IUCN Conservation Outlook Assessment 2014 **(archived)**
Finalised on 07 November 2014

Please note: this is an archived Conservation Outlook Assessment for Mount Emei Scenic Area, including Leshan Giant Buddha Scenic Area. To access the most up-to-date Conservation Outlook Assessment for this site, please visit https://www.worldheritageoutlook.iucn.org.

Mount Emei Scenic Area, including Leshan Giant Buddha Scenic Area

SITE INFORMATION

Country:
China
Inscribed in: 1996
Criteria:
(iv) (vi) (x)

Site description:
The first Buddhist temple in China was built here in Sichuan Province in the 1st century A.D. in the beautiful surroundings of the summit Mount Emei. The addition of other temples turned the site into one of Buddhism's holiest sites. Over the centuries, the cultural treasures grew in number. The most remarkable is the Giant Buddha of Leshan, carved out of a hillside in the 8th century and looking down on the confluence of three rivers. At 71 m high, it is the largest Buddha in the world. Mount Emei is also notable for its exceptionally diverse vegetation, ranging from subtropical to subalpine pine forests. Some of the trees there are more than 1,000 years old. © UNESCO

SUMMARY

2014 Conservation Outlook

Good

The property is well administered and carefully managed under strong protection legislation and planning provisions. The site is a very significant national sacred place and is an internationally renowned religious site, which attracts huge numbers of tourists and pilgrims. Although there is some overcrowding at times, current visitor impacts are well-recognized and controlled through effective management intervention. There are a few other threats and pressures on natural values in particular, but these are not serious. Vigilance is required to ensure that the current levels of protection are maintained in the long term. The likely increase in climate change effects on species and habitats should also be closely watched. There should be improved monitoring of the site's biological values, and a better balance of management effort between the protection of cultural values, which are given priority, and natural values.

Current state and trend of VALUES

Low Concern
Trend: Data Deficient

The current state of cultural values and attributes of the property are assessed as good and in a stable condition. There is a low level of concern about the condition of some natural values in the face of both direct impacts, such as traditional uses of natural resources, and indirect impacts, from atmospheric pollution for example. Insufficient management effort is directed at monitoring of the highly significant natural values and there may be undesirable trends that remain undetected. The imbalance between management of cultural and natural values should be redressed.

Overall THREATS

Very Low Threat

Threats to the property are few in number and generally of very low to low impact. The most obvious threats stem from the large and increasing numbers of tourists and pilgrims, and the consequential development of facilities infrastructure. A cable and monorail provide ready access to high summits but can cause overcrowding at the most popular spots and introduce people to sensitive vegetation habitats. Additional threats relate to harvesting of plant and animals for medicines and other traditional uses, small-scale cropping and animal grazing, and acidification of freshwater bodies from air pollution. To date, management intervention has alleviated the threat level but vigilance is required maintain control.

Overall PROTECTION and MANAGEMENT

Mostly Effective

Protection and management can be assessed as mostly effective, though data are insufficient to assess several key aspects. Management of the property is well-founded in law and guided by a comprehensive management plan providing regulations and other measures for effective management intervention. There is a full scientific programme and research results are used to improve management. Some concerns relate to inadequate control of harvesting and use of natural resources and the lack of monitoring of human impacts on biodiversity values.

FULL ASSESSMENT

Description of values

Values

World Heritage values

► **Exceptionally rich plant diversity of special significance to conservation and science**
Criterion:(x)

Located transitionally between the Sichuan Basin and Himalayan mountains, Mt Emei has an exceptionally rich floral diversity consisting of some 3,200 plant species, of which more than 100 are endemic. Among the important plants are orchids, primulas, rhododendrons, camellias, ginkgos, cycads and tree ferns (Foster et al. 2010). Over an altitudinal range of 2,600 m there are many vegetation zones including subtropical evergreen broad-leaved forest, mixed evergreen and deciduous broad-leaved forest, mixed broad-leaved and conifer forest, and subalpine conifer forest. The diverse vegetation habitats support more than 2,300 species of animals, including several threatened at the global scale such as the red panda, Asiatic black bear and golden cat, Tibetan macaque and Chinese giant salamander (People’s republic of China 1995; SoOUV, 2012; WCMC, 2011).

Other important biodiversity values

► **Other biodiversity values**

The Mt Emei property is within a WWF Global 200 Freshwater Eco-region and a Birdlife International Endemic Bird Area. It is identified as a Key Biodiversity Area by Conservation International and an Alliance for Zero Extinction Site. It

is noteworthy that protection of the natural values of the site has been enhanced by its long-standing status as a national sacred site.

Assessment information

Threats

Current Threats

Very Low Threat

The current threat level is generally very low. Threats stem from tourism developments and operations, traditional uses of natural resources, small-scale farming activities and pollution effects on freshwater bodies.

► Tourism/ Recreation Areas

Low Threat
Inside site

Very many tourists and pilgrims visit the property and there is some overcrowding pressure at key spots such as Golden Summit. There are more than 50 km of trails and stepped paths in the property, which become overcrowded. Littering and rubbish production are perennial problems. Patrolling of paths by staff and removal of litter has improved the situation (ICOMOS, 1995; IUCN, 1995; SOC Report, 2000).

► Roads/ Railroads

Low Threat
Inside site

A cable car carries hundreds of thousands of visitors annually to Golden Summit and has accentuated crowding pressure at this popular spot. It also brings more people into the sensitive montane forest belt. A 2.1 km-long light monorail was installed in 1998 to carry people from Golden Summit to Wanfoding Summit. The monorail is unobtrusive and of low impact and has improved management of visitors on Wanfoding Summit (ICOMOS, 1995;

IUCN, 1995; SOC Report, 2000).

▶ Water Pollution

Low Threat
Inside site

Acid rain from air pollution has detrimentally affected streams, rivers, ponds and lakes (Foster et al. 2010).

▶ Crops

Low Threat
Inside site

Cropping and livestock grazing by residents has had localized impacts on natural habitats, especially streams (Foster et al. 2010).

▶ Other

Very Low Threat
Inside site

Removal of rock material from some rivers and streams, mainly for use in restoration of cultural monuments, has altered freshwater habitats of some important species such as the salamander (Foster et al. 2010).

▶ Other Biological Resource Use

Very Low Threat
Inside site

Plants and animals are harvested for traditional medicinal uses, notably salamander in Longdong Stream, which are endangered (Foster et al. 2010).

Potential Threats

Protection and management

Assessing Protection and Management

► Management system

Mostly Effective

The property is managed under local administration and a management plan exists along with specialized plans (People’s republic of China, 1995; WCMC, 2012).

► Management effectiveness

Mostly Effective

Management appears effective (SOC Report, 2000).

► Implementation of Committee decisions and recommendations

Mostly Effective

State Party has generally responded to Committee requests and recommendations.

► Boundaries

Data Deficient

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► Sustainable finance

Data Deficient

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► Staff training and development

Data Deficient

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► Sustainable use

Some Concern

Some concerns are expressed about the impacts of small-scale farming practices, and harvesting of biota for traditional medicines (Foster et al.

2010).

▶ Education and interpretation programs

Data Deficient

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▶ Tourism and interpretation

Some Concern

Some concerns have been raised about infrastructure development, overcrowding at sites and on trails, and littering (ICOMOS 1995; IUCN 1995; WCMC, 2012).

▶ Monitoring

Some Concern

Concern that there was no reporting of monitoring of impacts on natural values as recently as 2004 (WCMC, 2012).

▶ Research

Mostly Effective

There has been much research effort on natural and cultural features both by international and domestic scientists. There are 15 specialized scientific and technical institutions in the area. Plant and animal specimens are held in many international collections (WCMC, 2012).

▶ Relationships with local people

Mostly Effective

There are more than 2,000 permanent residents in the property, mainly peasant farmers and Buddhist monks (WCMC, 2012). Residents have participated in a community based enterprise development study and trial (FAO, 2006). Monks have been encouraged to play a larger role in supporting and managing the property (20COM VIII.B).

▶ Legal framework and enforcement

Highly Effective

There are good national and local laws for protection and management of natural and cultural values and attributes (People’s Republic of China 1995; ICOMOS 1995; IUCN 1995; SOC Report, 2000). Less is known about enforcement processes and capability.

▶ **Integration into regional and national planning systems**
Data Deficient

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Overall assessment of protection and management
Mostly Effective

Protection and management can be assessed as mostly effective, though data are insufficient to assess several key aspects. Management of the property is well-founded in law and guided by a comprehensive management plan providing regulations and other measures for effective management intervention. There is a full scientific programme and research results are used to improve management. Some concerns relate to inadequate control of harvesting and use of natural resources and the lack of monitoring of human impacts on biodiversity values.

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

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State and trend of values

Assessing the current state and trend of values

World Heritage values

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Exceptionally rich plant diversity of special significance to conservation and science

Low Concern
Trend:Stable

The property provides critical habitat for many threatened and endangered species of biota. None is reported to be of more than low concern. There is a lack of data from monitoring of impacts on species and habitats and the true picture may not be revealed. More management effort should be directed at systematic monitoring of human impacts to ensure that there are no long-term trends that could detrimentally affect the survival of key species of plant and animals (Foster et al. 2010; IUCN, 1995; SOC Report, 2000).

Other important biodiversity values

► Other biodiversity values

The Mt Emei property is within a WWF Global 200 Freshwater Eco-region and a Birdlife International Endemic Bird Area. It is identified as a Key Biodiversity Area by Conservation International and an Alliance for Zero Extinction Site. It is noteworthy that protection of the natural values of the site has been enhanced by its long-standing status as a national sacred site.

Summary of the Values

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

Low Concern

Trend: Data Deficient

The current state of cultural values and attributes of the property are assessed as good and in a stable condition. There is a low level of concern about the condition of some natural values in the face of both direct impacts, such as traditional uses of natural resources, and indirect impacts, from atmospheric pollution for example. Insufficient management effort is directed at monitoring of the highly significant natural values and there may be undesirable trends that remain undetected. The imbalance between management of cultural and natural values should be redressed.

Additional information

Key conservation issues

▶ **.**

Local

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Benefits

Understanding Benefits

▶ **History and tradition**

The property is of exceptional cultural and spiritual significance as the birthplace of the Buddhist religion in China and the place from where it spread widely through the East. It is one of the four holy lands of Chinese Buddhism and the site where the first Buddhist temple in China was built. It also contains a magnificent array of religious monuments and treasures, including the largest carved statue of Buddha in the world.

▶ **Outdoor recreation and tourism**

The Mt Emei property is one of the most important Buddhist worship centres in the world and attracts huge numbers of domestic and international pilgrim visitors.

▶ **Is the protected area valued for its nature conservation?**

Mt Emei is of great significance to science and conservation for its exceptionally rich floral biodiversity, including a host of endemic and globally important plant species. The property is also rich in animal species, several of which are threatened at a global scale.

Summary of benefits

Mt Emei is of major global significance for profession and promotion of Buddhist religious faith, and an internationally important centre of religious tourism. The property is also of global significance for the protection of plant and animal diversity within the Asia region. As such, Mt Emei is a place of major benefit to the world community for protection of outstanding universal cultural and natural values.

Projects

Compilation of active conservation projects

№	Organization/ individuals	Project duration	Brief description of Active Projects
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REFERENCES

№	References
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2	Foster, M.N. et al. 2010. Synergies between World Heritage sites and key biodiversity areas. World Heritage Paper No. 56, UNESCO, Paris, France.
3	ICOMOS 1995. Mt Emei evaluation report.
4	IUCN 1995. Mt Emei evaluation report.
5	People’s Republic of China 1995. Nomination of Mt Emei and Leshan Giant Buddha.
6	SOC Report, 1999.
7	SOC Report, 2000
8	SoOUV, 2012.
9	WCMC 2011. Fact Sheet: Mt Emei Scenic Area, including Leshan Giant Buddha Scenic Area, China.