Statement of outstanding universal value - SOUV

Pirin National Park

Spread over an area of over 27,000 ha, at an altitude between 1008 and 2914 m in the Pirin Mountains, southwest Bulgaria, the site comprises diverse limestone mountain landscapes with glacial lakes, waterfalls, caves and predominantly coniferous forests. It was added to the World Heritage List in 1983. The extension now covers an area of around 40,000 ha in the Pirin Mountains, and overlaps with the Pirin National Park, except for two areas developed for tourism (skiing). The dominant part of the extension is high mountain territory over 2000m in altitude, and covered mostly by alpine meadows, rocky screes and summits.

Outstanding Universal Value

Brief synthesis

The World Heritage property covers an area of around 40,000 ha in the Pirin Mountains, southwest Bulgaria, and overlaps with the undeveloped areas of Pirin National Park. The diverse limestone mountain landscapes of the property include over 70 glacial lakes and a range of glacial landforms, with many waterfalls, rocky screes and caves. Forests are dominated by conifers, and the higher areas harbour alpine meadows below the summits. The property includes a range of endemic and relict species that are representative of the Balkan Pleistocene flora.

Criterion (vii): The mountain scenery of Pirin National Park is of exceptional beauty. The high mountain peaks and crags contrast with meadows, rivers and waterfalls and provide the opportunity to experience the aesthetics of a Balkan mountain landscape. The ability to experience remoteness and naturalness is an important attribute of the Outstanding Universal Value of the property.

Criterion (viii): The principal earth science values of the property relate to its glacial geomorphology, demonstrated through a range of features including cirques, deep valleys and over 70 glacial lakes. The mountains of the property show a variety of forms and have been developed in several different rock types. Functioning natural processes allow for study of the continued evolution of the landforms of the property, and help to understand other upland areas in the region.

Criterion (ix): The property is a good example of the continuing evolution of flora, as evidenced by a number of endemic and relict species, and the property also protects an example of a functioning ecosystem that is representative of the important natural ecosystems of the Balkan uplands. Pirin's natural coniferous forests include Macedonian Pine and Bosnian Pine, with many old growth trees. In total, there are 1,315 species of vascular plants, about one third of Bulgaria's flora, including 86 Balkan endemics, 17 Bulgarian endemics and 18 local endemics. The fauna of Pirin National Park includes 45 mammal species, including brown bear, wolf and pine marten, and 159 bird species. Pirin is also home to eight species of amphibians, eleven species of reptiles and six fish species. Although the forests are affected by some historical use, the natural functioning of the ecosystem ensures the protection of its regionally significant biodiversity values.

Integrity

The original inscription of the property in 1983 proved to be inadequate in representing and maintaining the Outstanding Universal Value of Pirin, but an extension in 2010 has addressed the issues to the best possible degree and represents the minimum area of Pirin National Park that can be considered to correspond to the requirements of Outstanding Universal Value set out in the World Heritage Convention.

The National Park is clearly defined from the point of view of its mountainous nature and ecology, and the boundaries of the property are of sufficient size to capture the natural values of Pirin. Adequate boundaries have been established through the extension of the initially inscribed property, to include the most remote areas of the interior of the National Park, and exclude adjacent areas that are not compatible with World Heritage status due to impacts on integrity from ski development. The values of the property as extended retain the attributes of a natural landscape but they closely adjoin areas subject to intensive tourism development that are a risk to the integrity of the property.

Protection and management requirements

The property is covered by national legislation which should ensure strong national protection of the values of the property, including the prevention of encroachment from adjoining development. It is essential that this legislation is rigorously enforced and is respected by all levels of government that have responsibilities in the area. The property also has an effective and functioning management plan, provided its implementation can be ensured through adequate resources to both maintain the necessary staffing levels and undertake the necessary management activities to protect and manage the property. A system of regular monitoring of the natural values of Pirin and ongoing programmes to maintain habitats and landforms in their natural state, avoid disturbance and other impacts on wildlife, and to preserve the aesthetic values of the property are required.

The World Heritage property has long been subject to tourism pressure, largely caused by the development of ski facilities and ski runs. Small ski areas were developed at Bansko, Dobrinishte and Kulinoto in the 1980s and 1990s. Activities such as night skiing, off-piste skiing and heliskiing are activities which may affect the values and integrity of the property and require rigorous control. Bansko, adjoining the property, has become one of the most rapidly developing towns in Bulgaria with hotels and holiday resorts constructed literally on the park boundary. Tourism development within and around the property has not been effectively controlled in the past including some areas that were developed within the property and caused significant damage. The management plan for the property needs to ensure a long-term priority for the protection of the natural values of Pirin, and to guard against any encroachments and impacts within the property from skiing, sporting events or other inappropriate development. Equally the planning documents that are created by national, regional and local authorities need to similarly ensure the protection of the natural values of the property, and also integrate the benefits it provides as a natural landscape to the surrounding area.

Other threats to the property include illegal logging, poaching and the use of snow mobiles and quad bikes. These uses require close monitoring, management and the enforcement of effective regulations. The management of visitor use to both prevent negative impacts and provide opportunities to experience the values of the property in a sustainable way is also an essential long term requirement for this property.

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- English
- French
- Arabic
- Chinese
- Russian
- Spanish
- Japanese
- Dutch



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Outstanding Universal Value

Brief synthesis

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