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

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

Mount Sanqingshan National Park

SITE INFORMATION

Country:
China
Inscribed in: 2008
Criteria:
(vii)

Site description:
Mount Sanqingshan National Park, a 22,950 ha property located in the west of the Huyaiyu mountain range in the northeast of Jiangxi Province (in the east of central China) has been inscribed for its exceptional scenic quality, marked by the concentration of fantastically shaped pillars and peaks: 48 granite peaks and 89 granite pillars, many of which resemble human or animal silhouettes. The natural beauty of the 1,817 metre high Mount Huaiyu is further enhanced by the juxtaposition of granite features with the vegetation and particular meteorological conditions which make for an ever-changing and arresting landscape with bright halos on clouds and white rainbows. The area is subject to a combination of subtropical monsoonal and maritime influences and forms an island of temperate forest above the surrounding subtropical landscape. It also features forests and numerous waterfalls, some of them 60 metres in height, lakes and springs. © UNESCO

SUMMARY

2017 Conservation Outlook

Good

The World Heritage values relate to the property’s extraordinary granite rock features and associated forest and atmospheric conditions under criterion (vii). These values remain intact due to the property’s natural defenses: its confined physical dimensions; an effective boundary design; inaccessible terrain; and effective management regime. Growth in tourism represents the most significant threat to Sanqingshan unless it is carefully planned and managed for in a way that is integrated with Provincial and Local development. Effective management of the property’s buffer zone is as critical as management of the more highly protected core zone. The rapid growth of uncontrolled tourists is a potential threat. Monitoring and reporting on wildlife, land use change and impact of tourism/community development need to be in place.

Current state and trend of VALUES

Good
Trend: Data Deficient

At the time of the 2008 evaluation the values for which Sanqingshan was inscribed were fully intact. The park’s delicate granite rock features were in excellent condition as were the biological values of the site. More recent data is limited; however, rapid increases in tourist numbers since inscription (over 8 million annually) may pose management challenges, yet without monitoring, the impacts thereof on the state and trend of values is unclear. Nevertheless, the area's rugged topography may limit access and human impacts.

Overall THREATS

Low Threat

Whilst there is a rapid increase in the number of tourists visiting the site, the development and implementation of a visitor management plan as a sub-plan of

the Management and Conservation Plan for MSNP would anticipate and address the need to manage the environmental impact of additional visitors. It appears that such a plan has not yet been actioned. The establishment of research and monitoring programmes to track visitor numbers and their impacts, and assess and adapt to the impacts of climate change on the park would ensure that any potential threats would be addressed, but remains to be implemented.

Overall PROTECTION and MANAGEMENT

Mostly Effective

The property has effective legal protection, a sound planning framework and as of 2011 is reported as being well managed (UNEP-WCMC, 2011). Strong government support and funding ensures that the property’s natural resources are maintained in good condition and threats are considered manageable. The most significant threat relates to the future increase in tourism, and careful and sensitive planning of the related infrastructure and access development is required. Stakeholders conclude that Mt Sanqingshan is well managed benefiting from effective management. It’s rugged inaccessible typography affords protection from outside human impact (IUCN Stakeholder Consultation, 2012). Concerns remain on tourist number control and implementation of monitoring plans.

FULL ASSESSMENT

Description of values

Values

World Heritage values

▶ **Landscape of exceptional scenic quality**
Criterion:(vii)

Mount Sanqingshan National Park's (MSNP) remarkable granite rock formations combine with diverse forest, near and distant vistas, and striking meteorological effects to create a landscape of exceptional scenic quality. The most notable aspect is the concentration of fantastically shaped pillars and peaks. The natural beauty of Mt Sanqingshan also derives from the juxtaposition of its granite features with the mountain's vegetation enhanced by meteorological conditions which create an ever-changing and arresting landscape (adapted from IUCN Evaluation, 2008; UNESCO SoOUV, 2008; UNEP-WCMC, 2011).

Other important biodiversity values

▶ **Significant biological values**

The property is geologically confined which creates an unusual ecological island of temperate forest within a subtropical landscape. Sanqingshan displays significant levels of species richness and endemism as well as a number of threatened species. 2,373 higher plant species and 401 vertebrate species have been recorded, of which 45 species are listed in the IUCN Red List. The property is also a refuge for a number of disjunct species (45 recorded species) being species of common biogeographic origin. (IUCN

Evaluation, 2008; UNEP-WCMC, 2011)

Assessment information

Threats

Current Threats

Low Threat

The park's natural resources are in good condition. Residential occupation of the property is concentrated in lower lying valley areas. Resettlement programmes appear to have been sensitively managed and are reducing human impacts on the core values. Livelihoods have mostly shifted from farming, logging and hunting to tourism. Quarrying has been discontinued and quarrying sites are progressively being rehabilitated. The major threat, however, is from the uncontrolled growing number of tourists, i.e., the designed quota of tourists, 10,000/day, is not enforced. Although logging and hunting are banned since inscription, a net loss of forest (Wang, 2017) has continued and poaching still occurs. The monitoring plan on wildlife, land use change and community development, as indicated in the World Heritage application, has not been implemented. (IUCN consultation).

► Housing/ Urban Areas

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

At the time of evaluation over 5,000 people were resident within the park and relocation programmes were moving 1,000 people to settle in other areas. Resettlement programmes appear to be sensitively handled with adequate compensation to affected residents (IUCN Evaluation, 2008). Since inscription, 1100 out of 5790 residents living inside the property have been resettled outside. Most villagers living inside the property have shifted their livelihoods from farming, logging, hunting to tourism. (Su, 2016). Logging and hunting are banned although poaching still happens (IUCN consultation,

2017).

► Mining/ Quarrying

Very Low Threat
Inside site, not applicable
Outside site

Whilst some quarrying sites still exist within the property and buffer zone, they are no longer operational and are progressively being rehabilitated. (IUCN Evaluation , 2008). Since inscription, 106 mining and logging companies in the property have been shut down (Wu 2015).

► Tourism/ Recreation Areas

Low Threat
Inside site, extent of threat not known

Two cable cars service the upper areas of the park providing access to most visitors. At the time of the 2008 evaluation associated visitor infrastructure was in place and stable and proposals for a third cable car had been rejected. Forecast tourism growth, however, poses the risk of further tourism infrastructure development (IUCN Evaluation, 2008). Since inscription, over 100,000 sq meters of tourism facilities, including hotels and restaurants, were removed to reduce tourism impacts (Wu, 2015).

► Tourism/ visitors/ recreation

High Threat
Inside site, scattered(5-15%)
Outside site

Tourism boomed since the World Heritage inscription. The tourist number increased from 1.48 million in 2008 to 8.08 million in 2013 (Su, 2016). Even though a daily limit was set at 10,000 people/day, reports indicate that the number during the peak season could reach over 80,000/day (Sanqingshan official website, 2016). Even if management improved, such a volume is a great challenge. An annual crack-down on wildlife trade is enforced. (IUCN Consultation). Overcrowding, noise and visitor safety concerns require vigilant monitoring and management to mitigate impacts and ensure a quality visitor experience. The WH Committee recommended that the State Party develop a specific visitor management sub-plan to the property’s management plan, however, it is not known if this recommendation has been

actioned (WHC 32 COM, 2008).

Potential Threats

Low Threat

The most significant potential future threat relates to the rapid increase in the number of tourists visiting the property. At present the related infrastructure is adequate but there is a need to monitor these as the numbers of visitors increase. A further potential threat could arise from pressure to develop greater road access in response to increased visitor demand. Equally careful management of the buffer zone is needed to maintain an appropriate setting for the core areas of MSNP. Climate change impacts on the ecological and meteorological values of the site are not fully understood and need further monitoring and research.

► Tourism/ visitors/ recreation

Low Threat
Inside site
Outside site

The World Heritage status of SMNP has already increased its popularity with tourists. The rapid increase in tourism could place pressure on visitor infrastructure including the narrow and potentially dangerous trail systems (as at 2008 only about 10% of visitors were accessing remote trails and use was limited to 20-30,000 walkers per year across the 50kms of remote trails). The use of loudspeakers by tour group leaders could negatively affect the experience of other park visitors. Toilet and visitor facilities need to be be upgraded with the increase of visitors. (IUCN Evaluation, 2008). Experience elsewhere in China has seen order of magnitude increases in visitation following WH inscription.

► Habitat Shifting/ Alteration

Data Deficient
Inside site

The park is potentially vulnerable in part due to the vertical zonation of plants and animals and the lack of connectivity of the area to other natural areas. The development of appropriate buffer zones and corridors could

alleviate this potential threat. (IUCN Evaluation, 2008)

► Roads/ Railroads

Data Deficient
Inside site
Outside site

The park has a relatively simple road system in low lying areas which provides access to the cable car base stations and the entry point to higher elevation walking trails. There is concern that increasing popularity will create pressure to widen roads and establish a through road system, particularly in low lying areas in the western section of the park (IUCN Evaluation, 2008).

Protection and management

Assessing Protection and Management

► Relationships with local people

Mostly Effective

Considerable efforts to inform and gain the support of locals to the conservation of this site have been made both with the conduct of a campaign around the WH nomination and via the setting up of Village Committees. However more could be done to enhance participatory approaches to management decision making. The State Party at the time of evaluation noted a successful resettlement programme was underway to remove people from more sensitive parts of the property. Resettlement programmes are sensitive and often contentious, however in this case resettled villagers appear to have been adequately compensated and appear satisfied (IUCN Evaluation, 2008). According to local government report, all residents inside the property have either been relocated or involved in tourism (Wu Baolong 2015; Su, 2016).

► Legal framework

Highly Effective

The property is state owned land and protected under a number of national

laws. It was designated a National Park in 1988 and a national Geopark in 2005. (IUCN Evaluation, 2008). Global Geopark status was awarded in 2012 (UNESCO 2014). A set of protective regulations enacted in 2006 overarch the national laws. All forest lands in the property are management by the park with compensations to resettled villagers (Wu Baolong 2015). A series of management regulations were developed after the Geopark was awarded, including land, resources, wildlife, environment and tourism. However, less is known on implementation.

► Enforcement

Mostly Effective

An annual law enforcement crack-down on wildlife trade in restaurants of tourist facilities is applied.

► Integration into regional and national planning systems

Some Concern

The park is subject to a broader Master Plan (2003-) and a more detailed Management and Conservation Plan drawn up in 2006. There are some concerns regarding consistency between these plans with respect to development proposals suggesting a need to review them for consistency. The MSNP Management Committee acts as a coordination body which brings together the various departments at State, provincial and Municipal levels who have an interest in the park. (IUCN Evaluation, 2008)

► Management system

Mostly Effective

There is high level oversight of the property’s management via the MSNP Management Committee. Although there are a number of government departments at all levels who are involved in the protection of the property, there is a clear sense of shared objectives thus ensuring a coordinated approach to the property’s management (IUCN Evaluation, 2008). More formal management effectiveness evaluation using the IUCN Framework has not been undertaken. The park has however, invested significantly in resource survey programmes (UNEP-WCMC, 2011).

► Management effectiveness

Some Concern

Management of the property is the responsibility of the Ministry of Housing Urban and Rural Development, Jiangxi Province and Shangrao Municipality with direct management delegated to the Management Committee of the MSNP. The Management Committee also acts as a coordination body bringing together the various departments of government at State, Provincial and Municipal levels who have a mandate or interest in the park. (IUCN Evaluation, 2008). Four protective zones are enshrined in management planning. The zoning system is rational and linked to use controls (UNEP-WCMC, 2011). While the effectiveness of management has not been assessed, the fact the tourist quota and monitoring plan have not been enforced or applied is perhaps an indication of the overall effectiveness of the implementation of the management plan.

► Implementation of Committee decisions and recommendations

Data Deficient

There has been no State of Conservation report for the property since its inscription nor have there been any monitoring missions or State Party Reports. Hence Sanqingshan has not come back to the WH Committee to assess follow through on the recommendations at time of inscription (WHC 32COM Decision, 2008)

► Boundaries

Highly Effective

The park boundaries are appropriately drawn to protect the naturalness of the landscape and the areas required to maintain the scenic qualities of the property. The property includes all of the granite peaks and pillars which provide the framework for its aesthetic values as well as important forest remnants and wildlife habitats. Boundaries are accurately surveyed and demarcated on the ground with more than 100 boundary markers and the buffer zone is similarly well demarcated and is actively managed in sympathy with the park (IUCN Evaluation, 2008).

► Sustainable finance

Highly Effective

At the time of the evaluation in 2008 the park was very well funded with funding received via the Central Government's five year plan. Financial contributions come also from Jiangxi Province and Shangrao Municipality. As at 2008 the State Party reported approximately 235 million USD has been invested in the park since 1990 and annual funding has increased fifteen fold in the last five years. As of 2008 these levels of funding are very high by international standards (IUCN Evaluation, 2008). There is insufficient data to assess funding levels over the past 5 years.
The annual revenue from tourism reached over 500 million RMB (Su, 2016), which should be able to support financial needs of the world heritage site management .

► Staff training and development

Mostly Effective

As at 2011 staffing levels were good with 242 reported (UNEP-WCMC, 2011). Training programmes are in place and there was a planned staff training program on WH of Jiangxi Province between 2006 and 2010, to include management staff, and approximately 100-300 people. (Management Committee MSNP, 2005). Local villagers are engaged in park jobs (IUCN Evaluation, 2008). Given that there is increasing wear on stepped and cantilevered pathways a strong maintenance team and safety culture are clearly major priorities.

► Sustainable use

Mostly Effective

The most significant threat to the park comes from the rapid growth in tourism. The park plans to manage tourism growth through maintaining access restrictions and limiting daily numbers. Tourism facilities will be developed outside the core zone. There are two cable car systems in place which focus use. As at 2008 proposals were in place to establish facilities at the cable car bases of Jinsha and Waishuangxi with natural gas powered buses used to bring in visitors who would park in buffer zone villages. Visitor numbers are monitored and access is controlled through ticket and permit

sales. Trail use is closely monitored and trails are well constructed in granite and would have the capacity to withstand larger numbers of visitors. (IUCN Evaluation, 2008).

► Education and interpretation programs

Mostly Effective

A large amount of visitor information is available and a new visitor centre in Fenshui has been built with state of the art interpretation. A new visitor centre and museum is also under construction in the south of the park. (IUCN Evaluation, 2008).

► Tourism and visitation management

Serious Concern

A large amount of visitor information is available and a new visitor centre in Fenshui has been built with state of the art interpretation. A new visitor centre and museum is also under construction in the south of the park. (IUCN Evaluation, 2008). Tourist numbers have increased dramatically since inscription, and daily and annual visitor quota are not being enforced. For example, the daily visitor quota is set at 10,000, but is reported to have exceeded 80,000 on certain days (Sanqingshan official website, 2016).

► Monitoring

Mostly Effective

Many local and international institutions monitor aspects of the site and over 300 papers on the geology and ecology of the site have been published (UNEP-WCMC, 2011). Sophisticated remote camera monitoring of visitors is conducted. At the time of evaluation IUCN advised on the need to establish research and monitoring programmes to monitor visitor numbers and their impacts, and assess and adapt to the impacts of climate change on the park including the potentially adverse impact of fire and invasive alien species on the park’s aesthetic and natural values. (IUCN Evaluation, 2008). This recommendation is yet to be implemented.

► Research

Mostly Effective

Effective research and monitoring programmes were in place in 2008 including for water and air quality, noise and visitor use. A comprehensive biodiversity survey was also completed involving 150 researchers and 20 field trips (IUCN Evaluation, 2008)

Overall assessment of protection and management

Mostly Effective

The property has effective legal protection, a sound planning framework and as of 2011 is reported as being well managed (UNEP-WCMC, 2011). Strong government support and funding ensures that the property's natural resources are maintained in good condition and threats are considered manageable. The most significant threat relates to the future increase in tourism, and careful and sensitive planning of the related infrastructure and access development is required. Stakeholders conclude that Mt Sanqingshan is well managed benefiting from effective management. It's rugged inaccessible typography affords protection from outside human impact (IUCN Stakeholder Consultation, 2012). Concerns remain on tourist number control and implementation of monitoring plans.

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

Mostly Effective

MSNP is a small but well protected site which benefits from its remote access. The management measures and impressive levels of resourcing which have been applied to the property are effectively combatting external threats. Resettlement programmes have moved some people into the surrounding buffer zone and alternative livelihoods are being developed which are linked to the park. Controls and standards are in place for village development; however, there is some concern over the mix of building styles and materials. Consistency of design and the use of traditional styles and materials are encouraged in the park's villages and buffer zone gateway communities to ensure harmony with the park's features (IUCN Evaluation, 2008).

► Best practice examples

12 hotels were removed from the park and the sites rehabilitated. This is part of a ban on overnight accommodation within the park to reduce waste and other impacts (all solid & liquid waste is removed from the park). An undertaking of this magnitude and the accompanying investment is impressive by international standards and represents a best practice example of ecological restoration and investment in conservation.

State and trend of values

Assessing the current state and trend of values

World Heritage values

► Landscape of exceptional scenic quality

Good
Trend:Data Deficient

The 2008 evaluation provided a baseline for understanding the condition and state of the park's Outstanding Universal Value. Since that time an updated WCMC Site Data sheet and limited stakeholder consultation report that values are stable. Up to date data is therefore scant however, the park's natural resources are reported to be in good condition and threats are considered manageable. There is an effective management regime in place for the park which will ensure that the property retains its aesthetic values, with a delicate balance being found between the provision of visitor access and the maintenance of the OUV of the property. (UNESCO SoOUV, 2008; UNEP-WCMC, 2011; IUCN Stakeholder consultation, 2012).

Summary of the Values

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

Good

Trend: Data Deficient

At the time of the 2008 evaluation the values for which Sanqingshan was inscribed were fully intact. The park’s delicate granite rock features were in excellent condition as were the biological values of the site. More recent data is limited; however, rapid increases in tourist numbers since inscription (over 8 million annually) may pose management challenges, yet without monitoring, the impacts thereof on the state and trend of values is unclear. Nevertheless, the area's rugged topography may limit access and human impacts.

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

Data Deficient

Trend: Data Deficient

Sanqingshan also has significant geological, biological and cultural values. Consistent with the assessment above it is assumed that biological values have equally been afforded good protection. However, forest cover has suffered a net loss between 2008 and 2014. No data are available as to the caused of this loss (Wang, 2017). Monitoring of wildlife, land use and community development is not being implemented.

Additional information

Benefits

Understanding Benefits

► History and tradition

Taoism is an ancient religious culture founded in China. Sanqingshan has been an important spiritual centre for Taoism since the East Jin Dynasty (A.D.317-A.D.420) and today historic Taoist stone structures, such as Sanqing Temple, Dragon and Tiger Palace and Wind and Storm Pagoda, remain important relics of the Taoism culture and add significantly to the

cultural landscape of Sanqingshan. (MSNP Management Committee, 2005) Mt Sanqingshan is one of eight mountain systems which are noted as comprising the sacred mountains of China.

▶ **Outdoor recreation and tourism**

According to the State Party the ongoing benefits of tourism development include revenue raising, which in turn is used for conservation and research and promotion of the scientific and aesthetic values of the Park to both the academic community, and the general public (MSNP Management Committee, 2005)

Summary of benefits

The natural features of Sanqingshan assume significant importance in Chinese and global culture and add to the broader cultural and spiritual values of the park. The park includes a diversity of physical features including a series of v-shaped valleys, numerous waterfalls up to 60 m in height, lakes and springs, and 48 granite peaks and 89 granite pillars. These natural phenomena have proven to be a significant drawcard to a huge and ever-increasing number of tourists to the site over many years. With tourism come the benefits of income generation and investment in local communities and the promotion of alternative livelihoods linked directly to the park and indirectly through goods and service provision. The property also delivers significant ongoing possibilities for research and education.

Projects

Compilation of active conservation projects

№	Organization/ individuals	Project duration	Brief description of Active Projects
1	.		.

REFERENCES

№	References
1	IUCN (2008) Evaluation Report. Mt Sanqingshan National Park. IUCN Gland, Switzerland
2	IUCN (2012). IUCN Stakeholder Consultation. IUCN, Gland, Switzerland.
3	Management Committee of Mt Sanqingshan National Park (2005). Conservation and Management Plan of Mt Sanqingshan.
4	Sanqingshan Geopark website http://www.sqsdzgy.com/index.asp
5	Shen, W. (2001) The System of Sacred Mountains in China and their Characteristics. In final report of UNESCO Expert Meeting on Asia-Pacific Sacred Mountains. UNESCO World Heritage Centre, Paris, France
6	Su M M, Wall G, Xu K., 2016. Heritage tourism and livelihood sustainability of a resettled rural community: Mount Sanqingshan World Heritage Site, China. Journal of Sustainable Tourism, 24(5): 735-757
7	Su M M, Wall G, Xu K., 2016. Tourism-induced livelihood changes at Mount Sanqingshan World Heritage Site, China. Environmental management, 57(5): 1024-1040.
8	UNEP-WCMC (2011) Site Data Sheet. Mt Sanqingshan National Park. Updated May 2011. UNEP WCMC, Cambridge, UK.
9	UNESCO (2008) Statement of Outstanding Universal Value. Mt Sanqingshan National Park. UNESCO World Heritage Centre, Paris, France
10	UNESCO (2014). http://www.globalgeopark.org/aboutGGN/list/China/6775.htm. Accessed 05 February, 2014
11	Wang Hao, 2017. China Forest Watch. China Nature Watch Report by ShanShui Conservation Center.
12	World Heritage Committee (2008). Decision 32 COM 8B.6. Quebec City, Canada
13	Wu B., 2015. Enhancing World Heritage management: a pilot model in Sanqingshan. http://itf.mafengwo.cn/client/article.php/info/?id=195913