IUCN Conservation Outlook Assessment 2017 **(archived)**
Finalised on 09 November 2017

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

Los Katios National Park

SITE INFORMATION

Country:
Colombia
Inscribed in: 1994
Criteria:
(ix) (x)

Site description:
Extending over 72,000 ha in north-western Colombia, Los Katios National Park comprises low hills, forests and humid plains. An exceptional biological diversity is found in the park, which is home to many threatened animal species, as well as many endemic plants. © UNESCO

SUMMARY

2017 Conservation Outlook

Significant concern

Los Katíos National Park continues to be an extraordinary protected area in a region globally renowned for high levels of diversity and endemism. Adding to its importance is the location within the frontlines of the “Great American Exchange”, a major and ongoing biogeographic event in the history of the Americas following the earlier geographic separation of what became North and South America. Such values are shared with the much larger and contiguous Darién National Park and World Heritage property in nearby Panama. The vast scale of Darién National Park considerably contributes to the integrity and conservation outlook of the property. It is therefore clear that investment in transboundary conservation is an investment in the future of both properties. Given that the establishment and configuration of the national park was not primarily based on a conservation rationale according to contemporary conservation planning, it can be argued that the property is facing some shortcomings by design. Years of limited security have reduced and at times prevented governmental control of the property. The same holds true for scientific research, which was largely suspended despite the major scientific importance of the area. At the same time, it can be argued that the lack of security may have contributed to preventing large-scale infrastructure projects. The Colombian Constitution and the evolving legislation and policy provide an adequate framework for the full consideration of use and conservation at the landscape level but much remains to be done in implementation. Building upon the promising management response and increased law enforcement over the last years, illegal resource use can be kept at acceptable levels providing sustained funding and staffing. Further progress in the negotiations with the Wounaan community inside the property serves as an unfolding practical experience in terms of negotiating and agreeing on a balance between local resource users and rights-holders versus formal conservation efforts. Lessons learned deserve to be extracted to inform the much broader debates about rights-based conservation and sustainable use. Eventually, the future of Los

Katíos National Park will be strongly influenced by the development and land and resource use of the surroundings. While the improved security situation is a blessing for local communities, including indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities and finally permits governmental and non-governmental conservation actors to operate, it may well favor longstanding ideas to invest in large-scale infrastructure projects. If they will materialize every effort is needed to carefully assess and address the direct and indirect impacts and risks for the landscape and its inhabitants.

Current state and trend of VALUES

High Concern
Trend: Stable

Following an earlier trend of well-documented concerns, the situation has been slowly but consistently improving in the years after inscription on the List of World Heritage in Danger. A coherent and decisive management response enabled the removal of the property from the List of World Heritage in Danger. Besides this encouraging improvement the property benefits from being contiguous with the much larger Darién National Park in Panama. Nevertheless, the relatively small property remains vulnerable.

Overall THREATS

High Threat

As illustrated by the removal of the property from the List of World Heritage in Danger in 2015, the management authority has systematically and effectively been addressing complex challenges in direct cooperation with law enforcement actors, institutions at all governmental levels, NGOs, indigenous peoples and mestizo and Afro-Colombian communities. This achievement deserves major credit. At the same time, the overall situation continues to be vulnerable and continued effort will be needed to prevent the security situation to deteriorate again. Illegal and uncontrolled resource use is being addressed but the management response remains to be consolidated. The possible large infrastructure projects are not posing an acute threat and in all likelihood will not directly affect the land within the property boundaries. Nevertheless, the interest to bridge "missing link" of the Panamerican Highway through the Darien Gap is here to stay and so is the interest in the power transmission corridor. It is for these reasons that the overall future is still considered to be uncertain despite

remarkable and successful conservation efforts and the absence of acutely tangible threats from infrastructure projects.

Overall PROTECTION and MANAGEMENT

Some Concern

The formal protection status is fully adequate and the enhanced security situation permits the dedicated protected area agency to engage in overall effective and increasingly participatory management. Law enforcement could likewise be restored to acceptable levels. Despite a clear positive trend challenges remain in terms of the relationship with indigenous and local communities, whose trust is understandably limited after decades of governmental absence and hardship. Illegal and unsustainable use of natural resources is not fully under control but does currently not constitute a fundamental threat to the property. Adequate and reliable funding and staffing and a partnership approach working with the full range of stakeholders and rights-holders are permanent requirements to ensure effective management.

FULL ASSESSMENT

Description of values

Values

World Heritage values

► **Rich diversity of ecosystems, habitats and species in an exceptional biogeographic location**
Criterion:(ix)

Like the adjacent Darién National Park the property displays an extraordinary biodiversity at all levels. The region in which both Los Katíos National Park and the contiguous Darién National Park and World Heritage in neighboring Panama property are located has been and continues to be exceptional in the biogeography of the Americas. Its geographical location in what is today northwestern Colombia made it a barrier to the interchange of terrestrial and freshwater fauna and flora between the Americas during the Tertiary and Pleistocene and subsequently an area of exchange of fauna and flora between the previously separated land masses of what are today North, Central and South America ("Great American Interchange"). The rich variety of ecosystems and habitats encompasses alluvial plains, marshes, lowland swamp forest, and lowland and montane tropical rainforest (IUCN Evaluation, 1994; WHC, 2014).

► **High diversity of endemic and threatened species of flora and fauna**
Criterion:(x)

Part of the "Tumbes-Chocó-Magdalena" Hotspot (formerly known as "Chocó-Darién-Western Ecuador") suggested by Conservation International, Los Katíos National Park features exceptional species richness and provides habitat to numerous threatened and endemic animal and plant species

(CEPF, 2005). At the time of inscription a total of 669 plant species had been recorded in Los Katíos National Park, of which 20-25% are endemic to Colombia. Some scientists assume the Colombian Chocó might be the most floristically diverse site in the Neotropics.(CEPF, 2005). Some 430 species of birds have been recorded in the property, comprising about one quarter of the renowned avifauna of Colombia despite the relatively modest size of the national park. More than 700 vertebrate species have been recorded despite limited research efforts due to the property's remoteness and security issues (Los Katíos Management Plan 2007-2011). The most conspicuous large mammals include Giant Anteater, Giant Tapir, several felids, such as jaguar, puma and ocelot and manatees in the river lagoons in the lowlands.

Other important biodiversity values

► Freshwater biodiversity

Los Katíos National Park encompasses numerous creeks and small rivers as well as a reach of the mighty Atrato River and associated wetlands. These complex freshwater systems are not only productive contributors to the overall ecosystem and local livelihood systems but home to a broad range of freshwater organisms, including an impressive diversity of freshwater fish. WWF Colombia (2014) reported 264 freshwater fish species in the Chocó-Darién Ecoregional Complex with the highest species richness (116 species) registered in the Atrato River basin to which the property belongs.

► Overlap of high biological and cultural diversity

The Darién Gap, including but not limited to Los Katíos National Park and Darién National Park, is a a telling example of an area with a high degree of naturalness serving as the foundation for a rich biological and cultural diversity. Just like for all other forms of biodiversity the land bridge played an important role in the human migration and distribution across the Americas.

► Scenic values

Beyond its extraordinary diversity of all forms of life, the national park and its surroundings are visually stunning through the combination of lush lowland

swamps against the backdrop of large and uninterrupted forested mountains. Particular highlights include several large waterfalls, such as the Tilupo and the Tendal Falls, the latter exceeding 100 meters in height.

Assessment information

Threats

Current Threats

High Threat

It is important to understand that the most acute current threats have been decreasing over the last years due to the consolidation of both the overall security situation and management. Nevertheless, this reason for cautious optimism should not disguise the still fragile overall security situation, as evidenced by occasional incidents and illicit activities. Both illegal and excessive legal resource use, including fishing and shellfish harvesting, in communities around the property is increasingly being addressed but continues to be a challenge. The return of an indigenous community is a remarkable development posing a new challenge in terms of balancing the use of natural resources and conservation. Despite very encouraging signs of the government having regained control in direct communication, coordination and cooperation with non-governmental organizations, academia and local and indigenous communities, the overall situation is still considered to be vulnerable at this stage.

▶ War, Civil Unrest/ Military Exercises

High Threat
Inside site, throughout(>50%)
Outside site

Despite the reported occasional presence of armed groups believed to cross the property at times, there is strong evidence of a continuously improving overall security situation. The current security level allows the conservation authorities to carry out their mandate and to conduct routine management

and control operations. Nevertheless, further improvements are needed and insecurity may flare up again given the severity and depth of conflict and the partial overlap between the past conflict and illicit commercial activites (SOC Reports, 2017 and 2015; Jaeger, 2015). Despite current reason for cautious optimism the considerable uncertainty justifies the ranking of security concerns as a high threat.

▶ Crops

Low Threat
Inside site, localised(<5%)
Outside site

Settlements along the boundaries of the property come with a risk of further encroachment and pressures, including through swidden agriculture, livestock grazing, subsistence hunting and, in the absence of alternative income, involvement in illegal logging operations (36COM.LosKatios.SPreport; 35COM.Los Katios.SOC; WDPA Sheet, 2011). An indigenous Wounaan community re-entered what is today the property in a location they could demonstrate is part of their ancestral lands. Several meetings between the indigenous Wounaan community and conservation authorities have been held over the last years with the objective to negotiate a balance between conservation and legitimate livelihood needs. Important progress in this highly sensitive and complex process is noted (SOC report, 2017). The presence of the indigenous community within the property from now on will be an integral element of the governance and management of Los Katios National Park. While it is clear that there are risks and that resource use must not exceed the productivity of the land, the return of the indigenous community is not considered to constitute a major threat per se.

▶ Other Biological Resource Use

High Threat
Inside site, widespread(15-50%)
Outside site

The limited governmental presence in the property over an extended period of time due to security reasons, among other factors, has favoured illegal resource extraction, in particular of timber, fish and wildlife (Jaeger, 2015, Jaeger et al., 2011, SOC report, 2017). Illegal logging is known to occur benefiting from the remoteness and at times limited security and control.

While a major concern across vast parts of the Colombian Chocó, deforestation within the property could largely be brought under control following an improved security situation and investment in governmental control and law enforcement. Nevertheless, illegal logging in remote areas accessible via rivers is an ongoing threat to the property. The situation has improved in that increased monitoring and patrolling is taking place, communication with the relevant regional institutions has been intensified and infrastructure is being consolidated, including through external support (Jaeger, 2015; Jaeger et al., 2011). Fishing and shellfish harvesting are major elements of the livelihood systems of indigenous, mestizo and afro-Colombian communities near the property, known to locally reach levels of severe over-exploitation (41COM.LosKatios.SPreport; 35COM.LosKatios.SOC; WDPA Sheet, 2011). An agreement on fisheries management in the Tumaradó Swamp was signed between the conservation authorities and the Tumaradó Community Council (SOC report, 2013). Poaching and wildlife trade are related to the combination of many years of limited management effectiveness and restricted livelihood alternatives (Jaeger et al. 2011).

► Crops, Livestock Farming / Grazing

Low Threat
Inside site, extent of threat not known
Outside site

Past agriculture and ranching have affected some of the lowlands near the Atrato River. The pastures, fields and orchards were abandoned at the time of the creation of the national park and have since been overgrown by native vegetation (Jaeger, 2015). Small-scale plots of illicit crops are known to occur within the property and broader region. While the management response is mostly effective, such illicit cultivation is a reminder of the volatility of the security situation.The still visible impacts of past agriculture and ranching were part of the reason of designating the national park in the first place in the early 1970s. Rather than constituting a threat, the establishment of the national park itself effectively addressed the threat. At this stage there appears to be no major threat from commercial agricultural interests or subsistence agriculture. Illicit crops are a sensitive matter requiring adequate attention. The scale of cultivation at this stage does not amount to a major threat at this stage though.

Potential Threats

High Threat

Proposed large infrastructure projects, namely the possible completion of the "Panamericana" road and power transmission corridor do not pose an acute threat to the property at this point in time according to publicly disclosed documents. The road construction seems to be on ice altogether, whereas the power transmission project seems to be active. A direct footprint of any major infrastructure project would face serious legal and constitutional obstacles and is thus hard to imagine. However, both a possible re-opening of the debate surrounding the completion of the Panamerican Highway through the Darien Gap and the possible implementation of the power transmission project - or any other major infrastructure project near the property - would come with impacts and risks. Adequate environmental and social assessment would be required in line with national requirements and the full understanding of the possible World Heritage implications would be needed in line with the State Party commitment to the Convention. Despite the absence of concrete implementation plans, any major infrastructure in the still largely roadless area would change the overall access and land and resource use dynamics and is thus considered to be a high threat requiring careful and detailed scrutiny.

▶ Utility / Service Lines, Roads/ Railroads

High Threat
Inside site, throughout(>50%)
Outside site

One of the particularities of large tracts of the bi-national Darién Gap is the absence of any major human-made infrastructure. On both sides of the international border, there have long been concerns about the anticipated impacts of the eventual connection of the Panamerican Highway through the Darién Gap. The Darién is the only missing link on the so-called "Panamericana" between Alaska and Tierra del Fuego. The possible bridging of the gap has been controversial and sensitive at all times for a wide range of reasons, including but not limited to nature conservation. The perspectives and priorities of the two involved governments do not necessarily coincide. From a technical perspective, a route crossing both the property and its sister park Darién National Park, likewise a World Heritage property, is

conceivable. Constitutionally and legally, however, the construction through the property appears unthinkable and no recent political appetite for possible alternative routes has been made public. If ever constructed, the highway would in all likelihood avoid any part of the Colombian property and the discussion would thus center around indirect impacts.

A proposed electrical utilities corridor faces similar complexity. If constructed, the corridor ("Interconexion Electrica") would link Colombia to the Central American energy market. Bottlenecks include pending binational agreement on the implementation, indigenous opposition in Panama and environmental concerns. The project would inevitably trigger Environmental and Social Impact Assessments (ESIAs) and consultation requirements in both involved countries (Jaeger, 2015). Comparable to the above road project, a direct footprint inside the property does not appear to be legally possible. Indirect impacts require careful assessment and consultations, including the involvement of the conservation authorities at all governmental levels.

Protection and management

Assessing Protection and Management

► Relationships with local people

Some Concern

Decades of insecurity and violence continue to taint the relationship between governmental actors and local and indigenous communities despite encouraging signs of trust-building. After extended periods of limited or even lacking governmental presence, a new chapter in the relationship between local people and protected areas management has been opened over the last years. As is common in remote rural settings where resource-dependent communities live in the vicinity of or inside of protected areas, there are conflicts regarding the use of natural resources; the well-documented over-fishing of the freshwater systems in the lowlands being one major example. The management authorities, however, have been moving from confrontational law enforcement to working with communities to jointly assess and identify solutions. The undoubtedly most remarkable

improvement in relationships is the indigenous Wounaan. While the Wounaan were historically expelled from the national park, they are today cooperating with the conservation authorities to facilitate the return to their ancestral lands within the property. The sensitive process in essence boils down to a negotiation of the terms of use of natural resources within the national park so as to balance indigenous needs and conservation objectives (41COM.LosKatios.SPreport; 35COM.Los Katios.SOC; WDPA Sheet, 2011).

► Legal framework

Some Concern

The property is state-owned and has strong and adequate legal protection. The Colombian Constitution grants an exceptionally strong level of protection to federal protected areas, which are referred to as "“inalienable, imprescriptible, and unseizable goods" (República de Colombia, 1991). Fully acknowledging Colombia's ethnic and cultural diversity of local communities, the Constitution also stipulates strong protection for communal lands,as well as guidance for sustainable natural resource management. Colombia has several layers of environmental and land use planning legislation and policies, which are highly relevant at the landscape level. More specifically, there is a comprehensive legal and policy framework for protected areas. This framework is adequate but much remains to be done in terms of implementation. Enforcement has been affected by armed conflict and the at times volatile security situation (36COM. Los Katios.SPreport; 35COM.Los Katios.SOC; WDPA Sheet, 2011; Jaeger 2015; Jaeger et al., 2011).

► Enforcement

Some Concern

Law enforcement temporarily broke down due to security challenges contributing to the inscription of the property on the List of World Heritage in Danger in 2009 upon request by the State Party. The situation could since be substantially improved permitting basic management operations, which in turn contributed to the removal of the property from the List of World Heritage in Danger in 2015. It is clear that the ongoing peace process is a long-term commitment and challenge and that security issues may well resurface in the future. Park management cooperates with a range of

governmental law enforcement actors (Jaeger, 2015).

► Integration into regional and national planning systems

Some Concern

Los Katios is within the Pacific Subsystem within Colombia's National Protected Areas System (SINAP). All regional subsystems must develop regional action plans which are complementary to the national action plan for SINAP. There is also a strong reference to land use planning as a complementary conservation strategy to ensure connectivity of the units of SINAP. Regional and local governments, including but not limited to environmental authorities, are required to work towards a landscape approach, which considers conservation and connectivity across sectors, land use and institutions. In terms of coordination with the adjacent land users and managers, the main entry point for the protected area authority (UAESPNN) are the so-called Regional Autonomous Corporations (CAR) and Corporations for Sustainable Development (Jaeger, 2015; Jaeger et al., 2011). The perhaps most tangible conservation opportunities are concrete plans to establish different types of protected areas in the vicinity of the property (41SP.report). Last but not least, it deserves to be recalled that the property shares a long border with the significantly larger Darién National Park in Panama, likewise a World Heritage site.

► Management system

Some Concern

The Colombian national protected areas agency is the land manager, represented by the local unit in charge of the property. There is coordination within the national protected area system SINAP, including the regional unit to which the property belongs. The management system encompasses elements of local participation, as well as important and increasing efforts to cooperate with institutions and sectors in charge of or otherwise shaping land and resource use in the broader landscape. A comprehensive 5-year management plan is being implemented. Inside the property, zonation is used as a major management instrument. Controlled resource use is in principle possible as long as it is compatible with conservation objectives (Jaeger, 2015; 41COM.LosKatios.SPreport). Even though the area was originally nominated as an extension to the previously inscribed Darién

National Park in nearby Panama, the site is formally not inscribed as a transboundary property. There are modest recent efforts to increase the conservation dialogue between the two countries as regards the two contiguous national parks and properties, which are intricately linked ecologically, ethnically and culturally.

► Management effectiveness

Some Concern

Management effectiveness used to be severely constrained by longstanding armed conflict deeply affecting the region, but also limited resourcing. The more recent improvement of the security situation and increasing investment has been producing tangible results in terms of management effectiveness. Management can move from reactive emergency measures to a much more structured and systematic approach to law enforcement and community involvement. Given that all overarching threats and challenge stem from outside the property, the coordination and cooperation stakeholders and rights-holders at various levels outside the property is a decisive factor in the management effectiveness equation. While much remains to be done, such coordination and cooperation is steadily improving improving (41COM.LosKatios.SPreport; Jaeger, 2015).

► Implementation of Committee decisions and recommendations

Mostly Effective

In terms of the inscription on and subsequent removal from the List of World Heritage in Danger, the State Party followed up on all corresponding Committee decisions and recommendations in exemplary fashion. Other than that the Committee repeatedly noted room for further consolidation, namely by encouraging additional resource allocation and further investment in the promising partnership approach. Furthermore, the Committee encouraged Colombia to assess the feasibility of extending the national park so as to include the Serranía del Darien National Protection Forest Reserve (Colombia) and potentially other areas. The same holds true for the consolidation of the integration of the property into landscape planning and participatory resource management inside the park. Finally, the Committee encouraged the State Party to address the impacts and risks posed by the artificial connection between the Leon and Atrato Rivers, while respecting the

socio-economic importance of the canal. The State Party has responded to all these encouragements but many corresponding activities remain to be concluded. At a level beyond conservation management, the Committee, on the occasion of the inscription decision in 1994, recommendrd that the States Parties of Colombia and Panama “consider the inscription of the transfrontier site as a single entry on the List” (Decision CONF 003 XI). The recommendation remains valid to this day.

► Boundaries

Some Concern

Los Katíos National Park is relatively small in size, certainly when compared to the vast Darién National Park to the west. The designation of the national park was partially related to the objective to maintain a natural barrier to livestock diseases (Jaeger et al. 2011). Therefore, the configuration of the park partially focused on areas targeted by agricultural and ranching interest in the lower elevations. Thereby the adjacent and ecologically different higher elevations along the international border were not included. There are credible hints at intact areas of high conservation value nearby, for example in the Serranía de Darién (Jaeger, 2015).

► Sustainable finance

Some Concern

Governmental core funding for Los Katíos National Park could be significantly increased over the last years. Since the beginning, external support from non-governmental, bi-lateral and multi-lateral sources has been adding to meet the needs. While there is currently no drastic under-funding, it is clear that reliable funding will be required to respond to the ongoing challenges (41COM.LosKatios.SPreport).

► Staff training and development

Mostly Effective

Staff is highly dedicated and qualified (Jaeger, 2015). As long as funding enables adequate staffing levels, the required management capacity can be secured.

► Sustainable use

Serious Concern

The main examples of sustainable use are freshwater fisheries in the lowlands and the localized re-establishment of an indigenous settlement. In the case of fisheries, the management efforts are a response to unsustainable resource management and can thus be described as an attempt to move towards sustainable use. The situation in the Wounaan community differs in that the return of the indigenous peoples marks a new beginning in the history of the park. The terms of use are under negotiation with the objective to define sustainable use levels right away (41COM and 36COM.LosKatios.SPreport). Even though the return of the Wounaan is a promising story of reconciliation, the fisheries management remains to be improved to meet both conservation and livelihood objectives. Therefore, the overall situation is considered to be of serious concern.

► Education and interpretation programs

Mostly Effective

Both the State Party and NGOs engage in environmental education, including as regards the indigenous Wounaan and neighboring communities (41COM and 36COM.LosKatios.SPreport). An environmental atlas of the park is a great example of effective environmental communication (WWF, 2012).

► Tourism and visitation management

Some Concern

The remoteness, comparatively difficult and costly access and decades of security concerns continue to impose limits to the realization of the tourism potential despite the indisputable attractiveness of the property (WDPA, 2011). At the time of writing, the official website notes that Los Katíos is closed to the public (UAESPNN, 2017).

► Monitoring

Some Concern

Active monitoring is planned and underway for several vertebrate species, freshwater ecosystems and fisheries (41COM.LosKatios.SPreport). The main

challenges requiring sustained long-term effort and investment are the participatory monitoring of the freshwater fisheries in the lowlands and the resource of the Wounaan.

► Research

Some Concern

The return of the indigenous Wounaan community is based on anthropological studies confirming the location of their ancestral lands, in fact an indispensable legal requirement underpinning the very option of their return. Another example of recent and ongoing scientific investigation are assessments and monitoring of freshwater fisheries in the lowland swamps linked to the Atrato River system. Other than that, the remoteness combined with decades of insecurity have limited research in the national park and its surroundings. Very little is known about the higher elevations of the Darién Range (Serrania del Darién), which undoubtedly harbors an important biological and ecological wealth. The enhanced security situation comes with an opportunity to better understand the conservation values and status of the Colombian side of the border area.

Overall assessment of protection and management

Some Concern

The formal protection status is fully adequate and the enhanced security situation permits the dedicated protected area agency to engage in overall effective and increasingly participatory management. Law enforcement could likewise be restored to acceptable levels. Despite a clear positive trend challenges remain in terms of the relationship with indigenous and local communities, whose trust is understandably limited after decades of governmental absence and hardship. Illegal and unsustainable use of natural resources is not fully under control but does currently not constitute a fundamental threat to the property. Adequate and reliable funding and staffing and a partnership approach working with the full range of stakeholders and rights-holders are permanent requirements to ensure effective management.

► Assessment of the effectiveness of protection and management in

addressing threats outside the site

Some Concern

Besides localized illegal activities and excessive subsistence use most threats to the property originate in the surroundings. Management acknowledges this by putting considerable and increasing effort on addressing natural resource management of communities there. At the same time, the mandate and capacity of the protected area agency routinely reaches its limits, e.g. when it comes to upstream contamination and excessive river fisheries affecting the Atrato River or broader deforestation trends in the Colombian Chocó.

► Best practice examples

Los Katíos National Park deserves to be noted for two best practice examples, which will hopefully inspire similar action or at least debate elsewhere. First, in an exemplary step the State Party proactively embraced and indeed requested the inscription of the property on the List of World Heritage in Danger, which was endorsed by the World Heritage Committee in 2009. The explicitly desired Committee decision gave rise to and provided the framework for a systematic response to the very real challenges facing the property. By doing so the State Party actively drew attention to the need to step up management. Over several years of coherent efforts, the State Party has since achieved significant progress permitting the removal from the List of World Herttage in Danger in 2015. Los Katíos National Park therefore became example of the best possible use of the List of World Heritage in Danger as an instrument to acknowledge and address threats to globally important heritage. Second, Los Katíos is the location of an unfolding reconciliation effort following the past eviction of indigenous inhabitants when the national park was established in the 1970s. The indigenous Wounaan, having provided evidence of their ancestral links to what is today the national park, have used their constitutional right to live in their traditional homelands. The negotiation of rights and duties and is an enormously important practical example, which can inform one of the most decisive conservation debates, which is the balance between conservation and local resource use.

State and trend of values

Assessing the current state and trend of values

World Heritage values

▶ **Rich diversity of ecosystems, habitats and species in an exceptional biogeographic location**

High Concern
Trend:Stable

The justification is identical to the above justification of the overlapping species values. The two inscription criteria are considered intricately linked as different but inseparable levels of biodiversity.

▶ **High diversity of endemic and threatened species of flora and fauna**

High Concern
Trend:Stable

Los Katíos National Park is relatively small, albeit connected with the much larger Darién National Park in nearby Panama. The impacts of past farming and illegal logging and other inadequate resource use have undoubtedly impacted on the property's integrity of various habitats and associated species. An alarming past trend could be halted to an at least stable situation. Nevertheless, concerns remain high due to the volatility of the security situation.

Summary of the Values

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

High Concern

Trend: Stable

Following an earlier trend of well-documented concerns, the situation has been slowly but consistently improving in the years after inscription on the List of World Heritage in Danger. A coherent and decisive management response enabled the removal of the property from the List of World Heritage

in Danger. Besides this encouraging improvement the property benefits from being contiguous with the much larger Darién National Park in Panama. Nevertheless, the relatively small property remains vulnerable.

▶ Assessment of the current state and trend of other important biodiversity values

High Concern

Trend: Stable

For the freshwater biodiversity values, overall, there is a paucity of data as information is available for selected areas and species only according to the importance for local livelihoods. It is thus somewhat simplistic to suggest an overall "high concern" when many of the less accessible streams and wetlands are likely to be quite intact. Nevertheless the universally acknowledged and major decline of the main fish species targeted by local communities suggests major concerns and there is no indication that the trend could be reversed despite an unfolding management response. This massive decline of important freshwater fish stocks is therefore problematic from both a conservation and a livelihood perspective to the point of a food security concern. Regarding the overlap of high biological and cultural diversity, the overlap as such is widely acknowledged. In addition to the original indigenous inhabitants, the ethnic and cultural diversity today includes Afro-Colombian and Mestizo communities. Violent conflict has disrupted much of the social fabric and the current situation can be described as a fragile and sensitive recovery. This gives hope that the consolidation of both peace and nature conservation may enhance the options to maintain the exceptional cultural and biological diversity of the Chocó and neighbouring areas of Panama. The Wounaan community returning to the national park epitomizes this hope. It is also encouraging that conservation increasingly works with indigenous peoples and other local communities of the Chocó. This could result in a recovery of the remarkable coincidence of cultural and biological diversity in the Darién Gap. As for landscape beauty, at this point in time there are no indications of tangible threats resulting in a major deterioration of the scenic beauty of the property in the foreseeable future.

Additional information

Benefits

Understanding Benefits

► Legal subsistence hunting of wild game, Collection of wild plants and mushrooms, Fishing areas and conservation of fish stocks

Freshwater fish is of major importance in the diet and food security of local communities and thus of major local socio-economic importance. The harvesting of wild biodiversity is an integral part of local and indigenous livelihoods as it is in all resource-dependent communities in rural areas. The indigenous Wounaan in the property deserve to be mentioned as rights-holders in this regard.

Water pollution is a concern on the Atrato River, while over-exploitation of fish and shellfish is well documented in the freshwater systems of the lowlands.

► History and tradition, Sacred natural sites or landscapes, Sacred or symbolic plants or animals, Cultural identity and sense of belonging

While it is still premature to comment on the complex process of re-settling of the indigenous Wounaan community in the Cacarica River areas, it cannot be overemphasized that the legal and policy framework in place explicitly permits the return of indigenous communities to their ancestral lands in protected areas. Thereby, the protected area today has the potential to serve as a safe haven for previously displaced communities. This is arguably the most striking example of the property directly serving as an instrument to recover cultural and spiritual attachment to the land.

► Outdoor recreation and tourism

Los Katíos National Park may well develop into an attractive future

destination for tourism and recreation. At this stage, access and security impede the realization of the potential which understandably is not a management priority at this stage.

► **Importance for research**

The entire Darién Gap is of major biological, ecological, biogeographic rand anthropological research interest. Both Los Katíos National Park and Darién National Park are among the most intact areas and thus particularly suitable research areas. As the security improves, it will become easier to realize this potential.

► **Carbon sequestration, Soil stabilisation, Coastal protection, Flood prevention**

As any montane forest, the forested parts of the property contribute to all of the above environmental services.

► **Collection of timber, e.g. fuelwood, Sustainable extraction of materials (e.g. coral, shells, resin, rubber, grass, rattan, etc)**

The small number of indigenous inhabitants uses a range of timber and non-timber forest products.

Summary of benefits

Beyond the obvious conservation benefits of a protected area located in a very particular biogeographic setting which is known to harbour an exceptionally rich and rare flora and fauna, the barrier effect with respect to movement of disease and alien invasive species between the Americas is a major benefit of the property and its sister across the border, Darién National Park. As most protected areas in rural settings with resource-dependent communities, the property also contributes to local livelihoods, economies, health, energy and food security. While such use tended to be a grey area at best or was explicitly illegal in the past, changes in the Colombian Constitution and the legal and policy framework have resulted in the re-thinking of local rights and resource use. The most dramatic example being the return of the indigenous Wounaan to their ancestral lands in a national park from which they were evicted in the 1970s. It can be argued that this creates an unprecedented opportunity to link

social reconciliation with conservation in Los Katíos.

Projects

Compilation of active conservation projects

№	Organization / individuals	Project duration	Brief description of Active Projects
1	National Parks Colombia (UAESPNN), supported by WWF and USAID		Sustainable Livelihoods project targeting vegetable production, fisheries, community capacity building in organizational matters, entrepreneurial skills, and sustainable practice management; identification of alternative livelihoods; environmental education; participatory ecological restoration; threat assessment for forests.
2	National Parks Colombia (UAESPNN) supported by World Heritage Fund		Small-scale project to support management infrastructure, such as control posts and for an inter-institutional meeting to review achievements of the Emergency Action Plan (Plan Choque).
3	National Parks Colombia (UAESPNN) in cooperation with Tumarado Community Council, WWF Colombia and various research institutions		Assessment, monitoring and management of freshwater fisheries - including shellfish - as a basis for participatory management.

№	Organization / individuals	Project duration	Brief description of Active Projects
4	GEF and FAO Colombia (implementing agency)	From: 2015 To: 2019	Named "Implementing the Socio-Ecosystem Approach to Conserve and Sustainable Use Biodiversity in the Caribbean Region of Colombia (GCP/COL/041/GFF)" the project has the following objective according to the below website: "To reduce the degradation and fragmentation of strategic ecosystems in the Caribbean Region of Colombia (CRC) by implementing a strategy of socio-ecosystem connectivities that include inter-institutional articulation, territorial planning, social participation with an intercultural vision, good management of existing protected areas (PAs), creation of new PAs, and the promotion of sustainable production models." While not specifically targeting the property, Los Katíos National Park is among the protected areas benefiting from the project.

Compilation of potential site needs

№	Site need title	Brief description of potential site needs	Support needed for following years

1	Consolidation of transboundary communication, coordination and cooperation	Los Katíos National Park was formally nominated as an extension to the contiguous, much larger Darién National Park, a World Heritage property of some 580,000 hectares since 1980. There can be no doubt that the integrity and conservation of Los Katíos National Park is intricately linked to its much larger "sister park" across the international border. While challenging, it appears as though the improving security situation could open new windows for communication, coordination and cooperation across the international border based on existing efforts.
2	Embedding Los Katios National Park in the management of the broader landscape	It is widely recognized that the surroundings of the property in northwestern Colombia contain many areas of major conservation importance. The long-term integrity of the property will also depend on the conservation and management of natural resources in the entire region. There is considerable room for various complementary options to further address such questions. The improved security situation provides a window of opportunity in this regard, while also increasing pressure from interests competing with conservation, such as agriculture and forestry. A systematic assessment of areas of high conservation value near the property (gap analysis) would provide a basis for informed decision-making. Given that none of the higher, ecologically quite distinct elevations of the Colombian side of the border are formally protected beyond the status of a forest reserve, the higher parts of the Serranía del Darién appear particularly promising. Furthermore, the consolidation of a functional buffer zone for the World Heritage property could be a very useful instrument to further integrate the property into the wider landscape. In its most recent State of Conservation reporting (41COM), the State Party has signaled commitment to the consideration of such ideas and documented its willingness to coordinate these efforts with ongoing initiatives to create regional protected areas in the Colombian Chocó.
3	Addressing anthropogenic silting up of the Ciénaga La Última lagoon	As was common in the forested parts of Colombia, the Atrato River system was modified to transport logs as a part of state-promoted commercial logging operations. In this context the León River was artificially connected to the freshwater lagoon system along the lower Atrato River, today partially located in the lowlands of the property. Because the planned disruption of the artificial connection upon conclusion of the logging operations never materialized, the artificial water source has since been modifying the wetland system (Grupo de Investigación en Gestión y Modelación Ambiental GAIA et al. 2005). In addition, it leads to visible siltation which will eventually silt up the entire La Última lagoon. Furthermore, the waters of the León River are a potential source of invaisve species and contamination from chemicals used in agriculture. The authorities are aware of the challenge and have committed to explore the options to address this overdue restoration.

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