Wadi Rum Protected Area

SITE INFORMATION

Country:
Jordan
Inscribed in: 2011
Criteria:
(iii) (v) (vii)

Site description:
The 74,000-hectare property, inscribed as a mixed natural and cultural site, is situated in southern Jordan, near the border with Saudi Arabia. It features a varied desert landscape consisting of a range of narrow gorges, natural arches, towering cliffs, ramps, massive landslides and caverns. Petroglyphs, inscriptions and archaeological remains in the site testify to 12,000 years of human occupation and interaction with the natural environment. The combination of 25,000 rock carvings with 20,000 inscriptions trace the evolution of human thought and the early development of the alphabet. The site illustrates the evolution of pastoral, agricultural and urban activity in the region. © UNESCO
SUMMARY

2014 Conservation Outlook

Good with some concerns

The conservation outlook is predominantly positive with only low level threats to the scenic World Heritage values currently identified. While a new draft management plan is awaiting approval, the 2014 joint World Heritage Centre / Advisory Bodies monitoring mission to the property recommended it be further revised. The main concern in relation to the management plan is its implementation, which has been lacking in some areas. There are some concerns over sustainable visitor management, especially given likely growing visitor numbers post inscription. The potential for increased infrastructure to support a growing tourism industry needs to be carefully managed. A successful future for Wadi Rum is dependent on managing to balance conservation of natural and cultural heritage with the maintenance of traditional livelihoods and sustainable tourism that specifically and equitably benefits the local Bedouin communities. *

For mixed sites Conservation Outlook Assessments only evaluate the natural values of these sites (criteria vii, viii, ix and x) and the overall assessment reflects the potential of a site to preserve its natural values over time.

Current state and trend of VALUES

Low Concern
Trend: Data Deficient

The current state of conservation of Wadi Rum’s world heritage scenic values is considered good and the information available indicates the current trend is stable. Low population density and lack of development impacts have helped maintain Wadi Rum in a relatively pristine and authentic condition. No major construction projects known of that might affect the exceptional scenic beauty values of the site.
Overall THREATS

Low Threat

Due to its remoteness from major population centres and its desert and mountainous nature much of Wadi Rum has been largely inaccessible or subject to subsistence usage only until relatively recently, and therefore naturally protected. Whilst there is some illegal hunting and some permitted subsistence woody fuel collection and pastoral grazing by local communities these are currently thought to be within sustainable limits. There are no commercially viable mineral resources known within the area so no actual or potential threat from mining. Unsustainable use of the fossil aquifer under the site does not directly impact it but has potential to impact on the local communities living within and around the protected area. Tourism presents the greatest current threat with unregulated off road driving by tour operators, construction of illegal campsites, and self-guided tourists causing vegetation damage and also threatening the integrity of the site. Increased impacts from a growing tourism economy, now that the site has World Heritage listing, are considered the greatest potential threat for Wadi Rum. These include inappropriate tourism infrastructure both within and adjacent to Wadi Rum and the growing impact of unregulated off road driving. There is also the potential for climate change impacts on flora and fauna dependent on the elevated mountainous areas of Wadi Rum.

Overall PROTECTION and MANAGEMENT

Mostly Effective

Wadi Rum’s protection and management has benefited significantly from support by NGOs, international aid and the national government over the few decades. The legal and governance framework is strong. Staff levels and financial resources are currently good. The visitor centre and staff administration building are relatively modern and well equipped. Wadi Rum has a good first management plan but implementation is lacking in some areas due to staff capacity particularly with regard to technical knowledge of natural and heritage management. With growing visitor numbers and associated pressures the finalization of the new draft management plan and ensuring sufficient capacity to implement it is a priority. Wadi Rum is still dependent on external technical
expertise and financial support to achieve this.
FULL ASSESSMENT

Description of values

Values

World Heritage values

▶ Spectacular desert mountain landscapes and rock formations of outstanding beauty

Criterion:(vii)

Wadi Rum protects a globally recognized iconic desert landscape. It is renowned for its spectacular series of sandstone mountains and valleys, natural arches, and the range of narrow gorges, towering cliffs, massive landslides, and dramatic cavernous weathering forms displayed. Key attributes of the aesthetic values of the property include the diversity and sheer size of its landforms, together with the mosaic of colours, vistas into both narrow canyons and very large wadis, and the scale of the cliffs. The property displays, in a protected setting, an exceptional combination of landforms resulting from drainage incision, severe weathering by salt, biological and other processes, and the undermining of steep sandstone cliffs by these weathering processes, together with the world's most spectacular networks of honeycomb weathering features. (SoOUV, 2012)

Other important biodiversity values

▶ Biodiversity values

Wadi Rum is the largest protected area in Jordan currently representing more than 60% of terrestrial protected areas nationally. (Advisory Body Evaluation, 2011) Located in the Sudanian Bio-geographical region Wadi Rum protects
ecosystems typical of this. However the high mountains present in the site (over 1700m asl) enable some unusual elements of Mediterranean Bioregions to persist here too - for example Juniper trees, Juniperus phoenica, and some Mediterranean reptiles. Wadi Rum has been identified as an Important Bird Area in the Middle East (Bird Life International, 1999). From survey records to date (2002), the Wadi Rum Protected Area is known to support 183 flora species, 26 mammals, 119 birds, 34 reptiles and 77 arthropod species. These include a number of globally threatened species. This level of species diversity is not exceptional for habitats within the Sudanian Biogeographical Region of Jordan, except in terms of bird species. A large number of the plants found in Wadi Rum (25 species) are considered to have medicinal properties and 2 plant species are endemic to Jordan. Notable fauna include the Arabian Oryx, Oryx leucoryx, - currently being reintroduced after becoming nationally extinct due to hunting, and Nubian Ibex Capra ibex nubiana - threatened with becoming nationally extinct, also due to hunting, but brought back from the brink through enforcement and captive breeding programs in other protected areas in Jordan. (4th National Report to the Convention on Biological Diversity 2009).

Assessment information

Threats

Current Threats

Low Threat

Due to its remoteness and mountainous nature much of Wadi Rum has been relatively inaccessible and therefore naturally protected until relatively recently. Whilst there is some illegal hunting and some permitted subsistence woody fuel collection and pastoral grazing by local communities these are currently thought to be within sustainable limits. There are no commercially viable mineral resources known within the area so no actual or potential threat from mining. Unsustainable use of the fossil aquifer is not believed to directly impact on the site but has potential to impact on the local communities living
within and around the protected area. Tourism presents the greatest current threat with unregulated off road driving by tour operators and self-guided tourists causing vegetation damage also threatening the integrity of the site. Lack of human waste treatment systems for Rum and for the desert campsites are also a concern.

► Housing/ Urban Areas

**Low Threat**

**Inside site**

Personal communications during the IUCN Evaluation Mission in September 2010 indicated that there were several cases of building outside the formal Rum township boundary (population approximately 1000 and areas approximately 40Ha, Advisory Body Evaluation, 2011). Pressure for tourism related infrastructure here could be expected to increase as visitor numbers grow following World Heritage Listing. Although currently a small scale issue encroachment threatens the integrity of the site. Protected area management staff have limited capacity to tackle encroachment. Enforcement lies with Aqaba Special Economic Zone Authority (ASEZA).

► Livestock Farming / Grazing

**Very Low Threat**

**Inside site**

Local community grazing use of the site is permitted. Western areas of the protected area see the highest levels of grazing activity during the spring months. At high intensities grazing can threaten both the integrity of the scenic values and the extent and condition of some biodiversity values. However monitoring indicates livestock numbers are reducing as local communities transfer to tourism-based economy. Informal monitoring of grazing occurs as part of ranger patrols. (Advisory Body Evaluation, 2011)

► Subsistence hunting

**Data Deficient**

**Inside site**

Low level subsistence hunting, particularly of Ibex, by the local Bedouin was a long established traditional use of the site. Hunting became illegal once Wadi Rum became a protected area in 1997. Ibex hunting is illegal by law in
the whole country. Personal communications with Bedouin rangers during the IUCN Evaluation Mission in September 2010 indicated that there were infrequent but ongoing cases of illegal hunting or poaching of Ibex occurring within the site. The full extent and consequent impact on the populations is not known. Compliance and enforcement are undertaken as part of ranger patrols. Effectiveness is unknown.

▶ Household Sewage/ Urban Waste Water

*Low Threat*

*Outside site*

There is currently no management of human waste for the village of Rum (current population approximately 1000). Whilst the village itself is small and excluded from the World Heritage Site Rum village is the major departure and conclusion point for tourism activities due to its location at the heart of Wadi Rum. Pollution from untreated waste from Rum threatens the integrity of the site and some of the biodiversity values in the immediate vicinity. Management of this issue is beyond the jurisdiction of the Wadi Rum protected area management staff. ASEZA have the authority over this issue but is not known if they have the capacity or intention to address the matter.

▶ Logging/ Wood Harvesting

*Very Low Threat*

*Inside site*

The Bedouin lifestyle historically depended upon the collection of firewood for domestic use. From the late 1990s the use of gas has largely replaced the use of firewood domestically thereby reducing the impact of this threat on the site substantially. Firewood is now primarily used by individuals in the local tourism industry to prepare a meal or make tea over a desert fire. 83% of the protected area is defined as a protection zone in which no wood collection is permitted allowed. (Advisory Body Evaluation, 2011)

▶ Dams/ Water Management or Use

*Very Low Threat*

*Outside site*

Wadi Rum lies just west of one of the largest groundwater resources, the Southern Desert/Disi basin, in Jordan. With low salinity it is suitable for
drinking. From the 1960’s onwards groundwater bores were established near Disi immediately North of Wadi Rum enabling these communities to grow and prosper. Water supplies for Rum have traditionally been the springs at the base of Jebel Rum. It is not known if these are supplemented now by bores. Personal communications during the IUCN Evaluation Mission in 2010 indicated a project was underway to pipe water from this fossil aquifer to Amman. Currently it is thought that there is little actual threat to the world heritage scenic values from this unsustainable use of the fossil aquifer. The management of groundwater resources is beyond the jurisdiction of the Wadi Rum protected area management staff. (Advisory Body Evaluation, 2011)

**Tourism/ visitors/ recreation**

**High Threat**

**Inside site**

Due to the nature of the site a large proportion of visitors undertake off road vehicle tours by jeep provided by the local Bedouin people as licensed tour operators. With 300,000 visitors a year (as of 2010) the impact of these tours is a threat to the both the integrity of the scenic values and the extent and condition of some biodiversity values in the fragile desert environment. Repeated driving over slow growing desert shrubs can effectively eliminate them and recovery can take a very long time. (Advisory Body Evaluation, 2011). It is likely that visitation and consequently demand for off-road based tours will increase due to the World Heritage Status. Whilst the negative impact of off road unregulated driving has been recognized in management planning as the biggest threat to the values of Wadi Rum management interventions (dedicated single track routes between key visitor sites have been determined and education and awareness raising programs for licensed tourism operators undertaken) to address the threat appear to have had limited success to date.

**Potential Threats**

**Low Threat**

Increased impacts from a growing tourism economy, now that the site has World Heritage listing, are considered the greatest potential threat for Wadi Rum. These include inappropriate tourism infrastructure both within and adjacent to Wadi Rum and the growing impact of unregulated off road driving.
There is also the potential for climate change impacts on flora and fauna dependent on the elevated mountainous areas of Wadi Rum

► **Habitat Shifting/ Alteration**  
**Data Deficient**

The unusual isolated pockets of Mediterranean bioregion flora & fauna habitat on the elevated mountain environments of Wadi Rum could be impacted by climate change induced higher temperatures and reduced rainfall. The potential loss of this habitat would have severe consequences as there is no alternative for species to shift to. However there is limited baseline data available on exactly what species currently inhabit the mountains and their tolerance of shifting climate regimes.

### Protection and management

#### Assessing Protection and Management

► **Monitoring**  
**Some Concern**

Monitoring of the scenic World Heritage values is informal which is probably adequate. With the exception of the intensively managed Arabian Oryx Re-introduction program monitoring of the biodiversity values of Wadi Rum are monitored informally as detailed monitoring objectives and protocols have not been established. It is likely that conservation objectives for biodiversity values and their management would benefit from being more evidence based.

► **Research**  
**Some Concern**

Research recommendations are incorporated and adopted in the protected area management plan. However, there are some difficulties in implementing these recommendations. Moreover, there are some concerns on how to use the results of the research programs in the decision making process especially during the implementation of the protected area management
Tourism and interpretation

Mostly Effective

Wadi Rum has benefitted significantly from US Aid Jordanian Tourism Project Siyaha and other aid initiatives focused on supporting tourism development. Tour operators are licensed and managed by the Wadi Rum protected area staff and receive training and education sessions on natural and cultural heritage. A visitor management plan for the site was developed as part of the management planning process in 2003. With tourism and visitor numbers expected to grow in coming years and visitor impacts identified as the greatest threat to the site it is critical that the 2013 updated visitor plan is fully implemented. (Advisory Body Evaluation, 2011; World Heritage Centre / ICOMOS / IUCN mission report, 2014)

Management system

Some Concern

The first management plan was prepared by the RSCN covering the period 2003 to 2007 and later extended to 2010. This plan was based on IUCN guidelines and is considered adequate for maintaining the site’s values. The zoning scheme for the Protected Area was developed through a participatory process in 2003 as part of the management plan; then was revised – based on strategic reviews, stakeholder inputs, and monitoring results – in 2009 (Advisory Body Evaluation, 2011). A draft revised management plan was awaiting approval in 2014 (World Heritage Centre / ICOMOS / IUCN mission report, 2014).

Relationships with local people

Mostly Effective

The development of the management plan was a participatory process with the local communities involved in the development of the zoning and permitted activities. Traditional subsistence grazing and fuel collection is permitted whilst hunting has been banned. Local employment is fostered with many park management staff being local Bedouin people. Local communities are accessing economic benefits of tourism through commercial nature based tourism activities such as licenced tourism operators and local
handicraft industries. (Advisory Body Evaluation, 2011)

### Legal framework and enforcement

**Mostly Effective**

The legal framework is strong with the site formally recognized as a protected area since 1997. The entirety of the property falls within a special regulation considered the strongest governance framework for a protected area in Jordan. The regulations include specific requirement for an environmental management plan. Although problematic initially traditional land tenure now reportedly coexists with official legislative gazettal of the protected area. Traditional land tenure relates to grazing use not ownership but now extends to areas covered by licensed tour operators who operate only within their traditional tribal areas. Ranger patrols include compliance and enforcement work although there is limited information on the capacity of rangers to undertake this work or the effectiveness of compliance work. The local rangers supported by staff in ASEZA staff, works closely with the local judicial system (Advisory Body Evaluation, 2011)

### Integration into regional and national planning systems

**Some Concern**

Wadi Rum is recognized as part of Jordan’s national protected area network and as such is included in periodical national protected area reporting (eg CBD report no 4). The Jordanian government has delegated management of majority of the national protected area estate to the NGO Jordanian Royal Society for the Conservation of Nature (RSCN). However due to its location within Aqaba Governorate, which is administered by the Aqaba Special Economic Zone Authority (ASEZA), management authority for Wadi Rum sits separately which raises questions about consistency of management nationally, as well as issues of capacity and an appropriate focus on natural and cultural heritage management.

### Management effectiveness

**Mostly Effective**

Wadi Rum was included in a national management effectiveness report on Jordan’s protected areas in 2009 undertaken by RSCN. This confirmed that the conservation of Wadi Rum Protected Area from the date of the
development of the first management plan has been satisfactory. (Jordan Protected Areas Management Effectiveness National Report) Nevertheless, implementation of the management plan has been lacking in some areas (World Heritage Centre / ICOMOS / IUCN mission report, 2014)

**Implementation of Committee decisions and recommendations**

**Some Concern**

There has been no evidence that the requests and recommendations of the Committee have been actioned as yet. Capacity, both in terms of skills and financial constraints, are likely limiting factors.

**Boundaries**

**Mostly Effective**

The boundaries of the property include the key cultural and natural attributes and are well designed. The boundaries of the property have been clearly defined and the 5 km buffer zone surrounding the property is adequately configured to address threats to the area arising from outside its boundaries.

**Sustainable finance**

**Mostly Effective**

A Wadi Rum Development Fund was established in 2001 to ensure the area’s financial and institutional stability. The current income from entrance fees goes to the national treasury and is reimbursed to ASEZA as an annual budget. The staff is supported by both national agencies and international aid. In 2009 the site received some JD1.3 million (US$1,834,940) for operation and management, supplemented by funds in 2006-7 from the USAID SIYAHAT tourism development project and JD1 million (US$1,411,490) from Abu Dhabi for Oryx reintroduction (Advisory Body Evaluation, 2011).

Whilst recent funding is considered adequate no information could be found on the ongoing security of aid contributions and national funding allocations.

**Staff training and development**

**Some Concern**

With over 80 staff, many being local Bedouin, staff numbers and indigenous representation are considered adequate. However staff capacity and
capabilities could be further improved, especially in administration, Oryx reintroduction and tourism units in order to effectively accomplish the protected area management objectives. (Jordan Protected Areas Management Effectiveness National Report, 2009). Recent aid projects have provided good quality staff buildings, equipment and visitor centre (Advisory Body Evaluation, 2011)

*Sustainable use*

*Mostly Effective*

Whilst there is some permitted subsistence woody fuel collection and pastoral grazing by local communities these are currently thought to be within sustainable limits.

*Education and interpretation programs*

*Mostly Effective*

The Wadi Rum visitor management plans states that ongoing site-based education programme have been established via school nature clubs in the Quweira district and other visiting schools focused on awareness raising of environmental issues

*Overall assessment of protection and management*

*Mostly Effective*

Wadi Rum’s protection and management has benefited significantly from support by NGOs, international aid and the national government over the few decades. The legal and governance framework is strong. Staff levels and financial resources are currently good. The visitor centre and staff administration building are relatively modern and well equipped. Wadi Rum has a good first management plan but implementation is lacking in some areas due to staff capacity particularly with regard to technical knowledge of natural and heritage management. With growing visitor numbers and associated pressures the finalization of the new draft management plan and ensuring sufficient capacity to implement it is a priority. Wadi Rum is still dependent on external technical expertise and financial support to achieve this.
Assessment of the effectiveness of protection and management in addressing threats outside the site

Some Concern

The National Protected Areas Management Effectiveness Report notes weak synchronization between the national law and the ASEZA special regulation for Wadi Rum. The special regulations are effective only inside the boundary of the protected area. The staff has acceptable levels of capacity/resources to enforce protected area legislation regulations but they have no legal authority outside the boundary of the protected area. Protected area staff should have a mandate from the national law to control inappropriate land use activities around the protected area boundary. (Jordan Protected Areas Management Effectiveness National Report)

Best practice examples

Nationally WRPA is considered the best example of Protected Area Management in Jordan in terms of legal and regulatory systems, human and financial resource investment and participative management

State and trend of values

Assessing the current state and trend of values

World Heritage values

Spectacular desert mountain landscapes and rock formations of outstanding beauty

Good

Trend: Stable

Low population density and lack of development impacts have helped maintain Wadi Rum in a relatively pristine and authentic condition. No major construction projects known of that might affect the exceptional scenic beauty values of the site.
Other important biodiversity values

Biodiversity values

Wadi Rum is the largest protected area in Jordan currently representing more than 60% of terrestrial protected areas nationally. (Advisory Body Evaluation, 2011) Located in the Sudanian Bio-geographical region Wadi Rum protects ecosystems typical of this. However the high mountains present in the site (over 1700m asl) enable some unusual elements of Mediterranean Bioregions to persist here too - for example Juniper trees, Juniperus phoenica, and some Mediterranean reptiles. Wadi Rum has been identified as an Important Bird Area in the Middle East (Bird Life International, 1999). From survey records to date (2002), the Wadi Rum Protected Area is known to support 183 flora species, 26 mammals, 119 birds, 34 reptiles and 77 arthropod species. These include a number of globally threatened species This level of species diversity is not exceptional for habitats within the Sudanian Biogeographical Region of Jordan, except in terms of bird species. A large number of the plants found in Wadi Rum (25 species) are considered to have medicinal properties and 2 plant species are endemic to Jordan. Notable fauna include the Arabian Oryx, Oryx leucoryx, - currently being reintroduced after becoming nationally extinct due to hunting, and Nubian Ibex Capra ibex nubiana - threatened with becoming nationally extinct, also due to hunting, but brought back from the brink through enforcement and captive breeding programs in other protected areas in Jordan. (4th National Report to the Convention on Biological Diversity 2009).

Summary of the Values

Assessment of the current state and trend of World Heritage values

Low Concern
Trend: Data Deficient

The current state of conservation of Wadi Rum’s world heritage scenic values is considered good and the information available indicates the current trend is stable. Low population density and lack of development impacts have helped maintain Wadi Rum in a relatively pristine and authentic condition. No major construction projects known of that might affect the exceptional scenic
beauty values of the site.

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

Low Concern

Trend: Data Deficient

Overall low concern about current state and trend of visitor impacts affecting biodiversity values

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**Additional information**

**Key conservation issues**

▶ **New management plan**

National

Ensure is a participatory process involving all the indigenous and local communities with traditional tenure of Wadi Rum. National government and or NGO/IGO funding (eg US Aid SIYAH) will be required. External NGO expertise (eg RSCN) to facilitate development of a new plan with local staff as a capacity building exercise

▶ **Sustainable visitor management**

National

Sustainable visitor management relating to unregulated off road driving. Probably limited in-country capacity so regional or global assistance would be required. A long term effort to raise environmental awareness required

▶ **Research and Monitoring**

National

National, regional and potentially global partnerships with research institutions appropriately funded nationally or by international aid would be required
Resourcing and capacity development

National

National, regional and potentially global partnerships would be required for an ongoing capacity building of the Wadi Rum staff and ongoing sustainable funding models.

Benefits

Understanding Benefits

Water provision (importance for water quantity and quality)

Subsistence woody fuel and pastoral grazing, medicinal plants, springs for local water supply. Large ground water basin (fossil aquifer) of drinking water quality soon to be utilized by Amman via piping project.

History and tradition, Wilderness and iconic features, Sacred natural sites or landscapes

The local Bedouin have a very strong and ongoing cultural and spiritual association with Wadi Rum.

Outdoor recreation and tourism

Nature based recreation and tourism such as rock climbing, trekking, scenic jeep driving and cultural tourism in iconic desert landscape

Summary of benefits

Wadi Rum is an iconic desert landscape where humanity can be reminded of its place in nature and be rejuvenated by wilderness values. Today many Bedouin earn their living from tourism whilst still retaining their goatherds and other elements or traditional life such as their strong connection to place.

Projects
### Compilation of active conservation projects

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<tr>
<th>№</th>
<th>Organization/individuals</th>
<th>Project duration</th>
<th>Brief description of Active Projects</th>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
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<td>No information located on active conservation projects</td>
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### Compilation of potential site needs

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<tr>
<th>№</th>
<th>Site need title</th>
<th>Brief description of potential site needs</th>
<th>Support needed for following years</th>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>.</td>
<td>A new management plan for the site is a key priority. The Jordanian Royal Society for the Conservation of Nature would be well placed to facilitate this as a capacity building exercise for local staff but would likely need external funding.</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<td>A research plan and partnership program with suitable research institutions (nationally and internationally) to deliver this is a key priority. External expertise would most likely be required to lead the development of the research plan and partnership program,. A secondment from a developed nation protected area agency could deliver this.</td>
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<td>3</td>
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<td>Capacity building to enable more sustainable management of visitors such as training and education for licenced tour operators including training in emergency management plans and environmental awareness around desert camps and off road driving.</td>
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<td>4</td>
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<td>A plan for regulation of off road vehicle use and plant and equipment (eg a grader) and suitably qualified staff to implement it. Suggest seek a grant to fund one off cost of a grader and then seek capacity building of local staff via a developed national protected area agency secondment or other means. Long term commitment to education and awareness programs is key.</td>
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# REFERENCES

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<td>1</td>
<td>Aqaba Special Economic Zone official website <a href="http://www.aqabazone.com/">www.aqabazone.com/</a></td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>UNEP-WCMC (2011) World Heritage Data Sheet on Wadi Rum Protected Area</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>UNEP-WCMC Protected Planet Website <a href="http://www.protectedplanet.net/">www.protectedplanet.net/</a></td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>UNESCO (2011) Statement of Outstanding Universal Value for Wadi Rum Protected Area and Decision 35 COM 8B.15 of the UNESCO World Heritage Committee</td>
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<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Wadi Rum Protected Area official website <a href="http://www.wadirum.jo/Index.htm">http://www.wadirum.jo/Index.htm</a></td>
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