

Biosphere Reserves, Global Geoparks, Ramsar Sites, World Heritage Sites

A Quick Reference Guide

There are currently four globally active intergovernmental, site-based conservation and/or sustainable development instruments in operation. These are designed to encourage national governments and local communities to identify special places, and to work together in ensuring they are conserved and/or used sustainably for current and future generations. As their popularity grows, and as an increasing number of people worldwide are exposed to them in either their personal or professional lives, the potential for confusion arises.

This quick reference guide was developed to help people understand how each of these instruments functions, how they differ, and how they complement each other. As these instruments evolve over time, and as the number of sites recognized through them grows, the information included in this pamphlet may become out of date. For the most updated information, please consult each instrument's respective website.



World Heritage Convention / World Heritage properties

Year Established

Adopted in 1972

Legal framework

A legally binding instrument providing an intergovernmental framework for international cooperation for the identification and conservation of the world's most outstanding natural and cultural properties. The Convention sets out the duties of the States Parties in identifying potential properties and their role in protecting and preserving them.

Main objectives

Identification and conservation of natural and cultural sites of outstanding universal value.

Administrative arrangements

Managed under the auspices of UNESCO, with a secretariat (the World Heritage Centre) at UNESCO headquarters.

Governance structure and bodies

Countries having ratified the Convention (States Parties) have a bi-ennial General Assembly to review and decide on broader policy issues. The General Assembly elects the World Heritage Committee, comprised of 21 States Parties which meets annually to consider new nominations, to review the State of Conservation of existing sites, to carry out the administrative and policy matters related to the implementation of the Convention.

Site admission criteria

To be included on the World Heritage List, properties must be of outstanding universal value and meet at least one out of ten selection criteria. World Heritage properties are selected on the basis of six cultural and four natural criteria. Among these are: areas of unique biological diversity, and threatened species habitats. The ten criteria are explained in the **Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention**.

countries participating (Nov 2012)

190 (States Parties) have ratified the Convention.

countries with sites (Nov 2012)

157

Total # sites (Nov 2012)

745 cultural, 188 natural and 29 mixed properties

Average # of new sites / year

19 for culture, 5 for nature, 0.5 for mixed properties

Total area of sites (Nov 2012)

2,077,808 km² (natural and mixed properties)

Scientific and technical advice

The Convention recognizes three technical advisory bodies to the Convention:

- The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN)
 - The International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS)
 - The International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Resoration of Cultural property (ICCROM)
- The Advisory bodies provide the World Heritage Committee with evaluations of cultural and natural properties nominated, expert advice on conservation as well as on training activities.

Governmental obligations

By signing the Convention, each country pledges to conserve not only the World Heritage properties situated on its territory, but also to protect its national heritage for future generations.

Intergovernmental monitoring

The World Heritage Centre and Advisory Bodies maintain on-going monitoring systems throughout the year. The World Heritage Committee may request States Parties to invite a reactive monitoring mission also, usually comprised of UNESCO and one of the Advisory Bodies representatives, to carry out in-situ investigation of the state of conservation of a site so that they may report back to the Committee.

Reporting

States parties are requested to participate in periodic reporting exercises (every 6-7 years) and to respond to specific requests by the World Heritage Committee. The Committee may ask for state of conservation reports based on evidence of serious conservation concerns.

Application/nomination process

The State Party prepares a tentative list from which it nominates properties for inscription onto the World Heritage List. It prepares a detailed nomination file and submits it to the World Heritage Centre prior to an annual nomination pipeline entry deadline. The Centre reviews it for a completeness check. When complete, it is forwarded to the appropriate Advisory Bodies for both an on-site and desk top evaluation. Once a site has been evaluated, the Advisory Bodies provide a recommendation to the intergovernmental World Heritage Committee, who make the final decision in relation to its inscription.

Funding available as a result of membership

The World Heritage Centre manages the International Assistance granting mechanism. Priority is given to the most threatened properties and to low or middle income countries. International Assistance is available for nomination or tentative list preparation, conservation and management, promotion and education, and emergency support purposes.

Mechanism to encourage greater national and international cooperation on the conservation of a particular site

The World Heritage Committee may decide to inscribe a property onto the List of World Heritage in Danger when it is considered to be seriously threatened and needs protection requiring major operations and assistance. The purpose is to incite rapid and focused conservation action and to raise the conservation profile of the property both within national governmental agencies and the international community. When the identified threats have been resolved, the Committee may remove the property from the Danger List.

Mechanism for removal of a site

The World Heritage Committee may decide to remove a property from the World Heritage List during its regular meetings if it has lost its outstanding universal value.

For more information

<http://whc.unesco.org/>

Man and Biosphere Programme / Biosphere Reserves

Year Established	Approved by UNESCO in 1971
Legal framework	No international treaty governs the designation of Biosphere Reserves under the intergovernmental Man and Biosphere (MAB) Programme. UNESCO's General Conference approved the Seville Strategy and adopted the Statutory Framework of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves in 1995 which functions as the »soft legal« framework for the development and formal recognition of Biosphere Reserves.
Main objectives	Harmonized management of conservation of biological and cultural diversity and economic and social development based on local community efforts and sound science. They are raised as the principal internationally designated areas dedicated to sustainable development in the 21st century.
Administrative arrangements	Managed under the auspices of UNESCO with an international MAB Secretariat (Division of Ecological and Earth Sciences) at UNESCO Headquarters.
Governance structure and bodies	The International Co-ordinating Council of the Man and the Biosphere Programme (MAB-ICC) consists of 34 Member States elected by UNESCO's General Conference. The Council normally meets in plenary once every 12-18 months but no more than twice by biennium to guide and supervise the MAB Programme in all aspects pertaining to its implementation, scientific content, international collaboration; it decides upon new biosphere reserves and considers periodic review reports on existing biosphere reserves.
Site admission criteria	There are seven criteria that sites must fulfill to be approved as BRs related to important biological features, including biological diversity; sustainable development issues; spatial zonation supporting 3 specific functions; management arrangements; proper management mechanisms; implementation of specific research programmes contributing to the achievement of MAB programme objectives. The seven criteria are detailed in Article 4 of the Statutory framework.
# countries participating (Nov 2012)	All 193 UNESCO Member-States
# countries with sites (Nov 2012)	117
Total # sites (Nov 2012)	610
Average # of new sites / year	14
Total area of sites (Nov 2012)	573,141 km ² (June 2012)
Scientific and technical advice	The International Advisory Committee for BRs (IACBR) comprises 12 members appointed by the Director-General of UNESCO. They serve on a 4 years' term of office in their personal capacity. The IACBR advises the Director-General (DG) of UNESCO and the MAB-ICC on scientific and technical matters concerning the nomination of new sites, and changes and periodic reviews of sites already included in the WNBR. They may be asked to also advise the DG and the MAB-ICC on any other aspects of the MAB Programme.
Governmental obligations	By participating in the MAB Programme, Member States pledge to manage the site respective to the Seville Strategy and the Statutory Framework of the WNBRs and the Madrid Action Plan for Biosphere Reserves.
Intergovernmental monitoring	N/A
Reporting	Article 9 of the Statutory Framework requests Member States to undertake a periodic review of Biosphere Reserve every ten years. The IACBR analyzes the periodic review reports and provides recommendations to the MAB-ICC. The MAB-ICC endorses the recommendations, which are then submitted by the international MAB Secretariat to the MAB National Committees of the BRs concerned.
Application/nomination process	Member States send to the MAB Secretariat a nomination dossier for the proposed designation of a site as a Biosphere Reserve. A desk top evaluation of the dossier is done by the IACBR which provides recommendations to the MAB-ICC and its Bureau. The MAB-ICC and its Bureau review the nomination dossiers in light of the IACBR's recommendations and makes the final decision on approvals and designations.
Funding available as a result of membership	Some seed money is available in the UNESCO Regular Programme to develop programmes in Biosphere Reserves, complemented by donated and extra-budgetary funded projects for specific activities in Biosphere Reserves. Two research awards are available for Member States: the MAB Young Scientists Research grants to encourage research within the MAB Programme and the Michel Batisse Award which rewards outstanding management in Biosphere Reserves.
Mechanism to encourage greater national and international cooperation on the conservation of a particular site	Extra-budgetary funding can be secured by UNESCO to promote the conservation of a particular Biosphere Reserve, complemented by efforts to enhance sustainable development.
Mechanism for removal of a site	A Member State may decide to withdraw a site from the World Network of Biosphere Reserves. It officially informs the MAB Secretariat hereof, which in turn informs the MAB-ICC. The site then ceases to be part of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves.
For more information	http://mab.unesco.org



Ramsar Convention / Ramsar Sites

Year Established Adopted 1971

Legal framework A legally binding instrument embodying the commitments of its member countries to maintain the ecological character of their Wetlands of International Importance and to plan for the »wise use«, or sustainable use, of all wetlands in their territories.

Main objectives The conservation and wise use of wetlands through local and national actions and international cooperation, as a contribution towards achieving sustainable development throughout the world.

Administrative arrangements Ramsar is not administered within the United Nations system. It is managed by a stand alone secretariat hosted under contract by IUCN. UNESCO acts as the legal depository for the Convention.

Governance structure and bodies Governed by the Contracting Parties (the policy-making organ of the Convention, which meets every three years) and an 18 member Standing Committee, the inter-sessional executive body which meets yearly. The Standing Committee represents the Contracting Parties in the implementation of work of the Convention and in monitoring the activities of the Secretariat.

Site admission criteria Wetlands are selected for the List of Wetlands of International Importance on account of their international significance in terms of ecology, botany, zoology, limnology or hydrology according to nine criteria, agreed by the member states, based on their uniqueness/representativeness or their biodiversity values for waterbirds, fish, and other taxa.

countries participating (Nov 2012) 163 Contracting Parties

countries with sites (Nov 2012) 163 – At least one Ramsar Site is obligatory for every Contracting Party

Total # sites (Nov 2012) 2,062

Average # of new sites / year 65

Total area of sites (Nov 2012) 1,972,585 km²

Scientific and technical advice The Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP) is a subsidiary body of the Convention with ca. 20 volunteer members, independent experts in relevant fields who do not represent their countries on the Panel. It provides scientific and technical guidance to the Conference of the Parties, the Standing Committee, and the Ramsar Secretariat. Its individual members are appointed by the STRP Oversight Committee, and the Standing Committee has the overall responsibility for the work of the STRP.

Governmental obligations Contracting Parties commit to work actively to support the »three pillars« of the Convention: 1) ensuring the conservation and wise use of wetlands they have designated as Wetlands of International Importance, 2) including as far as possible the wise use of all wetlands in national environmental planning, and 3) consulting with other Parties about implementation of the Convention, especially in regard to transboundary wetlands, shared water systems, and shared species.

Intergovernmental monitoring N/A

Reporting Contracting Parties provide detailed National Reports for each triennial Conference of the Parties and, in addition, are required to report any significant change or likely change to the ecological character of any listed wetland in their territory as a result of technological developments, pollution or other human interference.

Application/nomination process National governments have the sole responsibility of designating their wetlands to the Ramsar List based upon agreed criteria for eligibility. In cases where designations might not clearly meet those criteria, or where existing Sites may no longer meet the criteria, the Secretariat initiates a consultative process with the Party concerned.

Funding available as a result of membership The Secretariat administers a Small Grants Fund for eligible Parties in all regions, drawn largely from voluntary contributions from Parties and others, as well as modest assistance programmes for Neotropical and African Parties funded by the United States and Switzerland respectively. All are intended to provide funding or co-funding for small-scale preparatory, conservation management, capacity-building, awareness-raising, and emergency response projects.

Mechanism to encourage greater national and international cooperation on the conservation of a particular site The Montreux Record is a register of wetland sites on the List of Wetlands of International Importance where changes in ecological character have occurred, are occurring, or are likely to occur as a result of technological developments, pollution or other human interference. The Ramsar Advisory Mission is a technical assistance mechanism which provides help to developed and developing countries alike in solving the problems or threats that make inclusion in the Montreux Record necessary.

Mechanism for removal of a site Parties may choose to restrict the boundaries of sites on the List or delete them from it by invoking their »urgent national interests« (though this has very seldom happened), but there is no mechanism for removing a Ramsar Site against the wishes of the Party concerned. A consultative process has been effective in such cases in the past.

For more information www.ramsar.org



Global Geoparks Network (GGN)

Year Established First International Geoparks Conference in 2004

Legal framework Presently a voluntary, non-legally binding network of member territories. Upon application to join the GGN, applicants accept the GGN Charter (a code of conduct and best practise) but they can voluntarily leave the network at any time. UNESCO supports Geoparks on an ad-hoc basis upon requests from individual Member States. UNESCO is currently exploring a stronger link to the GGN through the creation of a UNESCO Global Geoparks Initiative. It is anticipated that such an Initiative would adopt the same, voluntary framework.

Main objectives Promotion of the importance, significance and need for protection of geological heritage through engagement with local communities. Specifically, Geoparks engage in awareness raising and mitigation strategy development on geohazards (volcanoes, earthquakes, tsunami etc), climate change and the need for the sustainable use of our natural resources. Geoparks promote local sustainable development through geotourism.

Administrative arrangements Managed under the auspices of UNESCO with a Secretariat (Division of Ecological and Earth Sciences) at UNESCO headquarters.

Governance structure and bodies The GGN is governed by the Bureau of the Global Geoparks Network, a 12 member body elected by regional Geopark networks (such as the European Geoparks Network and Asia-Pacific Geoparks Network) or co-opted by the members of the GGN due to their experience of Geoparks. The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and the International Union for Geological Sciences (IUGS) each have a place on the GGN Bureau as do the UNESCO secretariat and its regional offices in Montevideo, Nairobi and Cairo (until such times as those regions can be represented by regional Geopark networks).

Site admission criteria Geoparks must demonstrate geological heritage of international value, though not outstanding universal value, and this is assessed by IUGS. They must also demonstrate that they have local community involvement and that they are active in the fields of education, sustainable development and conservation. Membership of the GGN is given for a 4 year period, renewable. Detailed guidelines are found in the **Operational Guidelines of the Global Geoparks Network**.

countries participating (Nov 2012) 26 participating states

countries with sites (Nov 2012) 26

Total # sites (Nov 2012) 90

Average # of new sites / year 5

Total area of sites (Nov 2012) 130,000 km²

Scientific and technical advice Scientific advice on the geological content of GGN applications is given by the International Union of Geological Sciences (IUGS). The members of the GGN elect representatives to the GGN Bureau.

Governmental obligations None. The GGN is a voluntary network and membership of the GGN does not imply any legal obligations with to the Member State, the Geopark or UNESCO.

Intergovernmental monitoring N/A

Reporting The GGN implements a strict 4-yearly revalidation exercise. This involves submission of a detailed progress report and an in-situ field inspection. Revalidation can result in renewal of membership for a further 4 year period, renewal of membership for a 2 period after identification of some issues during the revalidation exercise. After the 2 year period, a subsequent revalidation will either result in membership renewal for 4 years or loss of GGN membership.

Application/nomination process Individual territories apply directly to UNESCO with the endorsement of the appropriate national body linked to UNESCO (e.g. national commission). Membership applications may be sent to the regional secretariat for Europe. No pre-selection process exists though this is likely to change upon adoption of a UNESCO Global Geoparks Initiative.

Funding available as a result of membership No funding results directly from membership of the GGN. However, the achievement of obtaining the status of Global Geopark often results in funding being made available from local, regional or national sources. In Europe, membership of the GGN has resulted in many Geoparks availing of significant EU funds.

Mechanism to encourage greater national and international cooperation on the conservation of a particular site N/A

Mechanism for removal of a site The GGN has a strict membership revalidation exercise. Failure to meet revalidation requirements may lead to loss of GGN membership. Geoparks may leave the GGN at anytime by notifying the secretariat.

For more information <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/natural-sciences/environment/earth-sciences/geoparks/>