apparent that there are some issues with funding, not the least of which is the lack of direct repatriation of visitor fees to park management. Funding for management is dependent upon separate funding of the various participating agencies rather than an allocation direct to the property. (Forbes 2011)

► Staff training and development

Some Concern

Staffing numbers are not revealed in the Periodic Reporting but are reportedly limited to a total of 3 persons from different agencies. The one important admission in the Periodic Reporting was the inadequate level of staffing. No data was available regarding training and in Periodic Reporting the State Party advises that there are no needs for training.

▶ Sustainable use

Some Concern

There are concerns about the sustainability of tourism use, especially given apparent on-going increases in numbers without commensurate improvements in management of impacts.

▶ Education and interpretation programs

Mostly Effective

If the two major visitor centres on the island and their associated education programmes are used to judge off site education and interpretation is impressive. However, given the large number of tour guides operating in and adjacent to the site, it is not possible to judge the quality and effectiveness of education and interpretation on site.

▶ Tourism and interpretation

Some Concern

Management of tourism in the property is admitted by the State Party (Periodic Reporting 2003) to be an issue, especially on the mountain trails. It is also independently identified as an issue (Forbes 2011)
Trampling of vegetation, crowding on trails and similar issues have been documented by both State Party and in published papers and online visitor reviews.
Yakushima Association for the Promotion of Ecotourism was launched in 2009. (Ministry of Environment 2014) However, the objective of the organisation is described as “…the institution of ecotours that gives visitors a real feel for the long-held lifestyles and traditions that still remain in the settlements on the island." The association also said to serve as a means for promoting the decentralization of use that is currently concentrated in the mountainous areas. (Ministry of Environment 2014)
It is apparent that there are on-going problems with visitor management, both in terms of quality of experience and avoidance/minimization of impacts.

Overall assessment of protection and management

Some Concern

For such a small site, the overall protection and management systems in place appear unnecessarily complex (tenure, management plan, zoning, management agency) and in the 20+ years since listing, only relatively minor changes have been made, mostly adding to the bureaucratic complexity rather than simplifying. The question arises as to whether these components of protection and management deliver a high order of protection and management. It is apparent that whilst there is a reasonable level of protection for the OUV of the site, there is an on-going issue relating to visitor management.
The reality is that given the shape and boundaries of the site, it is vulnerable to external threats and effective management can only be achieved if there is a high level of coordination and collaboration on management of surrounding lands. This is especially the case with visitor management, feral species management and deer management. Air pollution is a shared threat that requires further research attention.
There is considerable scope for improving protection and management. There is also a case for extending the property to include relevant forest areas to form a physically consolidated tract with greater opportunity for direct integrated management at the landscape scale.

▶ Assessment of the effectiveness of protection and management in addressing threats outside the site

Some Concern

Most of the lands adjoining the site are owned and or administered by one or more agencies (Ministry of the Environment, the Forestry Agency) The WHC website records that "In 2012, Kagoshima Prefecture and Yakushima Town joined as the management authorities, and the Plan was revised." However, the revised management plan records differently, that
"The Committee (Yakushima World Heritage Liaison Committee) shall be composed of the following organizations:
• Kyushu District National Parks and Wildlife Office
• Kumamoto Regional Forestry Office
• Kagoshima Prefecture

• Kagoshima Prefecture Board of Education"
Further, Yakushima Town is not a part of the Committee and involvement is at the discretion of the Committee -"may decide to ask representatives of the local governments of Kamiyaku-cho and Yaku-cho to attend Committee meetings to express their opinions."
The revised management plan provides some opportunity for coordination and collaboration but does not assure coordination and collaboration across boundaries in address of external threats.

State and trend of values

Assessing the current state and trend of values

World Heritage values

► Forests of outstanding natural beauty

Low Concern
Trend:Stable

For the majority of visitors to the site, the primary attraction is the aesthetics of the old-growth forests and especially large individual trees ('Yakusugi'). Whilst the forests and individual Yakusugi are much as at the time of listing, the visitor experience has deteriorated as a result of crowding and associated impacts on the forest environment.
Whilst the old-growth Yakushima white pine (Pinus amamiana) have not featured much in the visitor mind, this rare local endemic tree is subject to significant dieback and the cause is not certain though research suggests air pollution.

► Outstanding scenic beauty

Good
Trend:Stable

For visitors to the site, the spectacular landscape would be little changed from the time of listing. The macro landscape is comparatively stable apart from the impacts of natural processes, especially landslides. At the local or micro level, there are localised and concerning changes associated with visitor impacts, particularly in the high mountain section where there are

reports of trampling, track erosion and changed drainage.

▶ An island ecosystem with an unbroken sequence of old-growth forests from subtropical to cool-temperate climate

Good
Trend:Stable

The site continues to exhibit its overlapping biotas from the Palearctic and Oriental realms, a rather robust value that would only be threatened by longer-term changes such as climate change or threats from invasive species or severe pollution.

▶ A diverse biota exhibiting significant endemism

High Concern
Trend:Deteriorating

As an island ecosystem, Yaku Island (Yaku-shima) is vulnerable to threats from invasive species. Typically many islands in the world have had their ecosystems and biota seriously impacted by introduction/arrival of exotic species, in particular invasive species and Yakushima is unlikely to be an exception. Introduction of the predatory Raccoon Dog (Nyctereutes procyonoides) surely represents a serious threat to the biota of the island given the large biodiversity, including many local endemic taxa. Similarly, opinion is strongly in favour of recognizing an over abundance of the Yakushima Sika deer (Cervus nippon yakushimae) and hence the potential for detrimental impact on the biota of the site/island. Regrettably, the management plan is silent on address of invasive species and impacts of deer.

Summary of the Values

▶ Assessment of the current state and trend of World Heritage values

Low Concern

Trend: Stable

Overall the values of the site appear stable but various indicators and threats are evident or emerging that suggests a longer term trend towards deterioration in some attributes and values. The longer-term prognosis needs

to be taken seriously. There is a distinct risk that management focus will continue to be driven by visitor management issues and wildlife management given little attention. The existence of the invasive species, the Raccoon Dog (Nyctereutes procyonoides) on the island should be a warning of the need for control of invasive species and that must be done at a 'whole-of-island' level. The identification of excessive impact of deer (a local endemic), die back of old-growth White Pine (Pinus amamiana) together with evidence of airborne pollution underline the potentially deteriorating state that demands a more proactive approach.

Additional information

Key conservation issues

▶ **Visitor management**

Regional

There is a need to more proactively address the highest profile management issue of public interest, visitor management in the site, including crowding, trampling, and impaired visitor experience.

▶ **Inadequacy of site boundaries**

National

There is a clear need to conduct a thorough review of the adequacy and appropriateness of site boundaries to capture identified OUV which extends beyond the site, to improve manageability and to provide for more effective integration of management for visitors/tourism and ecological issues.

▶ **Complexity of management system**

Regional

There is a case for review and simplification of the current complexity of management agency, management zoning, operational management, enforcement. Greater formal involvement of the local community should be considered.

▶ Absence of a Research and Monitoring Strategy

Local

There appears to be a need for a more formal strategy and plan for research and monitoring which is proactive and based on threat assessment.

Benefits

Understanding Benefits

▶ Outdoor recreation and tourism

Yaku Island has become an increasingly attractive destination for tourists, both domestic and international. The Yakushima World Heritage Site is an important component of that tourism.
The tourism clearly makes an important economic contribution to the local island population and extending to Kagoshima on the mainland.

▶ Wilderness and iconic features

The larger cedar trees, those considered to be over 1,000 years old, called "Yakusugi", are greatly revered and regarded as sacred by Japanese people. One consequence is that this generates substantial national tourism to the site, generating economic benefits to the island community through employment and provision of services.

▶ Contribution to education

Several large and impressive visitor centres have been established on the island and are visited by most tourists to the island and the World Heritage Site. Emphasis in on education with a strong focus on the cedar forests, the WH site in particular. These facilities are also utilized for school education. These centres are an important complement to the WH site and provide great educational benefit to the wider population.

Summary of benefits

By far the main source of benefits to the community is from tourism visitation to the site, tourism being driven by a combination of the 'Yakusugi' cedar trees and the spectacular mountain scenery. Benefits flowing to the Yaku Island community is primarily economic through the provision of services to visitors. Educational benefits are significant and closely associated with tourism to the site.

Projects

Compilation of active conservation projects

№	Organization/ individuals	Project duration	Brief description of Active Projects
1	Osamu Nagafuchi, University of Shiga, Japan		Environmental factors influencing the load of long-range transported air pollutants on Pinus amamiana in Yakushima Island.
2	A group of researchers (Prof. Tetsukazu Yahara, Kyushu University and Prof. Takakazu Yumoto, Kyoto University) funded by the Ministry of Environment		Studies of deer over-abundance

Compilation of potential site needs

№	Site need title	Brief description of potential site needs	Support needed for following years
1	Boundary Review	The need to review the boundary was identified in the original evaluation document but has to date not been conducted. It is evident that OUVof the site extends beyond the boundaries, that there is a need for much greater integration of management with surrounding lands and to adopt boundaries that are more credible and related to geographic features.	

№	Site need title	Brief description of potential site needs	Support needed for following years
2	Investigation of the threats posed by invasive species (e.g. raccoon dog)	Island ecosystems are especially vulnerable to the impacts of invasive species, in particular carnivores. The existence of the Raccoon Dog Nyctereutes procyonoides on Yakushima should be a matter of some alarm given the absence of any equivalent carnivore on the island. There is therefore an urgent need to research the population dynamics of this invasive species and to consider the prospects of eradication.	

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