

A GLOBAL OVERVIEW OF WETLAND AND MARINE PROTECTED AREAS ON THE WORLD HERITAGE LIST



A Contribution to the Global Theme Study of World Heritage Natural Sites

Prepared by Jim Thorsell, Renée Ferster Levy and Todd Sigaty

Natural Heritage Programme

IUCN

Gland, Switzerland

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Working Paper 1: Earth's Geological History - A Contextual Framework
Assessment of World Heritage Fossil Site Nominations

Working Paper 2: A Global Overview of Wetland and Marine Protected Areas
on the World Heritage List

Working Paper 3: A Global Overview of Forest Protected Areas
on the World Heritage List

Further volumes (in preparation) on biodiversity, mountains, deserts and
grasslands, and geological features.



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This working paper provides a global overview of the current coverage of existing World Heritage sites with wetland and marine values and suggests potential wetland areas which may merit future nomination to the World Heritage List. Wetlands are among the most productive natural environments on earth. They provide substantial social and economic benefits to humans as well as habitat for numerous species. With only an estimated 5.7 million sq. km of wetlands remaining in the world, they continue to be one of the most threatened biomes.

In 1996, IUCN's Natural Heritage Program began a project to prepare a global strategy for natural World Heritage sites. As part of this project, this working paper on wetlands is the second in a series of global overviews of the various biomes of the world (e.g. wetlands, forests, mountains, grasslands, etc.). These theme studies involve close co-operation with the World Conservation Monitoring Centre (WCMC) and have benefitted from the support of Australia's Department of Environment. This paper also benefitted from consultations with the professional staff based at the Ramsar Convention Secretariat.

The sites described in this inventory were divided into two lists: those that have **major** wetland and marine values and those where wetland and marine values are **secondary** to other natural values based on the criteria mentioned in the nomination for World Heritage designation. Currently, 39 World Heritage natural sites contain **major** wetland values whilst an additional 38 sites have **secondary** wetland values. The 77 total sites in this inventory represent 50 countries and range from a 19ha nature reserve in the Seychelles Islands to a 9 million ha boreal lake in the Russian Siberia to the 35 million ha Great Barrier Reef in Australia.

The annex includes a summary description of all 77 World Heritage wetland sites cross referenced with their relations with other international programs and conventions (e.g. Ramsar, Biosphere Reserves and WWF Global 200 Ecoregions). Gap analysis of the sites listed indicates that a low number of World Heritage sites with significant wetland values currently exist within Central Asia, the Middle East, the Polar regions, and the South Pacific.

It is hoped that this overview will assist IUCN in making comparative evaluations and provide the World Heritage Committee with a firmer scientific basis for making decisions on new World Heritage nominations. It will also provide State Parties with a global perspective which is useful when identifying potential World Heritage properties in their territories.

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