IUCN Conservation Outlook Assessment 2014 **(archived)**
Finalised on 12 November 2014

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

Pirin National Park

SITE INFORMATION

Country:
Bulgaria
Inscribed in: 1983
Criteria:
(vii) (viii) (ix)

Site description:

Spread over an area of over 27,000 ha, at an altitude between 1008 and 2914 m in the Pirin Mountains, southwest Bulgaria, the site comprises diverse limestone mountain landscapes with glacial lakes, waterfalls, caves and predominantly coniferous forests. It was added to the World Heritage List in 1983. The extension now covers an area of around 40,000 ha in the Pirin Mountains, and overlaps with the Pirin National Park, except for two areas developed for tourism (skiing). The dominant part of the extension is high mountain territory over 2000m in altitude, and covered mostly by alpine meadows, rocky screes and summits. © UNESCO

SUMMARY

2014 Conservation Outlook

Significant concern

Overall, the site appears to be in a relatively good state of conservation. However, fragmentation of the site associated with the exclusion of the skiing areas incompatible with World Heritage status (now part of the buffer zone) is of significant concern. Economic pressure might lead to further intensive tourism development. Climate change is expected to have low to moderate impact on species, ecosystem and geological formations. The management is relatively effective regarding daily tasks, although low levels of funding are a constraint. However, the power of the Park administration is very limited regarding strategic development of the region and the political and economic pressures are very high for further mass tourism development with potential exclusion of new areas.

Current state and trend of VALUES

High Concern
Trend: Deteriorating

Overall, the site appears to be in a relatively good state of conservation. However, fragmentation of the site associated with the exclusion of the skiing areas incompatible with World Heritage status (now part of the buffer zone) is of some concern. Climate change might have further impacts on the site.

Overall THREATS

High Threat

Some areas of the park, now excluded from the site and in part of the buffer zone, have been severely damaged by ski infrastructure development. Other threats like climate change, impact of summer tourism are rather diffuse with limited impact. The political and economic pressures are very high for mass tourism development with potential exclusion of new areas.

Overall PROTECTION and MANAGEMENT

Some Concern

The management is relatively effective regarding daily tasks, but the power of the Park administration is very limited regarding strategic development of the region. The park administration in under severe economic constraints and strong political pressure. Moreover, poor legal enforcement strongly affects the protection and management of the site.

FULL ASSESSMENT

Description of values

Values

World Heritage values

► **A good example of the continuing evolution of flora and an example of high mountain ecosystems in natural condition**
Criterion:(ix)

The site is a good example of the continuing evolution of flora, as evidenced by a number of endemic and relict species, and the property also protects an example of a functioning ecosystem that is representative of the important natural ecosystems of the Balkan uplands. Pirin's natural coniferous forests include Macedonian Pine and Bosnian Pine, with many old growth trees. In total, there are 1,315 species of vascular plants, about one third of Bulgaria's flora, including 86 Balkan endemics, 17 Bulgarian endemics and 18 local endemics. The fauna of Pirin National Park includes 45 mammal species, including brown bear, wolf and pine marten, and 159 bird species. Pirin is also home to eight species of amphibians, eleven species of reptiles and six fish species. Although the forests are affected by some historical use, the natural functioning of the ecosystem ensures the protection of its regionally significant biodiversity values (SoOUV, 2010).

► **Mountain scenery of exceptional beauty**
Criterion:(vii)

The high mountain peaks and crags contrast with meadows, rivers and waterfalls and provide the opportunity to experience the aesthetics of a Balkan mountain landscape. The ability to experience remoteness and naturalness is an important attribute of the Outstanding Universal Value of

the site (SoOUV, 2010). One of the 2 real alpine areas of Bulgaria; one of the 3 highest Mountain ranges in the Balkan peninsula.

► Diverse limestone mountain landscapes

Criterion:(viii)

The principal earth science values of the property relate to its glacial geomorphology, demonstrated through a range of features including cirques, deep valleys and over 70 glacial lakes. The mountains of the property show a variety of forms and have been developed in several different rock types (SoOUV, 2010).

Assessment information

Threats

Current Threats

High Threat

Some areas of the park, now excluded as buffer zone, have been severely damaged (ski zones); however, these areas are relatively small and limited in comparison with the whole site. Other threats like climate change, impact of summer tourism are rather diffuse with limited impact.

► Tourism/ visitors/ recreation

High Threat
Inside site
Outside site

Lack of snow provoking a higher demand for artificial snow (modified terrain), thus affecting valuable ecosystems (9, PI).

► Solid Waste

Data Deficient

Inside site

Equipment most probably not adapted to the enormous increase of visitors / tourists in mountain huts and tourist resorts.

► Livestock Farming / Grazing

High Threat
Inside site
Outside site

High mountain grazing is limited to the easy accessible zones, with risk of overgrazing locally and invasion of trees and shrubs in other areas (PI)

► Subsistence hunting

High Threat
Inside site
Outside site

Illegal hunting inside and outside of the property

► Other

Low Threat
Inside site

Motor traffic is affecting the landscape (traffic on the road, parking lots) (PI).

► Dams/ Water Management or Use

Low Threat
Inside site

The water regime has been affected by construction of an artificial lake for snow production in winter (the level of impact is unclear) (9, PI)

► Tourism/ Recreation Areas

High Threat
Inside site
Outside site

Two construction projects in the Chalin Valog area of the Bansko ski area located in the buffer zone were approved in 2007in 2010 two additional development proposals were approved in the Bansko ski area - replacement and capacity upgrade of two ski lifts in the Bansko ski area within the

property’s buffer zone; namely the Banderishka poljana to Kolarski pat and the Platoto ski lifts (SOC, 2011). These developments in the area that was excluded from the WH property and became part of its buffer zone in 2010 have led to severe degradation of its natural values and represent a major disturbance for wildlife (1b,9,10,11,13). Serious threats of opening / enlarging at least 2 new ski zones with similar consequences (through at smaller scales) (12)

► Tourism/ Recreation Areas

High Threat
Inside site
Outside site

Ski runs have been created by opening of corridors in the forests and in low alpine shrub communities; they are extremely visible from far away. (9,10,11)

► Temperature changes

Data Deficient
Inside site
Outside site

Climate change (particularly changes in snow regime) may affect the caves and karst system as well as endemic species with very limited distribution.

► Logging/ Wood Harvesting

High Threat
Inside site
Outside site

Extraction of old growth trees

Potential Threats

Very High Threat

The political and economic pressures are very high for mass tourism development (12) with potential exclusion of new areas.

► Habitat Shifting/ Alteration

Low Threat

Inside site

Loss of endemic plant and animal species by modification of habitats and ecosystems. Modification of water regime in the streams and karst system (PI)

► Tourism/ Recreation Areas

Very High Threat
Inside site
Outside site

Extension of existing zones and demand from local communities for opening new ones (12)

Protection and management

Assessing Protection and Management

► Relationships with local people

Serious Concern

The relations with the local population are of serious concern; the local communities see only the potential for economic / tourism development. The Park and the WH designation are seen only as limitation for commercial activities.

► Legal framework and enforcement

Some Concern

The Park administration is very weak; The ministry of environment has very little control on territorial planning. Fines have been paid by developers, but their amount is far too low to be dissuasive. (9, 10, PI)
Poor legal enforcement has severe impacts on the site’s values.

► Integration into regional and national planning systems

Mostly Effective

The park is well integrated into the PA system; and is part of Natura 2000

network.

▶ Management system

Some Concern

The management system is relatively effective and there is a clear management framework in place since the World Heritage site coincides with the area of Pirin National Park and the area is entirely owned by the state. Budgets are stable, but rather limited (13, PI).

▶ Management effectiveness

Serious Concern

The management effectiveness is fair regarding the daily tasks; however it is strongly affected by the limited power the park administration has to influence the long term economic regional planning and regarding the overall park tourism development. (13)

▶ Implementation of Committee decisions and recommendations

Serious Concern

Despite several requests, a firm commitment of the SP regarding future commercial activities, development and strict respect of the current zoning has never been expressed.

▶ Boundaries

Some Concern

When Pirin NP was inscribed, the boundaries of the WHS did not follow an ecological rationale and
hence created a rather fragmented property. In 2009, the
Committee approved the extension of the PWHS and the establishment of a buffer zone. The same decision, excluded the Bansko and Dobrenishte tourism zones (1,078.23 ha) and included these in a new buffer zone (Mission report, 2011). Overall, current boundaries are adequate, with the exception of the buffer zone which does not surround the property, but rather makes intrusions into the site. (13). A GPS-based demarcation of the boundaries of the property will be conducted as part of the project “Sustainable Management of Pirin National Park”, but no expected completion date is

known (SOC, 2013).

▶ Sustainable finance

Some Concern

The financial resources provided by the state budget remain fairly constant. However, the level of funding for management and restoration activities in the property fluctuates considerably and was significantly reduced in 2010. This reduction is attributed to the current economical crisis and associated tightened financial policies (SOC, 2011).

▶ Staff training and development

Some Concern

The PNPD staff has grown from some 40 staff in 2002 to the present number of 51 staff in 2005. This
includes a Director, 9 Experts, 34 Inspectors and Rangers, and 7 administrative staff, all funded by the
state budget (Mission report, 2011). However, funding is inadequate. The low salaries are unattractive for highly qualified people (PI, 11))

▶ Sustainable use

Serious Concern

The skiing activities are totally unsustainable; the summer tourism is quite sustainable, but significant improvement should be made (waste and water treatment; traffic on the road; etc.). The lack of a Master Development Plan for Bansko Municipality has triggered an excessive expansion in the number of beds in this part of the property’s buffer zone. (13, 9)

▶ Education and interpretation programs

Some Concern

Limited education and interpretation programmes exist near Bansko; A small visitor centre is operating in Bansko.
Some programmes have been initiated in smaller municipalities not affected by mass tourism.
There is no communication about the WH values of the site.

▶ Tourism and interpretation

Serious Concern

A nature trail accessible for disabled people has been set up near Bansko. However, the information regarding the WH values is quite limited. (PI)

▶ Monitoring

Data Deficient

A monitoring programnme is foreseen in the MP; however it consist mainly of scientific investigations and inventories and is not really linked to the management of the property.

▶ Research

Data Deficient

An extensive research programme was carried out for the preparation of the MP; it is expected to have an update for the preparation of a new MP. Information is not available concerning ongoing research activities.

Overall assessment of protection and management

Some Concern

The management is relatively effective regarding daily tasks, but the power of the Park administration is very limited regarding strategic development of the region. The park administration in under severe economic constraints and strong political pressure. Moreover, poor legal enforcement strongly affects the protection and management of the site.

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

Some Concern

Intensive urban development in the major towns (Bansko, Razlog, GoceDeltchev). Switch from agriculture / forestry activities to tourism for the most important municipalities without consideration of conservation issues. However, direct impacts on the property are limited.

State and trend of values

Assessing the current state and trend of values

World Heritage values

▶ **A good example of the continuing evolution of flora and an example of high mountain ecosystems in natural condition**

High Concern
Trend:Deteriorating

Overall, the current state of values is good (Mission report, 2011), with limited impact from visitors. However, fragmentation of the site associated with the exclusion of the skiing areas (now part of the buffer zone) is of some concern.

▶ **Mountain scenery of exceptional beauty**

Low Concern
Trend:Deteriorating

The aesthetic values of some parts of the property have been negatively affected by ski infrastructure; however, overall, the property’s exceptional natural beauty is well preserved (Pers. obs.).

▶ **Diverse limestone mountain landscapes**

Low Concern
Trend:Stable

Soil erosion in skiing areas and modification of water regime, mainly in the buffer zone (Pers. obs.).

Summary of the Values

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

High Concern

Trend: Deteriorating

Overall, the site appears to be in a relatively good state of conservation. However, fragmentation of the site associated with the exclusion of the skiing areas incompatible with World Heritage status (now part of the buffer zone) is of some concern. Climate change might have further impacts on the site.

Additional information

Key conservation issues

▶ **Tourism infrastructure development**
Regional

Increase of hotel capacities to match those of skiing areas, then vice versa (snowball effect)

▶ **Dialogue with local communities**
Regional

The WH designation is largely considered only as a source of limitation to local development

▶ **Erosion and hydrographic changes**
Local

Opening of new ski runs and equipment for artificial snow production: artificial lakes, modification of streams

▶ **General increase of tourism pressure**
Regional

Road traffic, more visitors without adaptation of facilities (waste water, etc), off-piste skiing in protected zones

Benefits

Understanding Benefits

► Commercial wells

The Park area provides drinking water for large populations in lowland areas

► Outdoor recreation and tourism

Large mountain areas with little disturbance

Summary of benefits

Limited benefits.

Projects

Compilation of active conservation projects

№	Organization/ individuals	Project duration	Brief description of Active Projects
1	Pirin NP Directorate / Subcontractor :ECO COSULT PIRIN Ljudmila Dimitrova		Sustainable management of Pirin NP and Tisata Reserve Start Date: 02.07.2012 Date of completion: 31.03.2015 Some main activities: 1. Maintenance and regeneration activities in forests, land and water bodies 2. Visitor infrastructures and constructions 3.Interpretation and educational programmes 4. Planning and optimisation of the management
2	Balkani Wildlife Society		Other project related to monitoring of birds and animals

Compilation of potential site needs

№	Site need title	Brief description of potential site needs	Support needed for following years
1	Ministry	Renewal of Management Plan; dialogue with local communities and business sector	

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№	References
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9	34COM.Pirin.SPreport
10	35 COM 7b.Add
11	35COM.Pirin.SPreport
12	36COM.Pirin.SPreport.Word
13	IUCN Evaluation 1987
14	Ministry of Environment and Water (MoEW) 2004: National Park Pirin Management Plan