



The World Heritage Program in the United States

A Quick Guide

What is a World Heritage Site?

A World Heritage Site is a natural or cultural site that demonstrates influence or significance in a global context (i.e., has “Outstanding Universal Value”), and has been inscribed on the World Heritage List by the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization’s (UNESCO) World Heritage Committee.

What is meant by the term Outstanding Universal Value?

As defined by the *Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention*, Outstanding Universal Value means that a site has cultural and/or natural significance which is so exceptional that it transcends national boundaries and is of importance to present and future generations of all humanity.

Who maintains the World Heritage List?

The list is maintained by the World Heritage Programme administered by the UNESCO World Heritage Committee. The Committee is made up of elected representatives of 21 of the current 191 countries that have signed and ratified The World Heritage Convention. These countries are referred to as State Parties.

Are there any restrictions, rules, or regulations that apply to World Heritage Sites?

Being inscribed on the World Heritage List does not regulate or place restrictions on private property or private property owners. Direct authority over individual properties remains with the national, state, tribal, or local government or private organization that owns and manages the site. National authorities routinely report to the World Heritage Committee on issues affecting the values of the Sites.

How is a site inscribed on the World Heritage List?

A site must meet one or more of the ten World Heritage Committee selection criteria, be on a State Party's Tentative List, and go through a nomination process before being considered for inscription on the World Heritage List. A site can be proposed for inscription only by the country in which the property is located.

What is the Tentative List?

The Tentative List is an inventory of natural and cultural heritage sites within its territory which a country believes meet the selection criteria and which it intends to nominate within the next 10 years. In order for a site to be nominated to the World Heritage List, it must be included on its country's Tentative List. The List may be updated at any time, but a site must be included on the Tentative List for at least one year to be considered for nomination.

Who chooses the sites for the U.S. Tentative List?

The Secretary of the Interior, through the National Park Service, is responsible for identifying sites for the United States (U.S.) Tentative List and nominating sites to the World Heritage List. Only sites already designated as National Historic Landmarks (NHLs) or National Natural Landmarks (NNLs) or otherwise officially recognized as being nationally significant (such as National Parks) are eligible for the U.S. Tentative List.



Can sites be added or recommended to the U.S. Tentative List?

The Assistant Secretary of the Interior for Fish and Wildlife and Parks, acting on behalf of the Secretary of the Interior, can add sites to the U.S. Tentative List as part of an official process for making nominations. The Department of the Interior recently announced that the current Tentative List will be revised in 2016. Anyone interested in suggesting sites should contact the National Park Service Office of International Affairs (NPS-OIA).

What are the World Heritage Committee selection criteria?

The selection criteria allow the Committee to evaluate Outstanding Universal Value of a site in order to determine if it should be inscribed on the World Heritage List. A site must meet at least one of the ten selection criteria in order to be nominated. Sites may have multiple criteria and may be mixed (both cultural and natural). The criteria are occasionally revised by the Committee.

Cultural Criteria

- I. represent a masterpiece of human creative genius.
- II. exhibit an important interchange of human values, over a span of time or within a cultural area of the world, on developments in architecture or technology, monumental arts, town planning, or landscape design.
- III. bear a unique or at least exceptional testimony to a cultural tradition or to a civilization, which is living, or which has disappeared.
- IV. be an outstanding example of a type of building, architectural or technological ensemble, or landscape, which illustrates (a) significant stage(s) in human history.
- V. be an outstanding example of a traditional human settlement, land-use, or sea-use which is representative of a culture (or cultures), or human interaction with the environment especially when it has become vulnerable under the impact of irreversible change.
- VI. be directly or tangibly associated with events or living traditions, with ideas, or with beliefs, with artistic and literary works of outstanding universal significance. (The Committee considers that this criterion should preferably be used in conjunction with other criteria).

Natural Criteria

- VII. contain superlative natural phenomena or areas of exceptional natural beauty and aesthetic importance.
 - VIII. be outstanding examples representing major stages of earth's history, including the record of life, significant on-going geological processes in the development of landforms, or significant geomorphic or physiographic features.
 - IX. be outstanding examples representing significant on-going ecological and biological processes in the evolution and development of terrestrial, fresh water, coastal and marine ecosystems, and communities of plants and animals.
 - X. contain the most important and significant natural habitats for in-situ conservation of biological diversity, including those containing threatened species of outstanding universal value from the point of view of science or conservation.
- Cultural criteria do not support nominations for associative value alone, i.e. for places associated with important people, themes or historical events.
 - Significant interactions between people and the natural environment are recognized as *cultural landscapes*.
 - The *protection, management, authenticity, and integrity* of sites are also important considerations when determining eligibility for the World Heritage List.



What is the site nomination process?

Under U.S. law, the Assistant Secretary of the Interior for Fish and Wildlife and Parks makes decisions on nominating sites from the U.S. Tentative List to the World Heritage List. The Assistant Secretary is advised by the National Park Service Office of International Affairs (NPS-OIA) and by the Federal Interagency Panel on World Heritage, representing other Federal agencies.

Nomination File: Assistant Secretary selects site from Tentative List; owner prepares nomination; nomination reviewed by NPS-OIA and Federal Interagency Panel; additional research, peer review, drafts, and public outreach prepared as needed; NPS-OIA submits nomination to World Heritage Centre for technical review; U.S. submits completed nomination and World Heritage Centre sends to the appropriate Advisory Body (ies) for evaluation.

Advisory Bodies (evaluation): Nomination independently evaluated by two Advisory Bodies to verify that proposed site meets one of the ten criteria and other requirements. If nomination is for cultural site, the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) provides the World Heritage Committee with an evaluation of the nomination. International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) evaluates natural sites.

World Heritage Committee (inscription): Receives evaluations of the nomination; makes final decision on site inscription. Committee can defer inscription and request changes to the nomination file from a State Party. Committee meets once a year to decide on inscription of nominated sites.

Who prepares a site nomination?

The primary property owner or their representative is responsible for preparing the nomination. All owners within a site's boundaries must consent to the nomination and be willing to agree to protective measures for the property. NPS-OIA provides advice and assistance on preparing a nomination.

What is the time frame for site inscription?

Because of U.S. and international (UNESCO) requirements, the process for site inscription, from selection of the site to being inscribed on the World Heritage List, is several years at a minimum.

More information

For more information about U.S. World Heritage Sites, the Tentative List, and the nomination process visit the Office of International Affairs on the National Park Service's website at:
<https://www.nps.gov/subjects/internationalcooperation/worldheritage.htm>

For a more in-depth discussion of World Heritage Sites and the expectations for nomination documents, refer to the resource manual on *Preparing World Heritage Nominations*, a publication of the UNESCO World Heritage Centre, at: <http://whc.unesco.org/en/preparing-world-heritage-nominations/>