

SRI LANKA

Sinharaja Forest Reserve



II.1 Introduction

Year of Inscription 1988

Organisation Responsible for the Report

- Forest Department
Rajamalwatta Road
Battaramulla
Sri Lanka

II.2 Statement of Significance

Inscription Criteria N ii, iv

Statement of Significance

- Proposed as follows:
“Sinharaja Forest Reserve is a tropical humid evergreen rain forest 11,187 ha in extent, has high biodiversity, and is the last remaining relatively undisturbed forest in Sri Lanka. According to recent research, out of 177 woody trees and lianas found in Sinharaja, 125 (70%) were endemic.”

Status of Site Boundaries

- In 1992, an adjoining forest extension of 2,259 ha was included within the WH Site.
- A buffer zone will be established in 2002-03 as part of a UNDP/GEF ‘Boundary Demarcation’ Project.

II.3 Statement of Authenticity/Integrity

Status of Authenticity/Integrity

- The WH value is considered to have been maintained. No changes are foreseen.

II.4 Management

Administrative and Management Arrangements

- The WH area is managed directly by the Divisional Forest Officer from the Forest Dept.
- The most relevant laws include the ‘Forest Ordinance’ of 1917 which is currently “under amendment”; the ‘Fauna & Flora Protection Ordinance’ (1937); and the ‘National Heritage Wilderness Areas Act’ (1998) with special powers for World Heritage protection.

- A national steering committee co-ordinates institutions for Sinharaja as a National Wilderness Area, Biosphere Reserve (1988), and WH site.
- There are two management plans, prepared in 1985/86 and 1992/94, which emphasise conservation, scientific research, buffer zone management, benefit-sharing, and community participation.
- An updated management plan is currently under preparation.

Present State of Conservation

- Conservation interventions include: (i) biodiversity surveys; (ii) enrichment of degraded areas; (iii) reforestation of adjoining land; and (iv) acquisition of private land in Sinharaja by the Forest Dept.
- An ‘Accelerated Conservation review’ (1992) and ‘National Conservation review’ (1996) re-assessed the biodiversity & hydrological value of the forests.

Staffing and Training Needs

- Staffing level is considered adequate.
- There are 6 range officers; 11 beat forest officers, 8 field assistants, and 20 field guides at three visitor centres at Kudawa, Pitadeniya, and Morningside
- Training needs are identified in social forestry, participatory management, eco-tourism and recreation.

Financial Situation

- Annual government funding is roughly US\$ 10,500 received directly from the Forestry Sector Development Programme.
- Funding is considered inadequate.
- In 1991, the Ministry of Forestry & Environment proposed a ‘Trust Fund’ specially for the management of Sinharaja, which was not accepted by the government.
- In addition, US\$ 1 million has been allocated under the UNDP-GEF 2000-2004 ‘South West Rain Forest Conservation Project’ to develop and upgrade the park infrastructure and logistic facilities.
- Bilateral assistance include NORAD funds (1992-97).
- * International Assistance from WHF as follows: (i) 1986, US\$20,000 Training Workshop.

Access to IT

- 1 PC with no internet access.
- No GIS capacity.

Visitor Management

- In 2000, at least 12,099 school children, 9,327 domestic visitors, and 2,260 foreigners visited the site. However, due to incomplete records, the “actual figure” is likely to be significantly higher.
- There are 6 dormitories & lodges with 102 beds, 1 information centre, and 1 ‘Research Education and Extension Centre’ (REEC).
- There is an identified need for 2 new information centres, 2 dormitories and 4 lodges.
- No visitor management plan is acknowledged.

II.5 Factors Affecting the Property

Threats and Risks

- Encroachment of tea cultivation into the buffer zone area of the reserve,
- Private sector interest in redeveloping state lands,
- Increasing numbers of visitors.

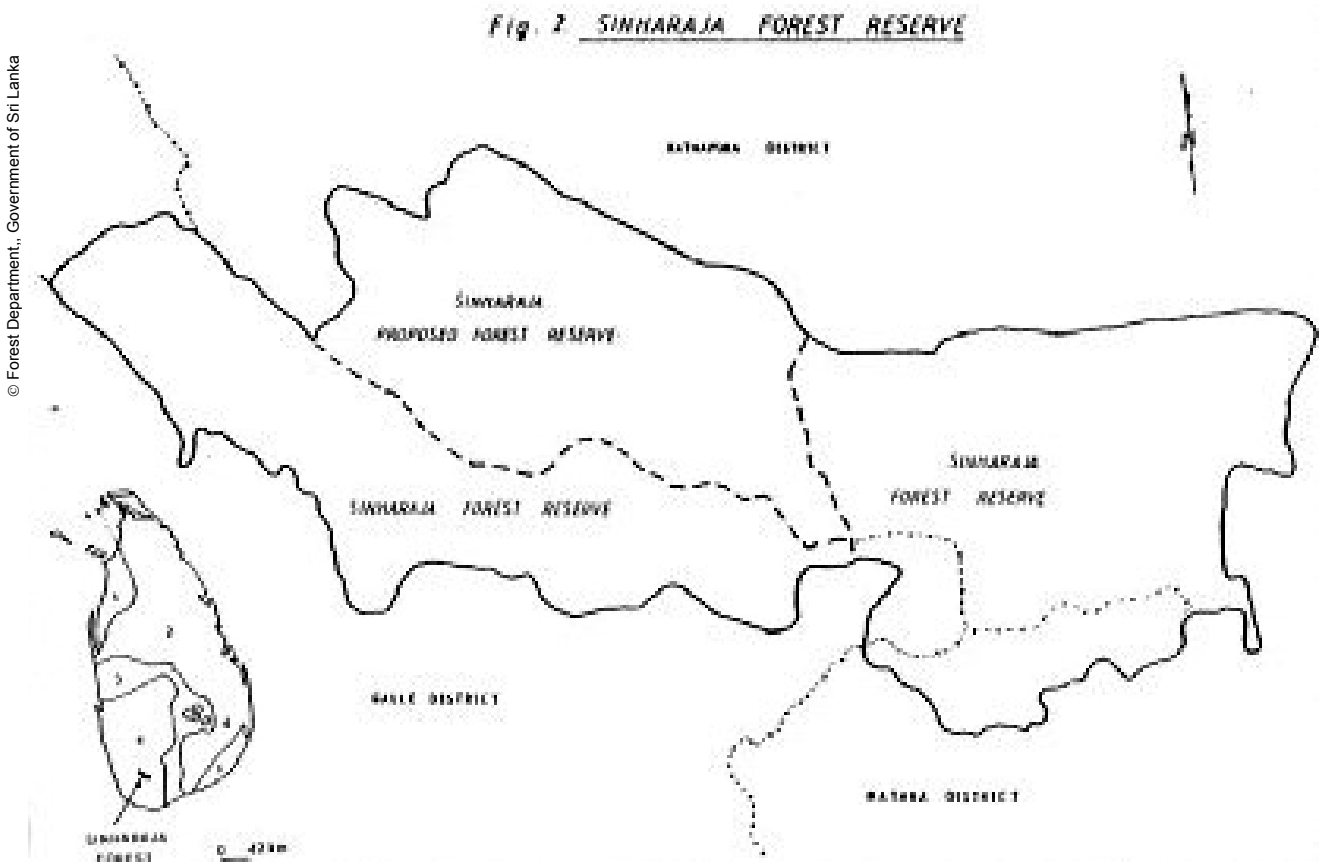
Counteractive Plans

- No emergency plan has been developed.
- The neighbouring Kanneliya Forest Reserve has been identified to provide visitor facilities and take the pressure off Sinharaja.
- The National Forest Policy of 1995 provides added emphasis on conservation of Sinharaja.
- ‘Vigilance Committees’ have been formed on a village basis in the buffer zone of Sinharaja.

II.6 Monitoring

Monitoring Arrangements

- Monthly progress reports are compiled by the Divisional Forest Officer for review at the annual progress review meeting for the park.
- The Deputy Conservator at the Forest Dept. HQ has been assigned specific responsibilities for the World Heritage Site.
- Other partners include the National Science Foundation of Sri Lanka.



Sinharaja Forest Reserve showing proposed extension (North)

Monitoring Indicators

- Indicators include: (i) visitor numbers; (ii) income generation activities; and (iii) buffer zone projects.
- A future monitoring system will also incorporate the number of encroachments and other illegal activities; research programmes; as well as visitor complaints and suggestions.

II.7 Conclusions and Recommended Actions

Conclusions and Proposed Actions

- “World Heritage values are becoming more and more important with the denudation of natural resources in the other areas of the region. More scientific research needs to be carried out covering all other disciplines such as social forestry and ethno botany.”
- Key proposed actions cover the redemarcation of boundaries, and the strengthening of Community-Based Organisations (‘Friends of Sinharaja’) for participatory management.
- Support from the WHF may be required for staff capacity development, infrastructure development, and upgrading the visitor facilities.

* State of Conservation Reports

1997 Bureau CONF.204/2B A state of conservation report on Sinharaja was prepared in connection with the meeting of the South Asian World Natural Heritage Site Managers held in January 1997. The total area of Sinharaja recognized as WH is about 8,860 ha. The Sri Lankan authorities have however extended the area of the Sinharaja National Heritage Wilderness Area to 11,187 ha to incorporate some fragments of ‘pristine’ habitats in the vicinity of the WH Area. Sinharaja continues to receive assistance from NORAD for the implementation of the Sinharaja Conservation Project with technical support from IUCN. Under the first two phases of the implementation of the management plan for Sinharaja, a range of activities, such as redefinition of the boundary, strengthening protection, increasing awareness, improving visitor facilities, buffer zone management projects, research studies and supporting community-based organizations have been undertaken. The Bureau requested IUCN and the Centre to contact Sri Lankan authorities to determine whether or not the State Party should be invited to consider increasing the total area of the WH property.

2000 Bureau CONF.202/5 The Centre and IUCN received reports in early 2000 from the Environmental Law Foundation of Sri Lanka that raised concerns over possible threats to the integrity of the property due to proposals for organic tea cultivation in a 62 hectare plot of land within the eastern border of the site. The reports were transmitted to the Permanent Delegate of Sri Lanka to UNESCO for verification and comment.

IUCN informed the Centre that the ownership of the area was not formally vested with the Forestry Dept (FD) by a gazette notification, which should have been published by the Land Reform Commission (LRC). The Provincial Council of Sabaragamuwa strongly opposed the proposal and the LRC informed the FD that the leasing out of a block of land from the buffer zone of Sinharaja for the above project had been stopped. Action in the meantime requested the LRC to formally vest the area under the FD by a gazette notification. IUCN further reported that the boundary re-survey of Sinharaja had been completed and visible permanent boundary posts were being fixed by the FD. IUCN-Sri Lanka noted that it would also be working with the FD to implement a proposed GEF-financed project to conserve Sinharaja, particularly through a programme of buffer zone development activities along the southern boundary.

(continued on page 220)

* State of Conservation Reports (continued)

The Secretariat requested the State Party to provide a detailed report on the steps taken to stop the release of land for tea farming and to prevent the recurrence of similar claims in the future. The State Party was invited to provide a full description of the buffer zone development project along the southern border for which it was applying for a GEF grant.

2000 Committee CONF.204/10 IUCN reported to the Committee that when fixing visible posts to demarcate the boundary of the property during the implementation of the conservation management plan (1988-93), it was revealed that a number of unauthorised settlements existed along the southern boundary of the forest. The FD therefore initiated action to re-demarcate the boundary, excluding the settlements. In the process, more than 1,000ha of natural forest situated along the eastern border of the site, which was not originally included in the WH site, was identified and set apart to be included as part of the Reserve. It was hoped that the State Party would nominate this area as an extension to the WH site in due course.

IUCN reviewed a letter submitted by the FD of Sri Lanka which confirmed that the process to release land to Sinharaja Plantations Organic Ltd. for a tea plantation had been stopped, and that the FD was taking steps to obtain legal ownership of the land. In addition, in a letter from the Sinharaja Plantations Organic Ltd., the company claimed that it had followed official legal processes to possess the land. The company also contested that the plantation would have any impact on the Forest Reserve as it lies 4.8 km from the boundaries of the WH site.

IUCN-Sri Lanka noted that it would be working with the FD to implement a proposed GEF-funded project to conserve the south-western rainforests of Sri Lanka, which would benefit the WH site, particularly buffer zone villages through the creation of opportunities for cottage industries based on non-timber forest products. The project would also support boundary-marking, conservation awareness among rural communities, and nature-based tourism. The Bureau noted that the FD was making efforts to reclaim the land released for organic tea farming and might encounter a legal challenge from the private enterprise concerned. The Bureau requested the Centre and IUCN to monitor further developments, and invited the State Party to report on steps taken to incorporate 1,000 ha of natural forest to the National Reserve and its eventual inclusion in the WH site.

2001 Committee CONF.208/ 10 The Committee was informed that the Director of the Centre had received an undated letter in October 2001 from Sinharaja Plantations Organic, raising preliminary objections against the reacquisition of land released earlier for Government-approved organic tea farming. The company provided a detailed explanation on why it considered the efforts of the Conservator of Forests of Sri Lanka to be unfair, and informed the Centre that it had placed the action of the Conservator before the judiciary of Sri Lanka to claim compensation. Hence, the company requested the Committee to refrain from taking any decisions concerning the parcel of land that it claimed had been legally handed over by the authorities.