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French and Spanish translations available on request

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New IUCN study shows life-supporting role of natural World Heritage

Sydney, 18 November 2014 – Natural World Heritage sites are not just iconic places with exceptional nature, they also provide benefits that contribute to economies, climate stability and human well-being, according to a new study by IUCN, International Union for Conservation of Nature, released today at the IUCN World Parks Congress in Sydney, Australia.

The report highlights the economic benefits and cost-effectiveness of preserving the exceptional World Heritage values of UNESCO-listed natural areas. It also shows that the benefits provided by World Heritage sites decrease due to changes in landscape, as well as overexploitation of resources.

Funded by Germany's Federal Agency for Nature Conservation, the study is the first assessment of the benefits and ecosystem services provided by the world's natural wonders. It also presents a global analysis of carbon storage and water provided by the sites, using latest data including remote sensing, compiled by the United Nations Environment Programme's World Conservation Monitoring Centre (UNEP-WCMC).

*"The findings of this report show that natural World Heritage is much more than a list of iconic sites with outstanding biodiversity and natural beauty," says **Tim Badman, Director of IUCN World Heritage Programme**. "Recognizing their crucial role in supporting our well-being reinforces the need to boost our efforts to conserve these places."*

Two-thirds of natural sites on the UNESCO World Heritage List are crucial sources of water and about half help prevent natural disasters such as floods or landslides, according to the report. Over 90% of listed natural sites provide income from tourism and recreation, and create jobs.

For example, the total value of jobs, tourism-related income and food provided by Spain's Doñana National Park, is estimated at €570 million annually.

Australia's Great Barrier Reef generates about AUS\$ 250 million a year from fishing and provides income to traditional Aboriginal owners who play a crucial role in sustainably managing parts of the reef. Tourism revenue from the Great Barrier Reef is worth more than AUS\$ 5.2 billion annually.

South Africa's Cape Town relies on Cape Floral Protected Areas for clean water and Dominica's Morne Trois Pitons National Park provides 60% of water consumed by local communities.

In India and Bangladesh, the Sundarbans' 2,200km mangrove coastline offers flood protection, which would otherwise require an investment of US \$300 million in man-made infrastructure.

“Natural World Heritage sites enhance our lives economically, as well as socially, culturally and spiritually – the full range of benefits they provide goes far beyond monetary gain,” says Dr. Beate Jessel, President of the German Federal Agency for Nature Conservation. “It is our collective responsibility to ensure that we care for these inspiring places and maintain their values so that future generations can continue to enjoy them.”

In Australia's Kakadu National Park, shared management with the traditional Aboriginal owners combines indigenous knowledge with modern conservation practice. World Heritage values recognise 65,000 years of living Aboriginal culture that has sustained the park's globally important landscape and wildlife.

Natural World Heritage sites also contribute to global climate stability by storing significant amounts of carbon, according to the report. Forests found in World Heritage sites across the tropical regions store 5.7 billion tons of carbon, which – if released to the atmosphere – would increase greenhouse gas emissions.

Natural World Heritage sites are globally recognized as the world's most important protected areas, inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List for their unique natural values, such as the scale of natural habitats, intactness of ecological processes, viability of populations of rare species, as well as exceptional natural beauty.

The report features a total of 23 case studies, highlighting how each site provides a unique set of benefits.

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The report can be downloaded [here](#).

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NOTES TO THE EDITOR

Facts and figures

Top benefits provided by natural World Heritage sites

- 'Recreation and tourism' (93% of all sites)
- 'Aesthetic values related to beauty and scenery' (93%)
- 'Resources for building knowledge' (92%)
- 'Provision of jobs' (91%)
- 'Contribution to education' (84%)
- 'Wilderness and iconic values' (84%)

Top ecosystem services

- Water (quantity and/or quality) (66%)

Carbon sequestration (52%): World Heritage sites across the pantropical regions harbour a total of 5.7 billion tons of carbon

Soil stabilization (48%)

Flood prevention (45%)

Potentially another 20% of sites could also be providing these services.

Key case studies

Climate change regulation – [Canadian Rocky Mountains Parks](#) (Canada) and [Ibiza, Biodiversity and Culture](#) (Spain) (blue carbon)

Fisheries - [Great Barrier Reef](#) (Australia)

Water supply – Morne Trois Pitons (Dominica)

Natural hazard regulation (flood prevention, coastal protection) – [Sundarbans National Park](#) (India) and The Sundarbans (Bangladesh)

Cultural and spiritual values – [Golden Mountains of Altai](#) (Russian Federation)

Wilderness, aesthetic and inspirational values – [Laponian Area](#) (Sweden)

Ecotourism – [Wadi Al Hitan](#) (Egypt)

Knowledge and education – [Sian Ka'an Biosphere Reserve](#) (Mexico)

Food security, materials and medicinal resources - [Gunung Mulu NP](#) (Malaysia)

About IUCN's World Heritage Programme

IUCN is the advisory body to UNESCO's World Heritage Committee on nature. Working closely with its World Commission on Protected Areas (WCPA), IUCN's World Heritage Programme evaluates sites nominated to the World Heritage List, monitors the conservation state of listed sites, promotes the Convention as a leading global conservation tool, and provides support, advice and training to site managers, governments, scientists and local communities. The IUCN World Heritage Programme also promotes wider support to the implementation of the World Heritage Convention through partnerships and projects.

www.iucn.org/worldheritage

About IUCN

IUCN, International Union for Conservation of Nature, helps the world find pragmatic solutions to our most pressing environment and development challenges. IUCN's work focuses on valuing and conserving nature, ensuring effective and equitable governance of its use, and deploying nature-based solutions to global challenges in climate, food and development. IUCN supports scientific research, manages field projects all over the world, and brings governments, NGOs, the UN and companies together to develop policy, laws and best practice.

IUCN is the world's oldest and largest global environmental organization, with more than 1,200 government and NGO Members and almost 11,000 volunteer experts in some 160 countries. IUCN's work is supported by over 1,000 staff in 45 offices and hundreds of partners in public, NGO and private sectors around the world.

www.iucn.org

About UNEP-WCMC

The United Nations Environment Programme World Conservation Monitoring Centre (UNEP-WCMC) is the specialist biodiversity assessment centre of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the world's foremost intergovernmental environmental organisation. The Centre has been in operation for over 30 years, combining scientific research with practical policy advice. www.unep-wcmc.org

About BfN

The German Federal Agency for Nature Conservation (Bundesamt für Naturschutz – BfN) is the German government's scientific authority with responsibility for national and international nature conservation. BfN is one of the government's departmental research agencies and reports to the Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Building and Nuclear Safety (BMUB). The Agency provides the Ministry with professional and scientific assistance in all nature conservation and landscape management issues and in international cooperation activities. BfN furthers its objectives by carrying out related scientific research and is also in charge of a number of funding programmes. www.bfn.de