

13. Shiretoko (Japan) (N 1193)

Year of inscription on the World Heritage List 2005

Criteria (ix)(x)

Year(s) of inscription on the List of World Heritage in Danger N/A

Previous Committee Decisions see page <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1193/documents/>

International Assistance

Requests approved: 0

Total amount approved: USD 0

For details, see page <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1193/assistance/>

UNESCO Extra-budgetary Funds

N/A

Previous monitoring missions

February 2008: joint World Heritage Centre/ IUCN Reactive Monitoring mission

Factors affecting the property identified in previous reports

- Impact of river constructions including check dams and erosion control dams on salmon migration for spawning
- Other factors indicated in the 2008 Reactive Monitoring mission

Illustrative material see page <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1193/>

Current conservation issues

On 21 January 2015, the State Party submitted a report on the state of conservation of the property, which is available at <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1193/documents>. The report provides the following information in relation to issues previously noted by the Committee:

- Population recovery of the migrating group of Steller's Sea Lion in the Sea of Japan has led to the species being upgraded from Vulnerable to Near Threatened. However, the increased population size is also reported to be causing increased damage to fisheries. Culling of sea lions therefore continues based on a precautionary and adaptive approach, in order to avoid extinction risk to the species. The maximum allowable catch size has been increased from 257 in 2013/2014 to 516 in 2014/2015 for all of Hokkaido. However, the maximum allowable catch size for the Nemuro migrating group, which includes the property but is not limited to it, remains at 15;
- Monitoring of the status of salmonid migration and spawning, following modifications to 13 river structures built on five rivers in the property, was mostly completed by 2013 and the results are presented in Appendix 2 of the report. Further monitoring will take place for the periods 2013-2014 and 2019-2020;
- Despite indications of some positive impacts from modifications to the three check dams on the Rusha river, there are concerns that the recent degradation of the river bed downstream of these dams may have an adverse effect on upstream salmon runs, and that the fixation of water courses and the blockage of hyporheic flows caused by the dams reduces the number of spawning beds between them;

- No further modifications of dams on the Rusha river have taken place after the modifications of two upstream dams in 2006, but discussions are on-going on the possibility of further modifications, on the condition that a balance can be struck between improving salmon spawning and maintaining these dams' role in preventing damage from disasters to fixed net fishing grounds;
- The salmon and trout hatchery at the mouth of the Rusha river was removed in 2012.

Analysis and Conclusions of the World Heritage Centre and IUCN

The State Party's efforts to maintain a healthy population of Steller's Sea Lion are noted. Surveys of the wintering population of Steller's Sea Lion on the east coast of Shiretoko Peninsula from 2006 to 2014, as provided in the State Party report, indicate an overall population growth. However, the level of fluctuation is such that it is difficult to conclude whether or not a positive trend is currently being maintained, and a declining trend since the 2010/2011 season appears plausible. It is therefore recommended that the Committee urge the State Party to ensure that catch quotas are regularly reviewed and adjusted to maintain a stable to growing population of sea lions in the property, and in the wider seascape.

Noting that some positive impacts from the modifications of river structures are reported and consultation with local authority and communities are ongoing, there remains concern that the presence of check dams on the Rusha river, which is the most important salmon river system in the property, is having a negative impact on salmonid migration and spawning. These concerns are confirmed by the State Party in its report.

It is noted that the salmon and trout hatchery at the mouth of the Rusha river was completely removed in 2012, and that the road and bridge leading to the hatchery are not used by the public. Consequently, the role of the three check dams in disaster risk reduction is limited to the protection of a source of livelihood rather than human life. The benefits thus provided by these dams are outweighed by the impacts they are having on the Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) of the property.

The interaction between marine and terrestrial ecosystems is an integral part of the OUV of the property, and a natural migratory and spawning behavior of salmonids is considered a vital part of that interaction. Therefore, it is recommended that the Committee raise concern about the lack of progress in the implementation of further modifications to the three dams on the Rusha river, and request the State Party to continue further modifications to these dams, including consideration of :

- the option of fully removing them, including the concrete below surface level, and
- fully decommission the road and bridge leading to the former hatchery, in order to restore normal hyporheic flow and to promote river braiding and meandering to improve salmonid spawning habitat.

Given the need for detailed technical discussion, it is recommended that the Committee urge the State Party and the IUCN SSC Salmonid Specialist Group to seek a consensus based on best available science regarding the most appropriate and practicable solution. The State Party may wish to consider inviting an IUCN Advisory mission to that end.

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Decision: 39 COM 7B.13

The World Heritage Committee,

1. Having examined Document WHC-15/39.COM/7B,
2. Recalling Decision **36 COM 7B.12**, adopted at its 36th session (Saint-Petersburg, 2012),
3. Notes the State Party's efforts to maintain a healthy population of Steller's Sea Lion in the Sea of Japan and in the property, and urges the State Party to ensure that catch quotas are regularly reviewed and adjusted to maintain a stable to growing population of sea lions in the property, and in the wider seascape;
4. Notes with appreciation the reported positive impacts from the modification of river structures, however, notes with concern that no further modifications to the dams on the Rurua river have taken place as requested by the Committee at its 36th session in 2012 (Decision **36 COM 7B.12**), in particular in light of the State Party's noted concerns about negative impacts from these dams on the downstream river bed and the availability of salmonid spawning habitat;
5. Considers that a natural salmonid migration and spawning behaviour are vital for the property to serve as an "outstanding example of the interaction of marine and terrestrial ecosystems", and also considers that, with the removal of the salmon and trout hatchery at the mouth of the Rurua river in 2012, the benefits of the three check dams for disaster risk reduction are outweighed by their impacts on the Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) of the property;
6. Also urges the State Party to continue further modifications of these dams, including consideration of the option to fully remove them, in close consultation with the local authority and communities, in order to fully mitigate the impacts of the three dams on the Rurua river, to also consider the option of removing the concrete below surface level, and to fully decommission the road and bridge that lead to the former hatchery, in order to restore normal flow of surface and ground water, and to promote river braiding and meandering to improve salmonid spawning habitat;
7. Recommends the State Party and the IUCN SSC Salmonid Specialist Group to seek a consensus based on best available science regarding the most appropriate and practicable solution and to consider the possibility of inviting an IUCN Advisory Mission to the property to provide advice on these matters;

8. Also requests the State Party to submit to the World Heritage Centre, by **1 December 2016**, an updated report, including a 1-page executive summary, on the state of conservation of the property and the implementation of the above, for examination by the World Heritage Committee at its 41st session in 2017.