

Updated report on the state of conservation of the World Heritage Property ‘Western Caucasus’ (Russian Federation) (No. 900) in 2021

1. Response by the Russian Federation in accordance with the World Heritage Committee Decision 44 COM 7B.110

Response to paragraph 3 of the World Heritage Committee Decision 44 COM 7B.110:

The Russian Federation confirms that it is still considering the construction of the Lagonaki Mountain Resort in the limited area of the Lagonaki Highlands in the basin of the Sukhoi Kurdzhips River. The master plan and basic parameters of the resort are being developed in such a way as to avoid negative impacts and to ensure proper preservation of the World Heritage Universal Value. At the same time, a strategic environmental assessment of the impact of the proposed resort on the OUV of the World Heritage Property is being undertaken. Once the Resort Master Plan and Strategic Environmental Assessment have been completed, these documents will be submitted by the Russian Federation to the World Heritage Centre in accordance with Article 172 of the Operational Guidelines. In doing so, the Property will be maintained intact and the decision to proceed with construction of the Resort will only be taken if the World Heritage Committee agrees to the plans for the development of the Resort.

Response to paragraph 4 of the World Heritage Committee Decision 44 COM 7B.110:

The Russian Federation confirms that no large-scale infrastructure development is planned within the boundaries of the ‘Western Caucasus’ World Heritage Property.

Response to paragraph 5 of the World Heritage Committee Decision 44 COM 7B.110:

The Russian Federation informs that the updated information (documentation including high-resolution maps meeting the current technical requirements) on the delineation of the World Heritage Property ‘Western Caucasus’ has already been submitted to the World Heritage Centre for the consideration. The documentation takes into account the comments made by the World Heritage Centre. In particular, three enclaves in the Lagonaki Highlands area have been included into the Property; and the total area of the ‘Western Caucasus’ property within the refined boundaries exceeds by 1069.7 ha the area defined according to the nomination dossier.

Response to paragraph 6 of the World Heritage Committee Decision 44 COM 7B.110:

The Lagonaki Plateau is a part of the Caucasus State Nature Biosphere Reserve (a strictly protected area of the highest category in the Russian Federation) as a biosphere polygon

(range).^{*} However, the legal protection regime of the Lagonaki Plateau is determined not by its status of a biosphere polygon, but by the statutory protection regime. At present, the legal protection regime of the Lagonaki Plateau remains unchanged and the legal protection of the Lagonaki Plateau remains at the same sufficient level.

It should be emphasized that the possibility of economic, sport, tourist or recreational use of the polygon is determined not by the status of the biosphere polygon but by its protection regime. According to the Russian legislation (article 15 of the Constitution of the Russian Federation, parts 3 and 4 of article 10 of the Federal law of March 14, 1995 No. 33-FZ "On especially protected natural areas") a protection regime must be established on the territory of the Lagonak biosphere polygon included into the Property to ensure its conservation and its transferring to future generations in unchanged condition. Thus, economic development of the part of the Lagonaksky biosphere polygon included in the Property is not possible and is not planned.

Response to paragraph 7 of the World Heritage Committee Decision 44 COM 7B.110:

The territories of the Sochi State Nature Reserve and Sochi National Park are not part of the 'Western Caucasus' property. Under the Convention, the Russian Federation only has an obligation in relation to these areas as set out in Article 96 of the Operational Guidelines. The Russian Federation confirms that it intends to comply with the requirements of this Article.

Response to paragraph 8 of the World Heritage Committee Decision 44 COM 7B.110:

The Decision of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Adygeya of May 21, 2020, No. 97 'On reorganization of the 'Upper reaches of the rivers Pshekha and Pshekhaskha' nature monument of republican importance' does provide for the possibility of building and placing linear objects and hydraulic engineering structures, as well as the resulting logging. At the same time, the implementation of this opportunity is limited by virtue of Article 15 Part 4 of the Constitution of the Russian Federation and Article 31 Part 1 of the Federal Law of the Russian Federation of 15.07.1995 No. 101-FZ 'On International Agreements of the Russian Federation'. Thus, according to the Russian Constitution, international treaties of the Russian Federation are an integral part of its legal system. If an international treaty of the Russian Federation establishes other rules than those stipulated by law, the rules of the international treaty shall apply. According to the Federal Law 'On International Treaties of the Russian Federation', international treaties of the Russian Federation are subject to fulfilment in good faith in accordance with the terms of the international treaties themselves.

The Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage is an international treaty of the Russian Federation, and the Operational Guidelines are a normative legal document enforceable under the Convention. Thus, the construction of

^{*} The Executive Order of the Government of the Russian Federation dated 06.03.2021 No. 561-r 'On the Establishment of the Lagonaki Biosphere Range of the Caucasus State Nature Biosphere Reserve'.

any linear or hydraulic structures and related logging in an area inscribed on the World Heritage List may only be carried out if all the requirements of the Convention and the Operational Guidelines are met. If the planned activity contradicts the Convention and the Operational Guidelines, the legal system of the Russian Federation excludes the possibility of its implementation.

Thus, the Decision of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Adygea No. 97 of May 21, 2020 does not create any legal prerequisites for economic use of the Property in circumvention of the Convention and the Operational Guidelines.

Response to paragraph 9 of the World Heritage Committee Decision 44 COM 7B.110:

The Russian Federation informs that the road project to Lunnaya Polyana (Lunar Glade), which caused the 2012 mission, has been completely discontinued.

Response to paragraph 10 of the World Heritage Committee Decision 44 COM 7B.110:

The Russian Federation has proposed by letter dated 23 November 2021 to the UNESCO World Heritage Centre a joint World Heritage Centre/IUCN Reactive Monitoring missions to the property from 21 February to 4 March 2022.

2. Information on other current issues related to the property conservation

The ‘Western Caucasus’ World Heritage Property is preserved in its natural state without significant changes. The state of its natural complexes has a positive trend. Anthropogenic interference in the ecosystems of the ‘Western Caucasus’ property over the last 22 years has been minimal.

Conservation of the natural complexes of the ‘Western Caucasus’ World Heritage Property

In 2021, as well as during earlier periods, the nucleus of the nomination, the Caucasus State Nature Biosphere Reserve (93.6% of the total area of the ‘Western Caucasus’ World Heritage Property) was free of anthropogenic influence and remained in its natural state.

Minimal anthropogenic impact on remote and hard-to-reach Heritage territories is being preserved: the ‘Upper reaches of the river Tsitsa’ nature park of the Republic of Adygea (until 2020 the ‘Upper reaches of the river Tsitsa’ nature monument), the ‘Gornaya Adygea’ (*Highlands of Adygea*) nature park of the Republic of Adygea (until 2020 the ‘Upper reaches of the rivers Pshekha and Pshekhaskha’ nature monument), the ‘Bolshoi Tkhach’ nature park of the Republic of Adygea, the ‘Buiny Ridge’ nature monument of the Republic of Adygea.

Conservation of biodiversity of the ‘Western Caucasus’ World Heritage Property

1. Conservation of main landscape types:

- mountain-forest landscape: complete preservation, no economic activity;
- mountain-meadow landscape: complete preservation, no economic activity;
- mountain-meadow landscape in the biosphere ‘polygon’ of the Caucasus Reserve on the Lagonaki Plateau: the status of meadows has positive dynamics, restoration of plant communities of the Lagonaki Plateau after excessive grazing in 1980–90s is continuing;
- alpine landscape: complete preservation, no economic activity;
- water bodies: complete preservation, not used in economic activities.

2. Conservation of species and species diversity:

2.1 Species richness (species composition) is fully preserved. No loss of any species of flora or fauna has been noted. The regeneration of *Colchicum colchicum* at the expense of natural undergrowth is being observed everywhere. No outbreaks and formation of pockets of boxwood beetles (*Cydalima perspectalis* (Walker, 1859) have been recorded.

Lists of species belonging to poorly studied groups of living organisms, such as fungi and lichens, and invertebrate animals, are being added to.

2.2 The state of populations of rare species of animals and plants is not deteriorating, except for the state of seed chestnut (*Castanea sativa* Mill.) which is experiencing increasingly depressing effects of introducers: phytopathogenic fungus *Cryphonectria parasitica* and oriental chestnut nutworm (*Dryocosmus kuriphilus* Yasumatsu, 1951).

2.3 There were no negative trends in the population dynamics of the main protected mammal species as the most sensitive to anthropogenic impact. As expected, there has been a stabilisation in the numbers of these populations with an optimal spatial, sexual and age structure. This indirectly confirms the assumption that the populations of these mammal species have reached the limits of natural environmental capacity.

Management of the ‘Western Caucasus’ World Heritage Property

The management of the ‘Western Caucasus’ World Heritage Property has remained unchanged since 2020.

1. Overall control and management

Overall control and management of the ‘Western Caucasus’ World Heritage Property is carried out by the federal executive body: the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment of the Russian Federation.

2. Management of the regional protected areas within the ‘Western Caucasus’ World Heritage Property:

As in 2020, the ‘Bolshoi Tkhach’ nature park is managed directly by the Regional State Institution – the ‘Bolshoi Tkhach Nature Park – under the jurisdiction of the Department of Environmental Protection and Natural Resources of the Republic of Adygeya.

Direct management of the ‘Gornaya Adygeya’ nature park is carried out by a special regional state public institution of the Republic of Adygeya ‘Gornaya Adygeya’ Nature Park, which is under the jurisdiction of the Department for environmental protection and natural resources of the Republic of Adygeya.

The management of the ‘Upper reaches of the river Tsitsa’ nature park of the Republic of Adygeya is carried out directly by the special regional state public institution of the Republic of Adygeya – the ‘Upper reaches of the river Tsitsa’ Nature Park, which is also under the jurisdiction of the Department of environmental protection and natural resources of the Republic of Adygeya.

The ‘Buiny Ridge’ nature monument is managed directly by the executive authority of the region of the Russian Federation: the Department for Environmental Protection and Natural Resources of the Republic of Adygeya.

Regional nature areas are managed on the basis of planning documents approved by the executive authorities of the Republic of Adygeya. Financing and control over management, protection, conservation and study of these territories is carried out by the Republic of Adygeya.

3. Management of the Federal Specially Protected Natural Area within the ‘Western Caucasus’ World Heritage Property:

The Caucasus Reserve is still managed by the federal state budgetary institution ‘The Caucasus State Nature Biosphere Reserve named after Kh. G. Shaposhnikov’ under the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment of the Russian Federation.

Key management directions:

- ensuring preservation of the World Natural Heritage Property and its natural-territorial complexes;
- studying and monitoring the condition of natural-territorial complexes and their individual elements;
- forming a positive attitude of the population to the protected areas through environmental education and development of educational tourism.

The Caucasus Reserve is managed on the basis of planning documents approved by the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment of Russian Federation. Planning documents are prepared, accepted, approved, agreed, executed and kept in accordance with the existing instructions and regulations. The Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment of the Russian Federation finances and supervises all activities related to the protection, conservation and study of nature of the Caucasus Reserve.

In 2021, the following measures have been taken to ensure the regime of the Caucasus Reserve. The Caucasus reserve is being protected by a staff of state inspectors consisting of 80 state inspectors.

In 2021 the State Inspectorate of the Caucasus Reserve detected 95 violations of the protection regime of the Caucasus Reserve, including the cases of:

- unlawful presence in the territory: 82;
- unlawful hunting and fishing: 0;
- unlawful gathering of wild-growing products: 1;
- unlawful pasture of cattle: 1;
- other: 9.

3. Major changes within the World Heritage Property in question are not observed, not foreseen.