Located on the watershed of the Río Plátano, the reserve is one of the few remains of a tropical rainforest in Central America and has an abundant and varied plant and wildlife. In its mountainous landscape sloping down to the Caribbean coast, over 2,000 indigenous people have preserved their traditional way of life. © UNESCO

SUMMARY

The conservation outlook for this World Heritage site remains critical in line with the longstanding inscription of the World Heritage List in Danger since 1996, temporarily interrupted between 2007 and 2011. While the Río Plátano Biosphere Reserve and numerous contiguous protected area in both Honduras and neighboring Nicaragua continue to harbor one of the largest and most important forest blocks of Mesomerica, adequately named the "Heart of the Corridor", the governance and management of the site remains severely constrained. In line with requests and recommendations from the World Heritage Committee, a fundamental re-visiting of the very approach and spatial configuration is required. As inscribed 38 years ago, the World Heritage site has no more legal foundation since the overlapping biosphere reserve was substantially enlarged and re-zoned in 1997. There is a need to harmonize the biosphere reserve as legally recognized and managed today with a revised World Heritage approach, benefiting from the promising efforts and achievements to accommodate local and indigenous rights and needs under the biosphere reserve umbrella. Namely, the zonation recognizing the economic reality and cultural diversity of the Mosquitia and the ongoing negotiation of access rights to natural resources and duties should be applied to the World Heritage approach. It is clear that the overall security situation is to improve to permit significant improvements of the governance and management of the World Heritage site. The efforts guiding the removal of the site from the List of World Heritage in Danger, many of which were targeted for 2020, have progressed and provide an adequate framework to integrate the lessons learned in 38 years of the existence of the site.
FULL ASSESSMENT

Description of values

Values

World Heritage values

► Exceptionally beautiful landscape comprised of large, undisturbed expanses of tropical forests, savannahs, wetlands, and beaches

Criterion:(vii)

The World Heritage site contains large expanses of closed tropical forests, savannah, wetlands, and beaches as well as numerous rivers and waterfalls. These are complemented by rugged granite mountains with impressive rock formations that produce spectacular waterfalls, and numerous rivers with scenic stretches of white water and deep, forested gorges (UNEP-WCMC, 2011).

► On-going geological processes

Criterion:(viii)

The site’s steep mountains, flat to undulating coastal plain, lagoons, and shallow marine habitats are outstanding examples of the broad range of physiographic and geomorphological features of the Caribbean coast of Central America. The on-going geological processes are visibly expressed here, especially along the dynamic coastline, the ever-changing meanders of the rivers as they hit the coastal plain, and the shifting patterns of wetlands (UNEP-WCMC, 2011).

► Key site for the on-going evolution of ecological and biological processes for the full range of Caribbean coastal terrestrial, fresh water, marine ecosystems

Criterion:(ix)

The Río Plátano Biosphere Reserve is the largest protected area and forest block in Honduras, and one of the largest in all of Central America. Its size, high degree of naturalness and contiguity with other areas of high conservation significance make it one of the last places in the sub-region where ecological and biological processes continue to evolve at a relatively large scale. Rather than an isolated fragment, the property is an integral and ecologically connected element of a much larger, relatively undisturbed natural landscape with a complex mosaic of habitats (UNEP-WCMC, 2011; Jaeger et al., 2011; AFE/COHDEFOR, 2007; IUCN, 1982).

► Exceptional diversity of ecosystems, habitats and species

Criterion:(x)

An impressive range of distinct terrestrial and coastal-marine ecosystems provide an exceptionally diverse array of habitats and species in the site and its surroundings, including into neighboring Nicaragua. The major ecological zones are wetlands, pine savannah, broadleaf forest, highland pine forest and the near-shore marine zone. At a finer resolution, at least 25 terrestrial, riverine, coastal and marine ecosystems have been distinguished (UNEP-WCMC, 2011). At the species level, the site stands out by boasting very high percentages of the Honduran and Central American fauna. This includes some 70% of the fish, and around 57% of both the birds and the reptiles of Honduras (UNEP-WCMC, 2011). As many as 39 mammal species, 377 bird species and some 200 reptiles and amphibians have been recorded, along with over 2,000 species of vascular plants. Charismatic or otherwise noteworthy species include, for example: 5 species of felines, the vulnerable giant anteater (Myrmecophaga tridactyla), the likewise vulnerable West Indian manatee (Trichechus manatus), and the spectacular caiman (Caiman crocodilus, LC). Spectacular bird species include the elusive harpy eagle (Harpia harpyja, NT), great green macaw (Ara ambiguus, EN), military macaw (Ara militaris, VU) and king vulture (Sarcoramphus papa, LC). Noteworthy reptiles include green turtle (Chelonia mydas, EN), loggerhead turtle (Caretta caretta, VU) and leatherback turtle (Dermochelys coriacea, VU). The site is also renowned for the in-situ conservation of the germplasm of valuable timber and medicinal plant
Assessment information

Threats

**Current Threats**

Lawlessness, insecurity and impunity in the region constitute significant overarching threats. Without significant efforts to re-gain governmental control, illegal activities impacting on the natural values of the site are unlikely to decrease.

**Hunting and trapping, Logging/ Wood Harvesting, Fishing / Harvesting Aquatic Resources**

*(Illegal commercial and subsistence hunting, fishing and, trade in wildlife)*

Uncontrolled resource use for subsistence and commercial purposes is widespread and includes illegal logging, poaching, fishing and trade in wildlife and plants (Jaeger et al., 2011; Global Witness, 2009; Ohnesorge et al., 2006). At the same time, indigenous peoples and local communities depend on the local natural resources so it is neither realistic nor desirable to exclude use from the entire World Heritage site. It is important to note that there are major and ongoing efforts to grant defined use rights to indigenous peoples and local communities under the umbrella of the biosphere reserve, as legally defined since 1997. Recently, inter-institutional efforts, with participation of the management authority ICF and its NGO partners (WCS), included further measures to address illegal resource use, such as joint check-points (State Party of Honduras, 2020).

**Invasive Non-Native/ Alien Species**

*(Tilapia fish introduced into coastal lagoons)*

Introduced into the coastal lagoons, tilapia fish is now common and assumed to compete with native fish (AFE/COHDEFOR, 2007). While the current status is not known, the increasing cattle ranching is typically associated with the introduction of exotic grass species, which is likely to be or become an issue in the property as it is across many of the sub-region’s protected areas (Jaeger et al., 2011).

**Logging/ Wood Harvesting**

*(Illegal logging and uncontrolled extraction of precious woods)*

There is a long and well-documented history of illegal logging in and around the World Heritage site targeting precious timber (Jaeger et al., 2001; Global Witness, 2009; Thiel et al., 2008; Ohnesorge et al., 2006). The Presidential Decree in 2011 stated the objective to actively address the challenge with modest success so far. There are, however, promising efforts to promote legal community forest management.

**War, Civil Unrest/ Military Exercises**

*(Climate of insecurity and lawlessness in the region)*

The precarious overall security situation undermines management and law enforcement and poses high threats to protected area staff and other law enforcement institutions, as well as environmental activists. Numerous illegal landing strips in and around the property are used for drug trafficking. However, a much deeper drug-related environmental impact is the related illegal land trade (Sesnie et al., 2017). The severe law enforcement deficit also extends to illegal fishing, logging and wildlife trade. The inscription of the property on the List of World Heritage in Danger drew attention to the situation and was accompanied by a Presidential Decree assigning national priority to the protection and management of the Rio Plátano Biosphere Reserve. An integrated, inter-institutional action plan has since been developed and is being partially implemented to enhance the rule of law in the region (IUCN, 1982).
Livestock Farming / Grazing

(Advancing agricultural frontier)

Very High Threat

Inside site, widespread (15-50%)

Outside site

As elsewhere in many marginalized rural areas of the Mesoamerican sub-region there is a dynamic agricultural frontier in the Honduran Mosquitia. Several factors are driving the conversion of forests. While land speculation and money laundering associated with the drug business play an important role (Sesnie et al., 2017), there is also poverty-driven expansion of agricultural land (Jaeger et al., 2011; Ohnesorge et al., 2006). The World Heritage site is particularly vulnerable in the easily accessible Northwest, Southwest and West quadrants (Jaeger et al., 2011). It is important to understand that large parts of the area inscribed as a World Heritage site in 1982 are not subject to strict protection according to the current legal framework. Some of these areas have been converted into ranches and agricultural land and cannot meet basic integrity expectations as understood in a World Heritage context. However, in the core zone of the biosphere reserve – as legally defined since 1997 – there is active law enforcement in response to occasional illegal squatting. Illegal appropriation of lands by people migrating to the region from other areas and associated deforestation remain as one of the most serious threats to the World Heritage site currently (ICF, 2020).

Renewable Energy

(Hydropower development)

Data Deficient

Outside site

The longstanding and controversial plan to construct a series of hydropower dams on the Patuca River since the 1960s appeared to be abandoned at some stage on the grounds of major environmental and social concerns and protests. However, the plans resurfaced in 2011. The report of the reactive monitoring mission at that time notes an absence of adequate impact analysis, suggesting a limited foundation for informed decision-making and mitigation planning (Jaeger et al., 2011). At the time of writing of this updated assessment the construction of the dam site is 97% complete, with the State Party of Honduras, 2020 reporting that ‘the major civil works have already been completed’. Given that the boundaries of the World Heritage site remain unclear and the absence of adequate impact assessments of the dam and associated access and transmission infrastructure, the exact threat posed to the site cannot be judged. Additionally, ‘in July 2019, the Environmental Measures Compliance Report (ICMA) was submitted in accordance with Resolution No. 2021-2008 of the Secretariat of Natural Resources and Environment containing 108 environmental mitigation measures for the Patuca III Hydroelectric Project for Environmental Control and Occupational Safety’ (State Party of Honduras, 2020). The State Party is in full readiness to comply with this recommendation and is committed to its development (State Party of Honduras, 2019).

Fire/ Fire Suppression

(Forest fires)

Low Threat

Inside site, localised (<5%)

Outside site

A pine savanna sub-montane ecosystem is located in the southern area of the Rio Plátano Biosphere Reserve. During 2018, 14 forest fires were registered, affecting a total area of 1,050 hectares (State Party of Honduras, 2019)(ICF, 2020) and a further 14 in 2019, 12 of which were on private lands (State Party of Honduras, 2020).

Potential Threats

Proposed and in principle approved hydropower development on the Patuca River through a series of large dams would in all likelihood induce fundamental change in the so far remote Honduran Mosquitia, as is well documented from large-scale infrastructure development in remote rural areas.

Renewable Energy, Roads/ Railroads, Utility / Service Lines

(Additional hydropower development)

Data Deficient

Outside site

While the current status of the three proposed and apparently approved dams on the Patuca River remains unclear, none of the projects has been cancelled. All projects would inevitably impact on the
intactness of the region. Whereas the exact impacts cannot be judged in the absence of information on the exact nature of the proposed dams and the status of planning and, in the case of Patuca III, implementation, the possible construction of any of the dams and associated access and power transmission infrastructure poses severe potential threats. It is important to understand that the lower Patuca River is the eastern boundary of the biosphere reserve as legally defined since 1997 which implies that any dam construction upriver would have direct effects on the ecology of the river constituting the boundary of the biosphere reserve.

**Overall assessment of threats**

Very High Threat

Lawlessness, insecurity and impunity in the region constitute significant overarching threats. The agricultural frontier, illegal logging and poaching all impact on the integrity of the World Heritage site and its surroundings. A planned series of large dams in the absence of adequate impact assessments, cast further shadows on the future of the still largely intact Honduran Mosquitia. Without significant efforts to re-gain governmental control, illegal activities impacting on the natural values of the site are unlikely to decrease. The inscription on the List of World Heritage in Danger provides a platform to draw attention to the situation and to develop a systematic management response.

**Protection and management**

**Assessing Protection and Management**

**Management system**

Serious Concern

In response to the second inscription on the List of World Heritage in Danger, an inter-institutional Technical Committee has been set up under a 2011 Presidential Decree on a permanent basis to coordinate national and international efforts to manage and conserve the Río Plátano Biosphere Reserve (IUCN, 2014). ICF (Instituto Nacional de Conservación y Desarrollo Forestal, Áreas Protegidas y Vida Silvestre) is the lead agency at the national level in charge of the national protected area system.

**Effectiveness of management system**

Serious Concern

Despite the effective protection of the core zone of the biosphere reserve even under adverse circumstances and temporarily promising trends (AFE/COHDEFOR, 2007), the overall security situation has been compromising the effectiveness of the management, as illustrated in the ongoing inscription on the List of World Heritage in Danger (Jaeger et al., 2011). During 2017 and 2018, the Government of Honduras continued to take actions to strengthen, improve and enhance governance in the territory, creating spaces for dialogue and following up on signed agreements of formal cooperation with indigenous peoples living in the Rio Plátano Reserve and strengthening the capacities to address the main threats of the site linked to illegal activities (State Party of Honduras, 2019).

**Boundaries**

Some Concern

A 1997 decree fundamentally revised the boundaries and zonation of the Biosphere Reserve and modified zoning patterns. However, no request was made to the World Heritage Committee to modify the boundaries of the World Heritage Property to match those of the biosphere reserve. This has led to a lack of clarity and a legal limbo regarding the boundaries of the World Heritage site versus the legal biosphere reserve. Communication is further complicated by the fact that the property bears the term “biosphere reserve” in its name even though the biosphere reserve today does not spatially coincide at all with the World Heritage inscription (IUCN, 2014; Jaeger et al., 2011). The advisory mission conducted in 2017 has been the technical basis to follow up the recommendations of the World Heritage Committee, specifically regarding the harmonization of property boundaries of Rio Plátano and the development of a proposal for a Significant Boundary Modification. It has been considered a priority to continue with the support and commitment of governmental and non-governmental institutions,
municipalities, and with special emphasis on indigenous organizations (State Party of Honduras, 2019).

▶ **Integration into regional and national planning systems**  
   **Serious Concern**

Under the umbrella of the Mesomerican Biological Corridor and specifically the debate about the “Heart of the Corridor” the World Heritage site is recognized as a highly significant contiguous complex of numerous protected areas of distinct categories on both sides of the international border between Honduras and Nicaragua (Jaeger et al., 2011). Given the important challenges in every single one of these protected areas, little priority is given to an overarching approach at the national levels, let alone the bi-lateral level.

▶ **Relationships with local people**  
   **Serious Concern**

Relationships with local people are most conflictive in areas where local resource use and strict governmental protection coincide, namely in the core zone of the biosphere reserve. The difficult security situation and limited governmental presence across large parts of the World Heritage site further limits mutual understanding and trust. Longstanding negotiation of access to resources and a revised biosphere reserve zonation recognizing local and indigenous economic and cultural needs are promising, yet have so far not been linked to the World Heritage arena. In fact, the revised zonation of the biosphere reserve has never been applied to the configuration of the World Heritage site as formally inscribed (Jaeger et al., 2011). However, agreements are now being formalized with individual resource users and communities engaged in forest management in the buffer zone of the biosphere reserve. Furthermore, land titling processes in favor of the Miskito and Pech indigenous peoples has so far resulted in the titling of more than 400,000 ha in the cultural zone of the biosphere reserve, and the ICF and Miskito and Pech peoples are starting to elaborate participatory plans (planes de vida) to guide all aspects of community life at the level of territorial councils (State Party of Honduras, 2018). The process has continued in 2019 and 2020 (State Party of Honduras, 2020).

▶ **Legal framework**  
   **Serious Concern**

Part of what today constitutes the World Heritage site was gazetted as an Archaeological National Park in 1969 (UNEP-WCMC, 2011). The spatial basis for the World Heritage inscription was a biosphere reserve as recognized by UNESCO’s Man and the Biosphere (MAB) Programme in 1979. However, the spatial configuration of the biosphere reserve was fundamentally changed in 1997. In other words, the World Heritage site, as recognized in 1982, lacks a clear legal basis: Its current boundaries overlap but do not coincide with legally recognized protected area boundaries (Jaeger et al., 2011).

▶ **Law enforcement**  
   **Serious Concern**

Law enforcement, with the notable exception of responding to invasions in the core zone of the biosphere reserve, is severely constrained due to the overall climate of lawlessness and limited governmental presence (Jaeger et al., 2011).

▶ **Implementation of Committee decisions and recommendations**  
   **Serious Concern**

World Heritage Committee decisions have been centering around responses to the status on the List of World Heritage in Danger (e.g. World Heritage Committee 2017 and 2011). The comprehensive requests and recommendations remain to be fully addressed as a basis to permit the removal of the site from the List of World Heritage in Danger. Given that the decision to develop a proposal for a Significant Boundary Modification, the Desired State of Conservation for the removal of the site from the List of World Heritage in Danger (DSOCR) will need to be updated to be consistent with the possible new boundaries (State Party of Honduras, 2019).

▶ **Sustainable use**  
   **Serious Concern**

Sustainable use of natural resources by local communities and indigenous peoples is among the key priorities in the governance and management of the site. While the laws governing illegal commercial activities in protected areas must finally be enforced, the ongoing negotiation of zonation and access to natural resources must be linked to the World Heritage discussion (IUCN, 2014; Jaeger et al., 2011).
Eventually, there must be clear rights and duties and local resource users must have say in decision-making. An Executive Agreement has been approved regarding the Regularization of Land Tenure in the buffer zone of the Río Plátano Biosphere Reserve; there has been advanced in the standardization of tools for the maintenance of FamilyUsufruct Contracts (CUF), which include a format for a Plan of Measures for Land Use Restoration (State Party of Honduras, 2018).

**Sustainable finance**

The declaration of the Río Plátano Biosphere Reserve as a national priority by the 2011 Presidential Decree mandated key institutions to give priority to implementation of the inter-institutional action plan. This implies that the financing of the implementation of the plan should be a priority. A decision has been made to use National Emergency Funds to finance initial activities. The decree also tasked the inter-agency Technical Committee with seeking and channeling international cooperation for this purpose. On-going project support in support of the Río Plátano Biosphere Reserve will complement the finance being provided through the National Emergency Fund. However, the general state of lawlessness is a major problem, and on-going efforts will have to be financed over many years if long-term impacts are to be achieved. The creation of the Kamasa Kaha Foundation has been promoted for management and mobilization of resources to implement conservation actions of the natural, cultural and archaeological heritage of Río Plátano. The agreement between the government and the foundation aims to establish an efficient mechanism for the interagency coordination and cooperation in order to achieve the governance and management of the cultural, archaeological and natural heritage, through the development of monitoring and research activities and scientific tourism (State Party of Honduras, 2019).

**Staff capacity, training, and development**

Staff is highly motivated despite often difficult and at times threatening circumstances. While capacity development is apparently underway, as part of the action plan for the defense of the Río Plátano Biosphere Reserve, to improve the capacity of national, regional and local institutions to restore the rule of law, manage natural resource use, and conserve core areas (IUCN, 2014), the effectiveness is unknown. Technical assistance and support has been given by the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) and Global Wildlife Conservation (GWC) regarding operational planning and implementation of conservation and protected measures; this support includes joint plan for 2019 to support the implementation of the Strategy for Immediate Actions for the Protection of Río Plátano and the Honduran Moskitia (State Party of Honduras, 2019).

**Education and interpretation programs**

Environmental education programs are being undertaken in local schools (IUCN, 2014; State Party of Honduras, 2020).

**Tourism and visitation management**

Despite the obvious attractiveness of the area, in particular along the Caribbean coast, tourism remains in its infancy and is restricted to a small niche of scientific and adventure tourism, primarily due to the combination of a difficult security situation and minimal infrastructure (IUCN, 2014).

**Monitoring**

The SIMONI (Sistema de Monitoreo Integral) is an exemplary platform specifically dedicated to the biosphere reserve providing information on a range of relevant indicators. As part of efforts to protect the reserve, various strategic air and ground operations have been continued in the area during 2018 and 2019 to to address different threats (State Party of Honduras, 2018, 2019).

**Research**

Over the years, there have been many individual research projects and studies on the ecology, people and the archeology of the area. Developed by the ICF, in collaboration with several national and international organizations, monitoring and research activities have focused in biological monitoring and inventory of flora and monitoring of sea turtles, felines, bats, tapir, scarlet macaw. A rapid biological
assessment concluded that the biodiversity of Ciudad Blanca, in the core zone of the Río Plátano world heritage site, is exceptional in the context of Central America, where species richness of most taxonomic groups was higher than has been observed with comparable sampling effort at other sites in Honduras and across the region more broadly. The site supports at least 43 species of conservation concern, including two Critically Endangered plants (the palm Reinhardtia gracilis and the fern Adiantum pulverulentum), the Endangered Great Green Macaw and abundant populations of the Endangered Geoffroy’s Spider Monkey and Baird’s Tapir (Larsen, 2019) and Mimon cozumelae a phyllostomid bat species, has recently been recorded in the site for the first time (Ávila-Palma et al., 2019).

### Overall assessment of protection and management

As illustrated by the ongoing inscription of the site on the List of World Heritage in Danger, the overall protection and management of Río Plátano raises serious concerns. Insecurity, lawlessness and impunity continue to compromise all conservation efforts. While the State Party is actively working on a management response in line with requests and recommendations from the World Heritage Committee and has achieved much towards the corrective measures and indicators proposed within the framework of the Desired Status of Conservation for the Removal of the List of World Heritage in Danger, much remains to be done. ICF, the institution in charge of protected area management should be equipped with all resources needed while recognizing that the challenges at hand go well beyond the scope of protected area management.

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

From a technical perspective there can be no doubt that the global conservation significance of the World Heritage site is also a function of Río Plátano being an integral part of a much larger landscape featuring numerous important protected areas in both Honduras and Nicaragua. The term “Heart of the Corridor” has been coined to illustrate the central location and importance of the transboundary landscape in the framework of the Mesomeric Biological Corridor. Until the rule of law is re-established in the region and until the governance and management of individual protected areas will meet basic standards, it is unrealistic to expect meaningful synergy from cooperation between the many protected areas. Eventually, a coordinated approach is indispensable though, if the landscape is to maintain its exceptional biological and cultural wealth.

### State and trend of values

#### Assessing the current state and trend of values

**World Heritage values**

- **Exceptionally beautiful landscape comprised of large, undisturbed expanses of tropical forests, savannahs, wetlands, and beaches**
  - **High Concern**
  - **Trend:Deteriorating**

The landscape beauty is visibly affected by the increasing areas cleared for small-scale agricultural and ranching.

- **On-going geological processes**
  - **Low Concern**
  - **Trend:Stable**

Compared to the concerns about biodiversity at all levels, geological processes are not similarly affected due to their very nature even though it can be argued that flooding and sedimentation caused by erosion stemming from forest loss and degradation can affect river morphology (IUCN, 2014).
Key site for the on-going evolution of ecological and biological processes for the full range of Caribbean coastal terrestrial, fresh water, marine ecosystems

From the perspective of the 1982 World Heritage inscription, there has been an indisputable loss and degradation of habitats and species. The advance of the agricultural frontier and associated pressures have taken a heavy toll on the integrity of the landscape. Started and proposed further hydropower dam construction further calls the future integrity into question. Nevertheless the World Heritage site continues to be part of a much larger and remote landscape shared by Honduras and Nicaragua, which continues to be an exceptionally rich conservation gem of global importance with the potential important natural processes. The situation does, however, call the configuration of the property as formally inscribed into question. Consequently, the World Heritage Committee (2011) urged the State Party "to consider the various options to redefine the boundaries of the World Heritage property to reflect the increased size of the protected area, the new zonation, and the existing land uses, in order to ensure that the property's Outstanding Universal Value can be more effectively conserved".

Exceptional diversity of ecosystems, habitats and species

Some of the area inscribed on the World Heritage List in 1982 has since been converted to agricultural land and settlements and visibly does not meet basic integrity expectations (Jaeger et al., 2011; Ohnesorge et al., 2006). At the same time, the overlapping core zone of the biosphere reserve as legally defined in 1997 continues to be covered in dense forests in its vast majority. Furthermore, there are large areas widely assumed to be of highest conservation value outside of the World Heritage site, for example towards the northeast all the way to the Nicaraguan border. A reconfiguration of the boundaries, accepting irreversible degradation in some areas while assessing the feasibility of adding areas of possibly highest conservation value elsewhere, might be the only possibility to move ahead in the current situation.

Summary of the Values

Assessment of the current state and trend of World Heritage values

Over the 35 years since inscription, the site has been subject to increasing pressures resulting in loss and degradation of forests through the advancing agricultural frontier and uncontrolled extraction of natural resources. This trend has been resulting in the inscription of the property on the List of World Heritage in Danger since 1996, briefly interrupted between 2007 and 2011. Parts of the World Heritage site have lost important conservation values whereas vast adjacent areas outside of the site are widely assumed to be much more intact than the degraded areas of the site as formally inscribed. In addition to consolidating the governmental overall presence and stepping up the participatory management, this raises the fundamental question of the adequacy of the boundaries of the World Heritage site. A reconfiguration of the boundaries, accepting irreversible degradation in some areas while assessing the feasibility of adding areas of possibly highest conservation value elsewhere, might be the only possibility to move ahead in the current situation.

Additional information

Benefits

Understanding Benefits
Collection of medicinal resources for local use, Outdoor recreation and tourism, Natural beauty and scenery

The indigenous peoples and local communities on the remote Mosquitia region, including the ones of African origin (“Afrohondureños”), largely depend on wild biodiversity as medicines. The exceptionally beautiful landscape, especially the Caribbean coast, and the archeological treasures of the site have a major tourism potential, the development of which has so far been limited by the security situation.

Importance for research, Contribution to education

As the largest and most important protected area of the country, Rio Platano Biosphere Reserve has major potential in terms of research and education. In addition to ecological research in one of the last large contiguous tracts of relatively intact forests and other ecosystems in Central America, the site has been keeping most of its archeological secrets since it was declared a National Archeological Park (Parque Arqueológico Nacional) in 1969, almost half a century ago. As in the case of tourism, one major limiting factor is the security situation.

Carbon sequestration, Soil stabilisation, Coastal protection, Flood prevention, Water provision (importance for water quantity and quality)

The forests and wetlands of the World Heritage site provide the full range of forest environmental services, including carbon sequestration. Especially the forests in the mountainous upper watershed of the Rio Platano River protect the soil and prevent flooding by buffering the torrential rains during the rainy season.

Legal subsistence hunting of wild game, Collection of wild plants and mushrooms, Fishing areas and conservation of fish stocks, Traditional agriculture, Livestock grazing areas

The World Heritage site and the larger biosphere reserve provide the full range of livelihood services for directly resource-dependent indigenous peoples and local communities inside and outside the site.

Access to drinking water

The montane forests of the core zone in the higher reaches of the Rio Platano River watershed protect a critically important water reservoir for downstream users.

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

The life, history, culture, belief system and economy of indigenous peoples and local communities is intricately linked with and dependent on the landscape, natural resources and biodiversity of the property and its surroundings. For many scientists and conservationists, the property is one of the last wild places in all of Central America.

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

Indigenous peoples and local communities use, and depend on, a wide range of biodiversity products
collected in the forests, wetlands, savannas, rivers, lagoons and the ocean.

**Tourism-related income, Provision of jobs**

The site provides limited direct income and employment in park management and tourism. This could change once the security situation may permit the realization of the tourism potential.

**Summary of benefits**

As the largest and most important protected areas in Honduras and an integral part of one of the last large-scale and mostly intact forest ecosystems of the entire Mesoamerican subregion, the World Heritage site epitomizes the many benefits of protected areas in the subregion. As most protected areas in Central America, the site is located in a marginalized and economically poor region where indigenous peoples and local communities directly depend on natural resources. While this creates a dilemma, it can also be argued that the protected areas conserve critically important benefits which would otherwise be eroding from competing land and resource use. Zonation and clear access rights are applied to approach a balance between conservation and local use and enable users to satisfy their material and cultural needs. The maintenance of significant forest cover has important benefits in terms of carbon sequestration, soil conservation and natural water regulation. The tourism potential of the site is undisputed but compromised by the security situation. Its realization would come with additional benefits, but also with new risks.

**Projects**

**Compilation of active conservation projects**

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<th>Brief description of Active Projects</th>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>BMZ-KfW</td>
<td>2017-2020. German financial assistance. Complementary Measures of the Communal Land Management and Environmental Protection in Río Plátano Project (MC-PROTEP). The objective of the MCPROTEP is to strengthen the sustainability of the results of the investments made with the PROTEP project, especially regarding the regularization of land tenure and municipal cadastre, as central issues of management and land use planning.</td>
<td><a href="http://www.prot.ep.org/acerca_04.html">http://www.prot.ep.org/acerca_04.html</a></td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>GIZ</td>
<td>2014-2019- Climate Change Adaptation in the Forestry Sector Program (CliFor) aimed for local population to improve the local situation through Community forestry in the social, economic, and environmental aspects facing the challenges of climate change.</td>
<td><a href="http://clifor.hn/biosfera-del-rio-platano/">http://clifor.hn/biosfera-del-rio-platano/</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>US Fish and Wildlife Service</td>
<td>2017-2020- Strengthening conservation management of the Río Plátano Biosphere Reserve: The purpose of this project has been to strengthen management in the Río Plátano Biosphere Reserve by supporting park guards from the national wildlife authority (ICF). Specific activities include: (1) recruitment and training of additional park rangers in operations, law enforcement monitoring tools, and forest fire management and control; (2) education and outreach activities with local communities; and (3) biological monitoring of key landscape species.</td>
<td><a href="https://www.fw">https://www.fw</a> s.gov/internatio nal/pdf/FY17-central-america-project-summaries.pdf</td>
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