

CURONIAN SPIT MISSION REPORT

**Report on an ICOMOS-IUCN Advisory Mission to the Curonian Spit, Lithuania
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Introduction:

The Lithuanian State party to the World Heritage Convention invited in July 2009 a joint ICOMOS / IUCN mission to the Lithuanian part of the Curonian Spit World Heritage site. The mission was organised by the UNESCO national committee and the directorate of the Curonian Spit National Park.

The property has faced problems in the past, as recorded in the different reports to, and discussion at, several UNESCO World Heritage Committee meetings concerning environmental aspects and international cooperation between Lithuania and the Russian Federation.

The mission was invited to consider different issues that have appeared in the last few years in the Lithuanian part of the property (the Curonian Spit National Park) related to new Municipal master plans for the Neringa and Klaipeda Municipalities and revisions in the National Park Plan related to proposed zoning. The fundamental question that the mission was asked to address was whether the current general plans of the Neringa and Klaipeda municipalities and the revised management plan of the Curonian Spit National Park, together still meet the management requirements of the World Heritage property that were considered to be met at the time of inscription. The Mission was also asked to present suggestions as to how the overall World Heritage property, including the part within the territory of the Russian Federation, might be enhanced.

The Brief for the mission is attached as Annex 1.

During two days in the field the mission met all the important players; though two days is relatively short, the documentation presented and the structure of the visit allowed appreciation of the key issues. The situation with many, and sometimes contradictory expectations, is not a new thing in World Heritage properties. What became clear is that the Curonian peninsula has an iconic status in Lithuania, as demonstrated by the interest of the journalists, and the media in the mission.

It is hope that this advisory report will assist the State Party in identifying solutions to accommodate the different needs and wishes of the local actors in a way that is compatible with sustaining the outstanding universal value of the cultural landscape that has been inscribed on the World Heritage list.

The Mission consisted of an ICOMOS representative and an IUCN representative. As the Curonian Spit is a cultural property the mission report is an overall ICOMOS report but includes the views of IUCN, particularly in regards to natural attributes.

The mission experts would like to thank the UNESCO commission, the National Park Directorate, the Municipality of Neringa and the State Protected Areas Service for their perfect organization, their readiness to discuss the different issues and their warm welcome to Lithuania.

Details of the programme and the people met during the mission are attached as Annexes 2 and 3.

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1. Background:

i) Advisory Bodies' Evaluations

The Curonian Spit was inscribed on the World Heritage List in 2000 as a trans-border cultural landscape under criterion (v): *The Curonian Spit is an outstanding example of a landscape of sand dunes that is under constant threat from natural forces (wind and tide). After disastrous human interventions that menaced its survival the Spit was reclaimed by massive protection and stabilisation works begun in the 19th century and still continuing to the present day.*

The Spit had been nominated as a mixed site under cultural criteria (ii), (iv) and (v) and under natural criteria (i), (ii), (iii) and (iv) (now criteria (vii), (viii), (ix) and (x)).

ICOMOS recommended inscription as a cultural landscape under cultural criteria (v) alone; IUCN did not consider that the property satisfied any of the natural criteria for the following reasons, but did support inscription as a cultural landscape which could encourage the State Parties to improve the integrity of the site's natural values, which it considered to be of national and regional, rather than universal, significance:

- (i) The Curonian Spit is a modified landscape, strongly influenced by human intervention and so cannot be considered to represent natural unhindered coastal accumulative processes.*
- (ii) As a result of the low degree of naturalness the site does not demonstrate outstanding universal value under this criterion.*
- (iii) The current landscape results from a relatively recent combination natural processes and human intervention and the Spit cannot be considered to be a product of nature alone.*
- (iv): There are no key species or ecosystems that depend solely on the Curonian for their survival.*

Both ICOMOS and IUCN recognised the Curonian Spit as a comparatively recent landscape which reflects profound human interventions – both negative in terms of deforestation in the 16th century and positive in terms of the extraordinary restoration programme begun in the 19th century to stabilise the area though rebuilding the dunes and afforestation.

ICOMOS noted that conservation of the Spit appeared to have been concentrated on its natural qualities and that there appeared to be only belated recognition on the part of the Lithuanian authorities of the cultural value of the heritage properties.

Both ICOMOS and IUCN considered that the protection and management arrangements in force in Lithuania at the time of evaluation were adequate in terms of national legal protection as a national park, and the management plan for the Park, which set out provisions for the protection of cultural heritage and cultural landscape and for ensuring the continuity of architectural traditions in

developing settlements. They both noted that the plan was based on clearly defined protective zones.

Both ICOMOS and IUCN also stressed the need for better coordination and integration between the parts of the spit in Lithuania and the Russian Federation. ICOMOS said that it was especially important that there should be an effective joint tourism management plan, while IUCN commented that there was a need to anticipate increasing levels of tourism and plan for this. They added that area has enormous potential for nature based, cultural and ecotourism development. Ferry only access to the site from Klaipeda is an important control mechanism for limiting visitation. The impacts on the Spit of building of a bridge to replace the ferry should be carefully considered.

ii) Description:

The Curonian Spit gives the appearance of a ‘natural’ landscape: the reality is that the Spit’s landscape is almost entirely the product of human intervention on a massive scale. The evocative landscape of dunes and forests is one of arduously reconstructed beauty; a testament to a grand restoration and stabilization process that has spanned two centuries.

The inscription of the Curonian Spit on the List as a ‘created’ cultural landscape reflects these processes, and its results in terms of the mosaic of sheltered fishermen’s settlements facing the Lagoon, reconstructed dunes, new forests and the recreational buildings of the 19th century.

Human interaction with the Spit may go back some 5,000 years as attested by significant archaeological evidence for fishing settlements from Mesolithic times through to the early 19th century on the seaward side, a Viking trading centre, and a few Teutonic castles. Its value today as a World Heritage site relates to its re-creation over the past 200 years, in response to the devastating deforestation of the 16th century and the subsequent emergence of unstable desert dunes. During the 19th century work was undertaken to stabilize the Spit, through the formation of a long sand protection bank on the seaward side that cuts off the possibility of sand progressing further into the Spit, a process that took the first half of the 19th century to complete, and the slightly later work to stabilise dune slopes with small brushwood fences and afforestation. By the end of the 19th nearly half the Spit had been re-afforested and today 75% is under forest cover.

iii) Outstanding Universal Value:

At the time of inscription a Statement of Outstanding Universal Value (SoOUV) was not agreed by the Committee. (Such a requirement was only formalised in 2005.) As part of the second round of Periodic Reporting for the Europe Region, all States Parties are now requested to draft SoOUVs for properties that do not have them and submit them to the World Heritage Committee for approval.

In the case of the Curonian Spit, this process of drafting such a SoOUV, and identifying the attributes that reflect OUV, would be an immensely helpful process, given the complexity of the property and the lack of clarity that appears

to be prevalent in some quarters as to the reasons why the property was inscribed on the List, and precisely what needs managing.

Such a SoOUV would need to be based on the ICOMOS evaluation, the nomination dossier and the Committee decision. These together provide the evidence for defining OUV and for identifying the attributes (both physical and associative) that reflect that OUV and need to be managed in order to sustain OUV.

These documents provide sufficient evidence for defining the 19th century man-made cultural landscape and its key individual attributes, such as the protective sand bank, stabilized dunes, new forests, fishermen's settlements, villas, as well as the tiny remnants from previous centuries such as buried villages, slight traces of mixed forest, etc., - sites of remembrance of the extinct ethnic communities - and also the overall attribute of visual harmony between the sheltered settlements, protective forests and high dunes.

iv) Key requirements of Inscription

At the time of nomination, the Advisory Bodies and the World Heritage Committee must be assured that there are adequate legislative protection and management arrangements in place to ensure that OUV and authenticity are sustained over time. This means that management arrangements/systems need to be based on managing the attributes that reflect OUV and that legislative protection is strong enough to ensure that this is possible. For the Curonian Spit the Committee was satisfied with the arrangements in place at the time of inscription, specifically for Lithuania the legislative protection and the 1994 National Park Plan, submitted with the nomination.

v) Mission remit and structure:

The fundamental question that the mission was asked to address was whether the current general plan of the Neringa municipality, that part of the current general plan Klaipėda city relevant to Smiltynė, and the revised management plan of the Curonian Spit National Park, still meet these requirements, particularly in relation to conservation of valuable features in the residential areas, future development in residential areas, recreational carrying capacity, infrastructural development, and potential economic development, especially in relation to Neringa as a resort, and if it they did not in some or all respects to suggest possible solutions..

The Mission was also asked to present suggestions as to how the overall World Heritage Property, including the part within the territory of the Russian Federation, might be enhanced.

In order to address these questions, the mission considered current key issues that need to be addressed by management (including through planning and legislative arrangements), the management and planning systems in place (including the plans for the Municipalities and the revised National Park plan), future challenges and opportunities, and how overall the inscription of the Curonian Spit on the World Heritage list might be used to optimise economic, social and cultural benefits in the long term as part of overall sustainable

development of the Spit. The mission then concluded by drawing out conclusions and suggestions.

2. Key Issues:

Issues such as pollution in the lagoon, risk from Russian oil exploration offshore platforms, and tourist developments projects on both side of the border have been discussed at World Heritage Committee meeting and some, although slow, progress, has been recorded (as set out in State Party reports and proceedings of the World Heritage Committee). A report has been requested from the State Party for the 2010 Committee Meeting.

In Lithuania, the ecological situation can be considered as more or less stable since the middle of the 20th Century and no fundamental change has been recorded since the time of inscription. On the other hand the social-economic situation appears to have changed significantly reflecting quite rapid economic growth and an increasing tourist demand and this has had a marked impact on the cultural environment. Closely connected to these changes, are changes in the expectation of local people, whose number have increased and whose social structure has changed with the "immigration" of wealthy people. These changes have brought about a number of expectations that are mostly referred to as "needs", though they should probably better called "wishes" until they are properly substantiated. These are set out below together with other issues related to the overall conservation of cultural attributes.

i) Restoration of fisherman's houses

The nomination and ICOMOS's evaluation both underlined the significance of the remains of old fishing settlements as key attributes of the cultural landscape. Although it was noted that many of the 19th century timber and thatch houses had been enlarged or altered and that some settlements had been extended with new dwellings, initially villas in the 19th century, but also with pre WW II, Soviet era and later apartments, it was nevertheless clear (from the very detailed survey and documentation) that many early examples remained and that their conservation within designated areas was part of the National Park plan. Mention was made in the Plan of reversing undesirable alterations, on the basis of clear evidence, and of restoring reed thatch on the houses with the highest protection. The main processes were seen as preservation, restoration and recovery through replication. In the strictest controlled zones it was stated that '*conservation and restoration of the exact appearance, layout, architecture, decoration and ethnographic relics should be preserved to the maximum extent*'.

The extremely detailed prescriptions for sustaining the authenticity of these houses and improving others do not seem to have been followed. The current mission noted the fragility of many of the remaining fishermen's houses and of their settings in terms of outbuildings, gardens and as part of patterns of streets near the lagoon. In a few instances, 19th century and pre WW II buildings appear to have been completely rebuilt with only a token reference to the original materials and in other cases building have been extended, upwards or

horizontally with modern materials (see below) that are not sympathetic and which mask the original features. (*As is stated in Guide to National Parks: Latelythe buildings underwent reconstruction or were even rebuilt without considering the unique nature of these households; the old and most valuable housing in the central part (of Pervalka) has suffered extreme damage.*). In many instances the cottage gardens have become parking lots for up to three cars.

This legacy of fishermen's houses is one of the key attributes of the cultural landscape. The siting of parallel rows of houses next to the lagoon, the decorative elements to the roof, porches and windows, the original wall and roof structures, outbuildings, cottage gardens and surrounding fences all make up an extremely picturesque, and very valuable legacy that is a key attribute of OUV.

Sustaining this legacy and its authenticity is essential and to achieve this will need sensitive restoration rather than re-building, and the use of local and sympathetic materials. It is appreciated that such materials can be more expensive than factory made materials. However the overall number of 19th century houses is not enormous (compared to the number of vernacular buildings in many World Heritage sites), all the houses have been surveyed and assessed, and the possibility of obtaining a grant for their overall restoration as a long-term project should be investigated.

It is not clear whether adequate craft skills are available for this work and if not training programmes need to be initiated. What is clear is that the overall stock of authentic pre WW II fisherman's houses have declined to a degree that makes the task of restoration now crucial and urgent.

In a few cases the permissions given for what has become reconstruction and development rather than restoration are being challenged in the Courts (see below).

ii) Building materials

For the most part the settlements are made up of core areas of fisherman's houses (both 19th century and pre World War II), with the outer areas characterised by larger houses, villas and apartments. There is now a policy to encourage new buildings to be constructed in 'local' materials, or at least clad in them, which means timber boarding for the walls and a tile roofs. In quite a number of cases, however, the tiles are particularly shiny, strongly coloured factory-made cement tiles rather than of clay, that will weather to a variegated shades. This makes for a very harsh appearance.

It would be desirable for a design manual to be developed that sets out acceptable materials for restoration, for repairs and for new buildings, as well as addressing design details for windows, doors, roofs etc.

iii) Public Realm:

In quite a few of the settlements details such as the harbour edge, once faced in stone, have now been covered in concrete and many of the walkways paved in concrete paviers. These and other details such as concrete road edgings are

tending to lead to a somewhat ‘suburban’ image in some parts of the settlements and certainly do not reinforce distinctiveness or signal that the place is special.

iv) New Buildings:

Although the mission did not visit all parts of all settlements, it was able to experience some of the more recent developments, particularly in Nida. Here the new development, mostly apartments and groups of houses, is not unpleasant but neither could it be said to be of a high quality in relation to its surroundings and it does not (apart from one development in Juankrante) appear to define a distinctive sense of place in terms of details, materials, or to have an ecological or sustainable approach to the use of materials.

In some instances the new buildings impinge on the setting of the fishermen’s houses. (*Some of the original fishermen’s houses became strangers in this area, penetrating into the new recreational architecture.*), and in some settlements the balance between new and old is such that the places give the initial impression of new recreational developments.

v) Presentation and Interpretation

One of the key attributes mentioned in the nomination dossier is the buried settlements. It is not clear how visitors gain knowledge of these sites of memory or of the extraordinary feat of restoration that was carried out during the 19th and 20th centuries to stabilise the dunes, which is still continuing, or of the remnants of the mixed forest that once clothed the Spit and still present in a few places, or of for instance individual sites such as the amber bay, a crucial survival.

There would appear to be a need for far more interpretation to help visitors understand the special qualities and fragility of the man-made landscape, and to encourage them to walk through the landscape.

vi) Housing Development for locals

The economic situation seems to be significantly better than the average for Lithuania. The unemployment rate is particularly low, but the definition of "local people" and "residents" is sometime delicate, quite a few people being registered for work while living elsewhere for the better part of the year.

The need for houses for ‘locals’ was articulated, and some sites outside the settlements have been identified in the Municipal Plan. It became clear to the mission that mechanisms that would allow houses to be lived in only by locals do not exist, thus if houses are to be constrained in their use for local, new tools will need to be developed to restrict their use and constrain letting and sales, and to define a ‘local person’.

vii) Tourist facilities: hotels, apartments, camping and caravan sites

The mission was made aware of the desire of the Neringa Municipality to build more accommodation for visitors: hotels, houses and apartments, caravan and camp sites, through extending zones for development and through giving change of use for some Soviet era derelict restaurant buildings. It was understood that Soviet era camp sites had been privatised and turned into hotels and that likewise former Young Pioneer Camps had also been sold: thus ‘green field’ sites were being considered for all these needs.

It was acknowledged that whereas visitors travelling independently might stay for one or two weeks, those arriving in coaches stayed for perhaps only one or two nights and yet resulted on the need for coach parks and large restaurants that could accommodate coach loads of people. Similarly large camper vans apparently had a comparatively short stay and yet needed large parking spaces and special facilities.

Unemployment levels are very low on the Spit and currently many existing hotels and guest houses employ people from outside the area.

In terms of this extra accommodation for visitors, this desire was not expressed in terms of a well researched and well-defined need, nor was it linked to an overall tourism strategy. So far there is no clearly defined 'Vision' for how the Curonian Spit should be marketed, what type of visitors should be targeted, how revenue might be optimised in relation to conservation needs rather than maximised, and crucially how visitors might be attracted at times and places that respect the overall carrying capacity of the Spit in terms of the numbers of visitors that can be accommodated without damage to the landscape.

Similarly, there is no overall tourism strategy that might weave all these threads into a clear plan that could be linked to the way the Spit is marketed and visitors targeted to optimise returns while minimising impact.

Unlike many other sensitive cultural landscapes, there has not been an attempt to utilise the very special characteristics of the landscape to provide unique and ecologically satisfactory visitor experiences that could attract high return visitors.

There is also an issue over whether the development of more apartments will encourage more absent owners – with buildings only used for a few weeks each year.

viii) Infrastructural development

The mission was made aware of the desire by some stakeholders to widen the main road along the Spit. The reasons given for this related to the need to clear snow and to be able to repair the road while leaving two lanes accessible. Currently two storey coaches and the very largest campervans are allowed onto the Spit (both of these are quite recent problems) and this has an impact on the design needs of the road.

This need for a wider, and thus faster, road was not linked to an overall transport policy for the Spit which could be related in turn to an overall tourism strategy and ultimately to an overall vision for the property.

A small Soviet era airstrip exists on the outskirts of Nida. It was built in 1967 and renovated with central government funds between 1998 and 2006 but is now closed to all traffic as it does not satisfy safety requirements. The mission was made aware of discussions on its future use: whether to re-instate it as a public airport to encourage more tourists, to restrict it to private planes, to use it for

emergency flights, or to remove it altogether and use it for car parking or some other non air-related use.

Clearly an airport in the centre of the Spit would be environmentally, aurally and visually intrusive. The rescue and emergency roles are extremely limited as there is another airport about 70 km away and most rescue activity is now operated by helicopter.

As with discussion over the road, the possible uses under discussion for the airstrip were not linked to wider transport and tourism development strategies. The a need (and justification) for developing an airport for tourist purposes, with all the necessary infrastructures and environmental consequences (noise, pollution, risk of further increase of attraction for wealthy people from the capital and subsequent raising of property prices, etc.) has not been demonstrated. Airport development would not reduce road traffic, but could increase it. The option to use the area as decentralized parking would imply a new mobility concept with drastic traffic restriction in the settlement areas and an important development of local transport system with ecological vehicles.

As far as the mission could gather, such a fundamental reflection has not taken place on a new land use plan for the airport or for the Spit as a whole.

ix) Re-use of Soviet era buildings

During the Soviet Era large scale accommodation blocks, restaurants, multiple garages and other complexes were constructed on the Spit, to provide for large groups of tourists. None of these structures still have their original use; many have been long abandoned and are semi-derelict. Some, such as in Nida, are within existing settlements; one or two of the smaller ones have been re-clad in timber and given tile roofs, while some garages on the outskirts of settlements have been converted into apartments – in a way that makes it now impossible to tell their original form.

Several of the structures built as restaurants are on the seaward side of the Spit just below the dunes and isolated from the main settlements, which are all on the lagoon side. These seaward sites are thus outside the envelope of the settlement zones.

A key issues is whether all of the plots housing these structures (most of which have been privatised) should be given permission for new developments (restoration is not possible). As has been shown by the re-building or conversion of garages, the result is equivalent to new build on a virgin site: the resulting buildings appear to have no relationship to their surroundings or their former use, which needs to be explained to understand the rationale of their isolated siting. Some of the restaurants sites have large footprints (they consisted of clusters of one-storey structures) and for one site a large 3-4 storey hotel has been proposed, while for another a health clinic has been suggested.

Most of the schemes for these sites would be for total re-development and for much grander schemes than before. This development would therefore not be sustaining the Soviet era use of the Spit: rather it would be using the plots for

new interventions unrelated to Soviet era use or to sustaining OUV. Where these sites are in the centre of settlements and services exist, a strong case could be made for improving the appearance of the settlements through improving the buildings and giving them a sympathetic use that does not bring the need for further development or large car parks. Where these sites are outside the settlement boundaries, major interventions could have an extremely negative impact on the attributes of OUV, and the mission does not consider that any satisfactory rationale had been put forward to justify re-development.

x) Visitor attractions

In order to extend the visitor season beyond the main summer months, the Neringa Municipality expressed a desire to offer new attractions such as festivals, to construct indoor (bad weather) attractions, to develop water activities, to provide health clinics, all of which might bring in foreign visitors in the Spring and Autumn and perhaps throughout the year. Given the large size of constructions associated with most of these options, these would have to be accommodated outside the settlement zones and it was suggested that the site of one or more of the former Soviet restaurants might be considered.

Other ways of extending the season through offering activity holidays, linked for instance to the specific fishing traditions, or marketing the attractions of the Spit in the winter months, have not apparently been explored.

As mentioned above such initiatives need to be part of an overall tourism development strategy which in turn needs to be based on an overall vision that reflects the need for development that sustains OUV. The comment made above about the re-use of soviet era buildings apply to these possible new visitor attractions.

xi) Development zones

In the National Park Plan of 1994, clear zones were demarcated within each of the settlements and overall for the whole Spit. The overall zones were generally lengthwise, running parallel to the coast, thus reflecting the topography and vegetation zones. Within each settlement, areas of existing buildings were zoned according to whether they contained the best examples of fishermen's houses (ethnic-cultural zones), preWW II houses (urban preserve zones), recreation areas or auxiliary areas (for services including car parks). Regulations for construction were set out and the plan did not allow for expansion of the settlement boundaries, but rather set out to satisfy the needs of residential space by optimising the existing settlement zones.

The proposed Municipal Plan now contains alternative zoning proposals that in overall terms divide the spit across from sea to lagoon rather than longitudinally. Such delineation would have the effect of encouraging a closer relationship between the settlements and the beaches on the sea shore to the west, which is not necessarily desirable. The proposed plans also contain development areas which extend the footprint of the settlements by as much as 10 -25% (?). These are in turn zoned for recreation or local housing.

The key issue is the rationale for extending the development areas – which was largely explained to the mission in terms of the maximum that was allowable under national guidance to encourage investment opportunities, rather than in terms of how new development might contribute to an overall vision of the way the Spit might develop as a resort, according to conservation parameters and constraints, and in a way that sustains OUV.

xii) Maintaining environmental quality

It is clear that the whole peninsula is not ‘natural’, the whole ecosystem having been completely transformed by centuries of human activities. The current situation, although stable, remains quite fragile and any new activities or extensions of the so-called recreation areas could have substantial negative impacts.

For several years the water pollution of the sea and the lagoon has been a major issue particularly in relation to transboundary cooperation. The establishment of an oil exploration platform in the Russian side of the Baltic Sea has been considered as a major environmental risk; an international agreement has been negotiated but is apparently not yet implemented.

On the lagoon side, it appears that the main pollution factor, a paper mill factory, burnt down a few years ago is now abandoned. The States Parties are doing their best to allow the removal of the site from the list of the main polluted Baltic Sea sites. Regarding the bird populations, the disturbance on the land appear to be much more significant than the water part. The fish population’s status was not discussed during the mission.

xiii) Profile of the Curonian Spit as a resort

The Spit first developed as a resort in the 19th century, once the major works to stabilise the area began to take effect. Villas, hotels and guest houses were constructed particularly in Juodkrante, in a sophisticated ‘Swiss Gothic’ style, and it came to be known as the ‘Pearl of the Baltic’, a reflection of its high status. In 1933 the Spit was formally declared a resort. During the Soviet era many buildings were constructed in a basic functional style in the settlements and a few near the sea coast – to accommodate and service large groups of tourists who spend extended time spans on the Spit.

In the last twenty years, the Spit has developed as a ‘resort’ for both individual and group travel for visitors from within Lithuania and from the rest of Europe, particularly Germany. This tourism has been based on medium sized hotels for groups, apartments to let and guesthouses, and access has not been limited either in number or in types of vehicles– even two storey coaches and the largest campervans are allowed.

The key issue now is how the Spit should develop as a resort in the future – does it need larger hotels, more restaurants, marinas, indoor and outdoor visitor attractions, better infrastructure, in order to draw in many more visitors and compete with resorts to the north on the mainland, or should it focus on delivering a unique experience to fewer, but higher value tourists, through

capitalising on its exceptional cultural and ecological assets? Should it become a place that is only inhabited seasonally or could it maintain a reasonable sized permanent community?

As a sensitive area, both culturally and ecologically, the Spit needs tourists with a light footprint. It has all the potential to be developed as an exemplar of sustainable tourism, but so far this route does not appear to have been explored.

The cultural landscape has now been recognised as being of international (universal) value and one that must be sustained for future generations. That landscape – its attributes, vulnerabilities and conservation needs - must be the basis for a tourism strategy, as a key part of the overall management of the landscape. And as has been set out above, the landscape is not just the dunes and forests; it is the overall Spit with the harmonious interrelationship between settlements, forest, sea, lagoon and dunes that needs to be sustained.

A key issue is the definition of the term ‘resort’ and how tourists might be targeted and optimised to underpin the special qualities of the property and support sustainable development.

3. Management and Planning Systems

The Nomination dossier stated that for Lithuania ‘According to the Law on Territorial Planning, all activities in the area can be implemented after approval of the territorial planning documents. The main territorial planning document for the Curonian Spit is the Planning scheme (management plan), covering the period until the year 2005, was endorsed by the Government in 1994. This scheme is the background for preparation of special territorial planning documents, such as forestry management plan, recreational development plan, detailed plans for facilitation of the settlements in individual recreational zones and further development of infrastructure’.

The National Park Management Plan for the Peninsula was considered adequate and appropriate as a management plan for the property at the time of inscription, given the very detailed documentation of all buildings and areas, and the specific zoning and conservation prescriptions that it contained.

As mentioned above, the detailed prescriptions for fishermen’s houses do not seem to have been realized and the protection and careful restoration that were envisaged have in reality been replaced in some cases by re-building. The reasons for this appear partly to lie in the definition of restoration, that can in some circumstances include re-building, but also in the relationship between the authority of the Municipality and the approval it gives and the authority of the National Park which should over-arch planning development in the two Municipalities on the Spit, Neringa and Klaipeda, but whose authority does not appear to have been respected. There have been many violations in terms of approvals for development that are not in line with the Park plan. Thirty-five cases of development, redevelopment or reconstruction of existing buildings or parking lots and abandoned zones have taken place recently are now before the

Courts for not being in line with the National Park Plan. Half have been examined and a number of detailed plans cancelled as not being in conformity with the current territorial plan (1994 MP) and the owners now have to reverse the alterations in order to maintain the character of the traditional fishing settlements.

In 2004 revisions to this Plan were drafted to reflect changes in the socio-economic situation. Furthermore a new law requested all Municipalities to prepare Municipal Master Plans to run from 2009. As a consequence 3 new plans have been prepared, with it appears little coordination between them, although some of the main authors are the same people.

i) Revised National Park Plan

The revisions to the National Park Plan show comparatively little change from the earlier plan but nevertheless the proposed changes do not appear to be based on any serious analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the 1994 plan. A needs assessment based on concrete data and evidence was not performed, nor was an assessment of challenges and opportunities undertaken. Perhaps most crucially there was no articulation of a vision to define how the Spit might develop over the next 10-20 years, through optimizing its assets while at the same time respecting its conservation constraints and sustaining OUV.

The proposed revisions thus appear to be more in terms of how far extra development might be accommodated, but without detailed criteria against which assessments of the impact of this development might be made in relation to the attributes that reflect OUV.

The new zoning of the Plan appears to follow more or less the scheme of the 1994 Plan. It is quite logical and reflects the attributes of OUV. However it is not always clear what the different zones exactly cover. More precise definitions are needed with precision as to exactly what is allowed, what is prohibited and what the conditions are for transformation or reconstruction of existing buildings.

Planning zones for the management of the Spit should respect as far as possible the environmental and cultural shape of the peninsula. The zoning should mainly be based on longitudinal units (north-south) rather than transversal units that would fragment the coherence of the landscape.

The revision of the National Park zoning has been prepared and adopted by the parliamentary commission and the mission understood that it is expected to be passed by Parliament soon.

ii) New Master Plans for Neringa and Klaipeda Municipalities

The Master Plans of the Municipalities took as their starting point both environmental and social issues: the need to develop the Spit both as a resort and as a place to live through encouraging development that could increase tourist numbers, provide more accommodation, promote a broader offering (such as hotels, campsites and caravan parks), create houses and jobs for locals and overall increase revenue from recreation. Both Municipalities have made proposals to extend the development areas. Areas of plots for new constructions

over the next 10 years of the Neringa plan, including for social housing, open air museum, spas, etc., are as follows:

	<i>Existing building plots</i>	<i>New construction plots</i>
Nida:	66,610 sqm	15,297sqm
Juodkrante	34,900 sqm,	7,485 sq m
Pervalka	63,350 sqm	17,085 sqm (1,900 sqm social housing) rest museum, camp, campsite etc)

Both new Municipal Master Plans reflects "needs" expressed by the municipalities. However these needs have not been thoroughly analyzed and are not substantiated by hard evidence (statistical data, systematic inquiries, etc.) or an overall clearly explained strategic vision for the Spit as a whole.

The Municipal Master Plans have been adopted by the municipalities, but without it appears external conformity checks with other existing laws and documents at national and international level (National Park plan, WH Convention). The nomenclature of the zones does not fully match those of the NP zones, and no clear definitions of the zones have been presented.

As a result, the Neringa Municipal plan contains proposals for new hotels and sanatoria that are not envisaged in the National Park plan, for development on the seaward side not envisaged in the Park plan, and for development of motels or residential units on privatized parking lots for which the National Park plan only sets out parking uses or cultivation as appropriate. Other proposals that could be a threat to the attributes of OUV are new constructions for water sports, health centres, camping near the sea shore, yachting hotels, development in Amber Bay, etc., as well as an increase in car-born traffic with the concomitant need for more parking lots and improvements to roads. The Klaipeda Plan proposes a large hotel at Smiltyne and a second ferry, neither envisaged in the National Park Plan.

In some instances, the Neringa Plan proposals appear to be legitimising development that has already taken place out of conformity with the Park Plan.

Both municipal plans propose a heating pipeline from the mainland along the Spit, but this is unrelated to any energy assessment or energy strategy. Timber is currently taken to mainland and sold and then transported back for domestic use.

According to the law, the municipal plans should be approved by the county authorities, but this seems not to have been done. The mission understood that the administrative organization of the country is currently under revision, with a drastic reduction proposed for the number of counties. In the meantime the controlling procedures for municipal plans do not appear to be functioning properly.

iii) Adequacy of the plans in relation to World Heritage requirements

The 1994 National Park plan was accepted at the time of inscription as providing an adequate overall framework for the conservation of the property, its management and development.

Since then, the lack of an agreed vision for the overall development of the Spit and the lack of long-term objectives „ as well as some "grey zones" in the current legislation, have lead to the development of two parallel planning processes – that of the National Park and that of the Municipalities. This means that there is now conflict between the expectations of the municipalities and the obligation resulting from the National Park plan and World Heritage inscription.

The mission considers that there is not now in place one overall system that has as its basis the need to sustain the OUV of the World Heritage site.

4. SWOT analysis of the three Plans in relation to the present condition of the World Heritage site, and its future development, particularly construction development:

Strengths

- The plans are very detailed and based on a good GIS information
- They have been prepared by good specialists with deep knowledge of their field

Weaknesses

- Lack of an agreed starting point in terms of defining a Statement of OUV and the attributes that reflect OUV
- Lack of a common vision and agreed sectoral objectives for the overall WHS for the next 10-20 years
- Lack of an agreed hierarchical framework for the plans and their respective objectives
- Lack of fundamental analysis of the 1994 plan (strength / weaknesses)
- Lack of agreed data as basis for choosing development options- such as daily population structure (residents, newcomers), jobs structure, accommodation occupancy, parking occupancy (villages and beaches), survey information from visitors regarding their origin, expectations regarding infrastructures, purpose of their visit, why their chose their destination, method of transport, etc.
- Lack of agreed criteria to differentiate "needs" from "wishes" from the municipalities as well as from the conservation organizations (NP, GGOs, State services).
- Lack of sectoral plans/strategies for tourism, transportation, energy supply, community infrastructure, for both NP and municipalities.
- Lack of adequate control of the development processes by the Municipalities and endorsement by higher authorities
- Lack of clarity regarding the definition of the zones and constraints applied

Opportunities

Curonian Spit offer exceptional opportunities for:

- High quality, sustainable tourism
- Development of innovative ideas for high value soft tourism associated with exemplary accommodation, boat and bicycle transportation, green solutions for renovating buildings with local materials and incorporating environmentally friendly waste, heat, and insulation solutions
- Development of car free zones
- Migrating birds observation in spring and autumn;
- Integration of the Curonian Spit into alternative / cultural visitor packages including Vilnius, selected protected natural and cultural sites, etc).
- Promoting facilitated walks in spectacular landscape as a result of human – nature interactions and activities related to the landscape
- Using the exceptional site for implementation of large programs for environmental information, awareness raising and education
- Through the WH, collaboration with the Russian Federation to ensure the global conservation of the Spit, the lagoon and its adjacent part of the Baltic Sea
- Endorsement of the plans by the highest possible authorities (in regard to the national and international status of the site)

Threats

- Loss of authenticity of attributes of OUV such as fishermen's houses, traditional settlement morphology, ports, and visual harmony between traditional settlements and the green landscape, dunes and lagoons through insensitive restoration and excessive development
- Potential to turn Spit into a seasonal leisure landscape unrelated to its value as a WHS through overwhelming the traditional settlements
- Uncontrolled increase of visitors and of recreational activities that strain natural resources and rely on importing people and energy
- Too many motor-borne visitors that do not contribute adequately to the sustainable use of the of the Spit's natural resources
- Dramatic increase of the property values and their acquisition by outsiders, pushing local people to abandon the traditional activities and building maintenance
- Contradictory plans and exploitation of "gaps" in legislation
- Short-term planning and expediency

5. Conclusions:

The Curonian Spit has huge potential to develop as a high-value and exemplary sustainable tourist destination while respecting its OUV. To achieve that potential there needs to be a clear understanding of what that OUV is, the attributes that carry it and how they might be harnessed to deliver a long-term Vision that can over-arch Management and Master Plans. There is also a need for a clear hierarchical structure between the Park and Municipalities that sets out at what level responsibilities lie and who ultimately can resolve conflicts and how. And also an understanding of what the tourist offer should be in terms of

whether it is marketed as a 'resort' with all the implications that brings or as an exceptional destination that can offer something quite unique.

Neringa Municipality understandably wants to be successful in developing its assets but currently there is a danger that the type of development that they envisage supports the needs of investors rather than the interests of conservation and may in the long term weaken the uniqueness of the Spit.

In order to attract high value visitors and foster a resident rather than seasonal population, the mission considers that it would be preferable for the Municipality in its plan to build on the strengths and unique character of the Spit through promoting a much higher quality offer of small scale green accommodation in exceptional surroundings, in order to widen the range of tourists and extend the number of countries from which they travel.

There is clearly also a need to lengthen the season in order to spread out visitors but it is doubtful that water sport centres or "sanatoria" would help much, as both can be found elsewhere, and there would appear to be more local activities that could be promoted to attract visitors in the 'shoulder' months.

The land within Klaipeda Municipality has a very different profile from that within Neringa and the different roles of the two Municipalities need more clearly defining. Klaipeda is better placed to provide concentrated development of say high quality hotels and yachting centres as well as improved offerings to foot-based day visitors who arrive in high numbers, while Neringa, with its land covering the most sensitive parts of the Spit has the opportunity to offer exceptional experiences to well-regulated individual visitors.

6. Suggestions/Recommendations

The mission considers that much good work has gone into producing the current three plans. However the three plans together cannot be said to deliver the detailed, sensitive and coherent management that is needed to sustain OUV and provide a sustainable way forward for the settlements that releases their potential as an exemplary tourist destination.

In order to put in place a more appropriate framework, it is suggested that a stakeholder workshop and perhaps also specialist workshops are organized to provide the necessary underpinning to a revision of the plans, if necessary after preparing a database with basic facts regarding the socio-economic situation and trends, and a needs assessment for municipalities, conservation authorities and visitors.

These workshops should endeavor to:

- Develop a Statement of OUV (this will need to be relevant for the whole property) and identify the attributes that carry OUV
- Analyse the weaknesses of the 1994 National Park plan and the dislocations between it and the Plans of the Municipalities

- Draft and agree on a joint vision for the World Heritage site, building on its unique selling propositions
- Define long-term overall objectives and sectoral objectives in line with the vision
- Define constraints/conditions/threats
- Suggest an overall coordinating mechanism to oversee the implementation of the plans in order to sustain OUV

Following on from the workshop/s it will be desirable to agree a hierarchical structure between the plans of the Park and Municipalities, and on the basis of the outcomes of the workshop/s, to adapt the proposed plans to the agreed vision and long-term objectives, and to develop sectoral strategies for tourism, transport, energy, interpretation, education, etc.

The mission suggests that the following specific recommendation should be considered as part of the overall process in order to ensure that the OUV of the property is sustained:

- High priority should be given to restoring to the highest standards fishermen's settlements using appropriate materials and approaches for buildings and for the public realm;
- A design guide should be developed for all construction
- All private vehicles and traffic should be removed from the two highest level protection zones for cultural heritage; authorize delivery only and arrange parking outside of the zones, as part of an overall sustainable traffic strategy
- There should be no presumption that all Soviet era remains can be re-developed
- No new construction should be erected within 20-50 meters from the lagoon; the existing ports in Neringa should not be transformed into marinas / yacht clubs. The coastline (lagoon side) should remain as natural as possible.
- No construction on the Sea coastal dune; all beach infrastructures should be located behind the dune. Exception: mobile (seasonal) lifeguard infrastructures
- Presumption in favour of using existing settlement envelopes for appropriate scale development but not within the high level protection zones
- Abandon the existing airport, keeping a small zone for helicopters; possibly use the tarmac as parking lot and develop a shuttle service to the locality.
- Recognize that major developments of hotels , spas, health centres or other large developments in the southern part of the Spit, and the re-development of former isolated Soviet sites could impact adversely on OUV

On the issue of coordination between Lithuania and the Russian Federation, the Mission would like to stress the difficulties encountered with the official procedures; the administration of the Russian side of the Spit is directly under the control from Moscow. On the other hand, there would seem to be frequent contacts between the staff of the two National Parks. Apparently the Russian

part of the Spit is facing similar development issues, such as an uncontrolled tourism development.

The mission considers that the preparation of a joint OUV Statement for the whole site and a vision for the management of the property for the medium term would be a significant step forward and could be the basis for further collaboration on the preparation of a joint management plan and its implementation. ICOMOS and IUCN could provide examples of good practice from elsewhere. Unfortunately the example of Pyrenees – Mt Perdu suggested in the IUCN evaluation is not now a model that should be followed!

Overall, the mission would like to suggest that further help could be provided, if needed, through the ICOMOS and IUCN professional networks on matters such as restoration of timber buildings, on the development of green approaches to insulation, on energy and transport, on overall tourism strategies as well as on the development of a Statement of OUV and on strategic and management issues.

11th September 2009

ANNEXES:

- 1. Terms of Reference**
- 2. Mission Programme**
- 3. People met**
- 4. ICOMOS Evaluation**
- 5. IUCN Evaluation**

Annex 1: Terms of Reference

TERMS OF REFERENCE (prepared by the Lithuanian State Party)

For an expert evaluation of prepared spatial planning documents regulating the protection, management, use and development of the part of the Curonian Spit within the territory of the Republic of Lithuania, a World Heritage object

(to be carried out by UNESCO's individual ICOMOS and IUCN experts)

1. To get acquainted with legal acts (translated into English) regulating spatial planning, the management and protection of protected areas in Lithuania, and specifically in the part of the Curonian Spit within the territory of the Republic of Lithuania.

2. To provide conclusions as to whether the solutions of the general plan of the Neringa municipality, the general plan of a part of the Klaipėda city (Smiltynė) and the management plan of the Curonian Spit National Park, particularly those related to construction development, meet the requirements and criteria set forth in the Convention Concerning the Protection of World Cultural and Natural Heritage.

3. In order to analyse the present condition of the World Heritage object and foresee its future development tendencies, to carry out a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) analysis of solutions of the general plan of the Neringa municipality, the general plan of a part of the Klaipėda city (Smiltynė) and the management plan of the Curonian Spit National Park related to the residential areas of Neringa, particularly construction development therein:

3.1. to analyse solutions the implementation whereof would ensure the protection of natural and cultural property in the unique residential areas of the Curonian Spit;

3.2. to analyse solutions the implementation whereof may have a negative effect on the valuable landscape property of residential areas of the Curonian Spit;

3.3. to identify threats that may influence a loss of the most valuable features of residential areas of the Curonian Spit and establish whether recreational carrying capacity (visitor and transport flows, measures for regulating them, building density in the territory, the extent of infrastructure development) is planned so as to ensure balanced use of the Curonian Spit and its protection from a negative effect;

3.4. to establish opportunities for the development of economic activities in spatial planning document solutions.

4. Upon analysing Curonian Spit (Curonian Spit National Park) landscapes of different value and development potential and the needs of local residents, to evaluate the development potential of Neringa as a resort.

5. Present proposals (recommendations) on further development in the entire Curonian Spit (including the part within the territory of the Russian Federation), a World Heritage object.

Annex 2: Mission Programme

July 26	Arrival of experts in Vilnius from London (Susan Denyer) and Geneva (Pierre Galland). Overnight in Vilnius
July 27	Travel to Klaipeda and the Curonian Spit. Meeting in Nida with the Master Plan team. Sailing cruise in the lagoon to the Russian border. Overnight in Nida
July 28	Visit Nida, surrounding infrastructures, beach area (Baltic side) and semi-natural areas around the town. Travel to Juodkrante and discussion with the authorities, the National Park and the State Protected Areas service. Short visit to Smiltyne and travel back to Vilnius. Overnight in Vilnius.
July 29	Meeting with NGOs at the UNESCO commission office. Meeting with the Minister and Vice-Minister for the Environment. Wrap-up discussion regarding the report and conclusions. Departure of Susan Denyer and travel back to England. Pierre Galland: visit of the Old Town of Vilnius and overnight.
July 30	Departure to the airport; on the way short visit of a nature park close to Vilnius. Travel back to Switzerland.

Annex 3: People met

Meeting with representatives of the Neringa municipality and organisers of the Neringa municipality General Plan		
27 July, 2009		
Rest house "Litorina", Nida, Neringa		
No	Name, surname	Institution, position
1	Vyngantas Giedraitis	Neringa Municipality, Mayor www.neringa.lt
2.	Alvydas Mituzas	JSC „Urbanistika“, Organiser of the Neringa Municipality General Plan www.urbanistika.lt
3.	Linas Naujokaitis	JSC „Urbanistika“, Deputy Director – Senior Architect, Organiser of the Neringa Municipality General Plan www.urbanistika.lt
4.	Vladas Stauskas	Vytautas Magnus University of Kaunas, Professor, Organiser of the Neringa Municipality General Plan
5.	Gintaras Prikotskis	Kaunas Technological University, Associate Professor, Architect, Expert in Architecture and Urbanistics, Organiser of the Neringa Municipality General Plan
6.	Gražina Žemaitienė	Neringa Municipality, Senior Specialist of Architecture Division www.neringa.lt
7.	Antanas Baranauskas	Neringa Municipality, Secretary of the Council www.neringa.lt
8.	Valentina Burkšienė	Neringa Municipality, Senior Specialist of Business and Strategic Development Division www.neringa.lt
9.	Ramūnas Bartkus	Neringa Municipality, Head of Architecture Division www.neringa.lt
10.	Urtė Platakytė	Kaunas Technology University, Institute of Architecture and Construction, Architect, Organiser of the Neringa Municipality General Plan www.urbanistika.lt
11.	Lina Dikšaitė	Direction of the Curonian Spit National Park, Deputy Director www.nerija.lt

12.	Romualda Žičkienė	Neringa Municipality, Deputy Director of the Administration www.neringa.lt
13.	Aušra Feser	Neringa Municipality, Deputy Mayor www.neringa.lt
14.	Nijolė Piekienė	Direction of the Curonian Spit National Park, Head of the Planning and Landscape Division www.nerija.lt
15.	Jolanta Bernotaitė	Direction of the Curonian Spit National Park, Directress www.nerija.lt
16.	Aurelija Stancikienė	Member of the Parliament of the Republic of Lithuania, Committee for the Environmental Protection www.lrs.lt
17.	Asta Dirmaitė	Lithuanian National Commission for UNESCO, Secretary General www.unesco.lt
18.	Algimantas Vyšniauskas	Neringa Municipality, Director of Administration www.neringa.lt
19.	Eglė Baltranaitė	Neringa Municipality, Senior Specialist of Business and Strategic Development Division www.neringa.lt

Meeting with specialists of culture and nature heritage protection

28 July, 2009

Liudvikas Rėza Cultural Center Juodrantė, Neringa

No.	Name, surname	Institution represented	Position
1.	Rūta Baškytė	State Service for Protected Areas under the Ministry of Environment www.vstt.lt	Head
2.	Rūta Gruzdytė	State Service for Protected Areas under the Ministry of Environment www.vstt.lt	Senior Specialist
3.	Romas Pakalnis	Lithuanian National Commission for UNESCO www.unesco.lt	Chairperson
4.	Aurelija Stancikienė	Parliament of the Republic of Lithuania, Committee for the Environmental Protection www.lrs.lt	Member former Directress of the Curonian Spit National Park
5.	Edita Petrauskienė	Klaipėda City Municipality, Division of Heritage Protection www.klaipeda.lt	Head of the Division
6.	Almantas Mureika	Klaipėda City Municipality www.klaipeda.lt	Senior Architect
7.	Vigantas Giedraitis	Neringa Municipality www.neringa.lt	Mayor
8.	Algimantas Vyšniauskas	Neringa Municipality www.neringa.lt	Director of the Administration
9.	Ramūnas Bartkus	Neringa Municipality www.neringa.lt	Senior Architect
10.	Romualda Žičkienė	Neringa Municipality www.neringa.lt	Deputy Director of the Administration
11.	Aušra Feser	Neringa Municipality www.neringa.lt	Deputy Mayor

12.	Jūratė Markevičienė	State Commission for the Cultural Heritage Protection	Member of the Commission, Representative on the Curonian Spit issues Member of the ICOMOS National Committee
13.	Michail Trushko	JSC "OEZ" – Kaliningrad, Russian Federation	Director
14.	Sergey Balbutskiy	Kaliningrad, Russian Federation	Director
15.	Nijolė Piekienė	Direction of the Curonian Spit National Park www.nerija.lt	Head of the Planning and Landscape Division
16.	Jolanta Bernotaitė	Direction of the Curonian Spit National Park www.nerija.lt	Directress
17.	Lina Dikšaitė	Direction of the Curonian Spit National Park www.nerija.lt	Deputy Director
18.	Naglis Puteikis	Cultural Heritage Department under the Ministry of Culture, Klaipėda Territorial Division www.lrkmlt/ www.heritage.lt	Head of the Division
19.	Gražina Žemaitienė	Neringa Municipality www.neringa.lt	Senior Specialist of the Architecture Division
20.	Sandra Vaišvilaitė	Neringa Municipality www.neringa.lt	Senior Specialist
21.	Karina Jakienė	Cultural Heritage Department under the Ministry of Culture, Klaipėda Territorial Division www.heritage.lt	Senior Specialist
22.	Rasa Kalinauskaitė	NGO Alternative Commission for the Cultural Heritage Protection	Member
23.	Linas Ramanauskas	Public Institution "Neringa FM" www.neringafm.lt	Director

24.	Ričardas Zulcas	Klaipėda City Municipality, Economy and Strategy Department www.klaipeda.lt	Head of the Department
25.	Algimantas Gražulis	Expert in heritage protection	
26.	Jūratė Sendžikaitė	Institute of Botany www.botanika.lt	Senior scientist
27.	Leonas Jarašius	Institute of Botany www.botanika.lt	Senior technician
28.	Jonas Jakaitis	Ministry of Environment, Department of Territorial Planning, Urbanisation and Architecture www.am.lt	Director of the Department
29.	Jūratė Juozaitienė		Architect former Ministry Secretary of the Ministry of Environment
30.	Gintautas Gruodis	Ministry of Environment, Landscape Division www.am.lt	Head of the Division
31.	Urtė Platakytė	Kaunas Technology University, Institute of Architecture and Construction www.urbanistika.lt	Architect, Organiser of the Neringa Municipality General Plan
32.	Linas Naujokaitis	JSC "Urbanistika" www.urbanistika.lt	Deputy Director, Senior Architect, Organiser of the Neringa Municipality General Plan
33.	Arvydas Mituzas	JSC "Urbanistika" www.urbanistika.lt	Organiser of the Neringa Municipality General Plan
34.	Asta Dirmaitė	Lithuanian National Commission for UNESCO www.unesco.lt	Secretary General

Meeting with representatives of NGO's

29 July, 2009

Lithuanian National Commission for UNESCO

Šv. Jono 11, Vilnius

No.	Name, surname	Institution represented	Contact information
1.	Kęstutis Navickas	"Baltic Environmental Forum" www.bef.lt Environmental NGOs Coalition www.aplinkosauga.lt	+370 689 71355 kestutis.navickas@bef.lt
2.	Valerijus Rašomavičius	Institute of Botany, Director www.botanika.lt	+370 686 70866 valerijus.rasomavicius@botanika.lt
3.	Algirdas Valentinas	Member of the Neringa Community	valentinasalgirdas@gmail.com
4.	R. Drungilas	Member of the Neringa Community	+370 687 27713
5.	Andrius Navickas	Bernardinai.Lt, Editor-in-Chief www.bernardinai.lt	+370 677 51224 andrius@bernardinai.lt
6.	Žymantas Morkvėnas	"Baltic Environmental Forum" www.bef.lt Environmental NGOs Coalition www.aplinkosauga.lt	+370 614 72597 zymantas.morkvenas@bef.lt
7.	Dr. Algirdas Knystautas	Movement "For the Nature", Head www.uzgamta.com	+370 677 0503 info@uzgamta.com
8.	Prof. Vytautas Narbutas	Movement "Santalka"	+370 5 2721919 vytautas.narbutas@gmail.com
9.	Rasa Kalinauskaitė	Alternative Commission for Cultural Heritage Protection	+370 612 13668 rasa.kalinauskaite@gmail.com
10.	Erlandas Paplauskis	Ecological Club "Žvejone" www.zvejone.lt	+370 686 95503 erlandas.p@gmail.com
11.	Lina Blažytė	The Lithuanian Association of Castles and Manors www.dvarai.lt	+370 611 40040 lina@dvarai.lt
12.	Dalius Stancikas	Community of the Curonian Spit Admirers, Journalist	stancikas@bernardinai.lt
13.	Tomas Bakučionis	Public Institution "Institute of Protection of Public Interest"	+370 656 61723 tbakucionis@gmail.com

NOT representatives of NGOs			
14.	Jolanta Bernotaitė	Direction of Curonian Spit National Park, Directress www.nerija.lt	+370 640 48187 j.bernotaite@nerija.lt
15.	Algimantas Vyšniauskas	Neringa Municipality, Director of the Administration www.neringa.lt	+370 689 10707
16.	Aušra Feser	Neringa Municipality, Deputy Mayor www.neringa.lt	ausranida@gmail.com
17.	Alvydas Mituzas	JSC “Urbanistika”, Organizer of the Neringa Municipality General-Plan	+370 685 24443 alvydas.mituzas@gmail.com
18.	Aurelija Stancikienė	Parliament of the Republic of Lithuania, Member of the Committee for the Environmental Protection www.lrs.lt former Directress of the Curonian Spit National Park	+370 69843125 aurelija.stancikiene@lrs.lt
19.	Asta Dirmaitė	Lithuanian National Commission for UNESCO Secretary-General www.unesco.lt	+370 698 48413 adirmaite@unesco.lt

Annex 4: ICOMOS Evaluation (2000)

Curonian Spit (Lithuania/Russia)

ICOMOS Evaluation

No 994

Identification

Nomination The Curonian Spit

Location Klaipeda Region, Neringa and Klaipeda (Lithuania); Kaliningrad Region, Zelenogradsk District (Russian Federation)

States Party Lithuania and the Russian Federation

Date 23 July 1999

Justification by State Party

[**Note** This property is nominated as a *mixed site*, under the natural and the cultural criteria. This evaluation will deal solely with the cultural values, and the natural values will be covered in the IUCN evaluation.]

The landscape of the Curonian Spit has been formed not only by natural processes but also by human activities, and so it represents the combined work of nature and of man. It illustrates the evolution of a society based on fishing. Up to the present day the Curonian Spit has been a continuing cultural landscape, which “retains an active social role in contemporary society associated with the traditional way of life and in which the evolutionary process is still in progress” (*Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention*,

paragraph 39.ii). At the same time it exhibits significant material evidence of its evolution over time, the latter integrally related to both natural forces and human activity. On the Curonian Spit it is still possible to observe the relict landscape in which an evolutionary process came to an end in the past: the ethnographic heritage of the Kursiai tribe, which lived on the Spit for a long period, but have now disappeared, still exists. The earlier landscape of fishing villages is to be found beneath the sand-dunes.

The Spit retains the following items of cultural heritage:

- Fishing settlements, where the works of man and nature are of outstanding universal value from the ethnocultural, historical, and aesthetic points of view;
- Architectural works that are unique in scale and which are of outstanding value from the historical, artistic, and scientific points of view;
- Archaeological sites, most notably buried villages.

The special significance of the Curonian Spit is expressed through the vivid combination of its natural and its cultural heritage. The latter relates not simply to material and spiritual aspects, but also to the experience accumulated by generations of local inhabitants, which has permitted the rehabilitation of natural systems of the Spit that had been lost.

Criteria ii, iv, and v

Category of property

In terms of the categories of cultural property set out in Article 1 of the 1972 World Heritage Convention, this nomination comprises *groups of buildings and sites*. It is also a *cultural landscape* as defined in paragraph 39 of the *Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention*.

History and Description

History

Formation of the Curonian Spit began some 5000 years ago. Despite the continual shifting of its sand dunes, Mesolithic people whose main source of food was from the sea settled there in the 4th millennium BCE, working bone and stone brought from the mainland. In the 1st millennium CE West Baltic tribes (Curonians and Prussians) established seasonal settlements there, to collect stores of fish, and perhaps also for ritual purposes.

The temperature increase in Europe during the 9th and 10th centuries resulted in a rise of sea level and the creation of the Brockist strait at the base of the Spit. This provided the basis for the establishment of the pagan trading centre of Kaup, which flourished between c 800 and 1016. This is unique in being the last unexcavated large proto-urban settlement of the Viking period.

The invasion of Prussia by the Teutonic Knights in the 13th century marked a major change in the historical development of the Spit. They were gradually driven out, but armed conflict continued in the region up to the 15th century. The Spit had great strategic importance, and in consequence the Knights built castles at Memel (1252), Noihaus (1283), and Rossitten (1372). They also settled German farmers around the castles, building roads and clearing woodland for agriculture. The influence of the Knights ended with the peace treaty signed with Lithuania in 1422. Groups of Baltic peoples set up settlements on the Spit and the population increased. However, since their main activities were fishing and beekeeping, this had little impact on the natural environment of the Spit. The early 16th century witnessed the economic and political rise of Prussia, accompanied by intensive industrialization. Industries such as glassmaking, shipbuilding, and salt and metal production required large amounts of wood, charcoal, and potash, all of which could be obtained easily and cheaply on the Spit. Most of the woodland was felled to meet this demand. Loss of tree cover resulted in degradation of the vegetation and exposed the underlying sand to wind erosion. In the 16th century a new process of dune formation began and settlements became buried in sand. By the early 19th century woodland only survived in a few places on the Spit, which took on the topography that has survived to the present day. Large sums were made available by the Prussian State Land Management from the beginning of the 19th century to prevent further destabilization of the Spit. The works took the form of the construction of a protective bank of sand to prevent further ingress of dunes (a process that took most of the century) and the stabilization of dunes by means of brushwood hurdles, accompanied by reforestation. By the end of the 19th century nearly half of the Spit had been converted to woodland thanks to these works. The battles of January 1945 saw considerable destruction of the woodland cover from fire, bombing, and the movement of heavy vehicles. Restoration work began after World War II and has continued with success, despite some serious incursions from the sea; nowadays woodland covers more than 71% of the surface area of the Spit.

Description

The Curonian Spit is a sandy peninsula that separates the Baltic Sea and the Curonian Lagoon. It stretches in a slightly concave arc for a distance of 98km (52km in Lithuania, 46km in Russia) from the Kaliningrad peninsula to the town of Klaipeda, and it varies in width from 0.4 to 3.8km.

The largest settlements in the Lithuanian part are Smiltyne, Pervalka, Juodkrante, Preila, and Nida and in the Russian part those of Lesnoje, Morskoje, Rybachy, and the Diuny tourist hotel complex.

The dominant relief feature is a large ridge of high dunes which stretches for 72km and varies in width between 250m and 1.2km. The average height is 35m, but in places the dunes rise to more than 60m. Dune valleys divide the ridge into separate dune massifs, and capes are generally formed in front of these valleys. At the present time more than half the ridge is forested.

The most significant element of the Spit's cultural heritage is represented by the old fishing settlements. The earliest of these were buried in sand when the woodland cover was removed. Those that have survived since the beginning of the 19th century are all to be found along the coast of the Curonian Lagoon. At the end of that century more elaborate buildings – lighthouses, churches, schools, and villas – began to be erected alongside the simpler vernacular houses. This was due in part to the fact that the Spit became a recreational centre: Juodkrante became famous as a health resort as early as 1840 and Nida, Preila, and Pervalka were given official recognition in this category in 1933. In the centre, Nida, the largest settlement on the Spit, has a linear plan based on a single main street that runs parallel to the Lagoon and which developed spontaneously in the 19th century. Small streets, mostly dead-ends, join the main street at intervals and it is connected to the Lagoon by a network of paths.

The first fishermen's houses in Preila, 9km to the north of Nida, were built in clusters, and they were linked by a single main road. A little further north is the small settlement of Pervalka. The compact single-storeyed fishermen's houses that had survived from the early 19th century were destroyed during World War II and have been replaced by uninspiring modern buildings.

The topography of dune valleys and wooded crests imposed a special character on Juodkrante, 13km north of Nida. From the 17th century to the 20th century it was composed of seven separate settlements, each slightly different in layout and architecture. They were united as a single urban unit at the beginning of the 20th century. Until 1942 it was the most important fishing settlement and health resort on the Spit, but this distinction was lost as a result of wartime destruction.

The most northerly part of the Spit is known as Smiltyne. It was not settled until the mid 19th century, when a health resort was created. It is the point where ferries from Klaipeda on the Lithuanian mainland arrive on the Spit.

The surviving buildings on the Spit of cultural significance are the houses of fishermen built during the 19th century. In their original form they were built of wood and thatched with reeds. A homestead consisted of two or three buildings: a dwelling house, a cattle shed, and a smoke house for curing fish. These were located to one side of the long narrow plot, leaving space for a kitchen garden and for drying nets. The houses were constructed at right-angles to the street. The development of the Spit for recreational purposes in the 20th century saw many changes. The fishermen's houses were enlarged and new houses were built, in styles that had no reference to the traditional architecture. Summer cottages were built, usually two-storeyed and with their long sides to the street. As a result, the appearance of the settlements was radically altered.

Other buildings are the sturdy lighthouse at Pervalka and the Neo-Gothic Evangelical Lutheran churches at Juodkrante and Nida, both built in the 1880s. The cemeteries of Nida, Preila, Pervalka, and Juodkrante are of interest. Of special significance are the characteristic grave markers known as *krikštai*. These are timber planks decorated with flowers, horses' and birds' heads, human silhouettes, and other motifs. These only survive in the Nida cemetery.

Management and Protection

Legal status

The entire Curonian Spit is protected in the form of two National Parks. The Lithuanian part is the National Park "Kuršių Nerija," created by Decision of the Supreme Council of the Republic of Lithuania No I-1224 of 23 April 1991.

The Russian part is the National Park "Kurshskaya Kosa," created by Resolution of the Council of Ministers of the RSFSR No 423 of 6 November 1987, as amended in 1995.

The protective measures in the management plan for the Lithuanian Park make special provision for protection and conservation of the cultural heritage and cultural landscape.

That for the Russian Park invokes the Federal Law "On specially protected natural territories," which forbids and activity which is potentially harmful for, *inter alia*, historical and cultural sites.

Management

Both National Parks are state property.

The Lithuanian Park is managed by its own administration, which is under the jurisdiction of the Department of Forest and Protected Areas of the Ministry of Environment. There is a territorial management plan for the Curonian Spit covering the period to 2005, approved in 1994 by the Lithuanian Government. This forms the basis for a series of detailed plans relating to forestry management, recreational development, settlement improvement, and infrastructure development. The specific management plan for the "Kuršių Nerija" National Park includes provisions for the protection, rational use, and restoration of the cultural heritage and landscape and for ensuring the continuity of architectural traditions in developing settlements. Management of the Russian Park takes

place at two levels. Overall responsibility is with the Federal Forestry Service, which works through the Forest Administration of the Kaliningrad Region.

The General Development Plan of the "Kurshskaya Kosa" National Park of 1989 sets out measures for conservation, control, and use of the Park, as well as scientific research projects. The information in the nomination dossier does not indicate whether it makes specific reference to the cultural aspects of the Park.

Both Parks have clearly defined zones. The zoning categories are: Strict Nature Reserves; Limited access zones; Recreation zones; Settlements; Agricultural zones. They are also surrounded by buffer zones (in the Baltic and the Curonian Lagoon) that vary in width from 500m to 2km.

Conservation and Authenticity

Conservation history

Conservation in both parts of the Curonian Spit appears to have concentrated on its natural qualities since the end of World War II. These have, however, ensured that the overall landscape values have been protected and enhanced, which are significant when the property is considered as a cultural landscape. There appears to be only belated recognition on the part of the Lithuanian authorities of the cultural value of the heritage properties on that part of the Spit.

Authenticity

In landscape terms, the Curonian Spit has high value. It is an example of a special landform that is subject to changes owing to natural phenomena resulting from climate variations and from human interventions. The latter have been both catastrophic, as in the case of the drastic deforestation in the 16th century, and beneficial, as demonstrated by the creation of artificial barriers in the 19th century against further incursions by the sea. It is undoubtedly a continuing organic landscape, as defined in the *Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention*.

Evaluation

Action by ICOMOS

A joint ICOMOS/IUCN mission visited the Curonian Spit in May 2000.

ICOMOS comments

In the opinion of ICOMOS the Curonian Spit qualifies for inscription on the World Heritage List under the cultural criteria. However, it is essential that the management plans for the two components of the nominated property should be harmonized and integrated before it can be inscribed. It is especially important that there should be an effective joint tourism management plan. To ensure the proper management of the entire Spit, a joint consultative commission should be set up, operating in the same way as the Franco-Spanish commission for the Mont Perdu World Heritage site.

Recommendation

At the meeting of the Bureau of the World Heritage Committee in Paris in June 2000, this nomination was referred back to the two States Parties,

requesting them to take active steps to create the collaborative mechanisms proposed by ICOMOS. At the time this evaluation was prepared for printing this information had not been received. In the event of the information being made available before the extraordinary meeting of the Bureau in November 2000 and found to conform with these requirements, ICOMOS recommends that this property be inscribed on the World Heritage List on the basis of *criterion v*:

Criterion v

The Curonian Spit is an outstanding example of a landscape of sand dunes that is under

constant threat from natural forces (wind and tide). After disastrous human interventions that menaced its survival the Spit was reclaimed by massive protection and stabilization works begun in the 19th century and still continuing to the present day.

ICOMOS, September 2000

Annex 5: IUCN Evaluation (2000)

WORLD HERITAGE NOMINATION - IUCN TECHNICAL EVALUATION CURONIAN SPIT (LITHUANIA / RUSSIAN FEDERATION)

1. DOCUMENTATION

(i) **WCMC Data sheet:** (3 references)

(ii) **Additional literature consulted: Inscription of Curonian Spit National Park on the World Heritage List**, International Conference, Lithuania, May 1998. **Draft Global Overview of Geologically Significant Protected Areas on the World Heritage List**, IUCN, Dingwall, P. and Marsh, J. 1999. **Global Overview of Wetland and Marine Protected Areas on the World Heritage List**. IUCN, Thorsell, J., Levy R. F. and Sigaty, T. 1997. **Mires Process, Exploitation, and Conservation**, Wiley & Sons, Heathwaite, A.L., 1995. **Aeolian Sand and Sand Dunes**, Unwin Hyman, Pye, K. and Tsour, H., 1990. **Coastal Dynamics and Landforms**, Clarendon Press, Trenhaile, A.S., 1997. **Coastal Lagoons**, Cambridge Press, Barnes, R.S.K. **Coastal Dunes**, African Wildlife, Rickard, C. **Important Bird Areas in Europe**, Cambridge Press, Heath, M.F., Evans, M. I. Eds., 2000. **Important Wetlands in Lithuania**, Ompo Vilnius, Svazas, S. et al., 1999. **Bird Migration Ecology at University of Lund, Sweden**, Website, Dept of Animal Ecology, University of Lund, Sweden, 2000. **Bird Migration – Environment Lithuania**, Website, 2000. **Midcontinental Shorebird Migration**, Website, U.S. Geological Survey, 2000.

(iii) **Consultations:** 12 external reviewers. Relevant officials from Russian Federation and Lithuanian parks agencies and local municipalities. Local interest groups.

(iv) **Field Visit:** Peter Shadie, Henry Cleere (ICOMOS), May 2000.

2. SUMMARY OF NATURAL VALUES

The Curonian Spit is a narrow sandy peninsula, which separates the eastern shore of the Baltic Sea from the Curonian Lagoon, and stretches in a narrow (0.4 to 3.8 km in width), slightly concave arc for 98 kms. The nominated site spans the borders of two countries: Lithuania and the Russian Federation and has been jointly submitted. It has been submitted on the basis of both cultural and natural criteria and has been the subject of a joint inspection by IUCN and ICOMOS.

The nominated site comprises two protected areas: to the south Kurshskaja Kosa National Park in Russia, established 1987; to the north Kursiu Nerija National Park in Lithuania, established 1991. These two reserves total an area of 33,021 ha comprising a terrestrial area of 16,321 and aquatic areas covering part of the Curonian Lagoon: (4,200 ha) and the Baltic Sea (12,500).

The Curonian Spit displays Quaternary geomorphological features representing different stages in the formation of the Baltic Sea and is one of the largest accumulative forms of the Baltic relief. It remains an area of active and on-going coastal geomorphological processes and is dominated by linear dune formations derived from aeolian and coastal processes which are up to 60 metres in height and extend for more than 70 kms.

The Spit contains a mosaic of coastal, lagoon and dune environments including lagoon and shallow margins habitat, Baltic Sea coastal dune front, mobile parabolic dune systems, freshwater inland lakes, and a variety of vegetation communities (pine and spruce forest; alder, birch and oak woods; mires; meadowlands; reeds, bulrush, sedges and water lilies). Forests cover over 70% of the site and 74% of these are dominated by introduced *Pinus spp.* subject to active forest management. 5% of the area contains pre 18th century virgin forest. There are 700 species of flowering plants and ferns; 20 species of lichens; 40 species of mosses; and 300 mushroom species.

The site contains a number of plant and animal species listed as rare on the Red Data Books of Lithuania and Russia, a small number of which are also listed as globally threatened. A small number of endemic plants are noted. The vertebrate fauna consists of 338 species including 251 species of birds and 35 mammal species including elk, European roe deer, wildboar, fox, wood marten, stoat, badger, beaver, and lynx.

One of the significant aspects of the Spit is its geographical position and orientation (north-east to south-west) which creates a directing line for bird migrations between north-eastern Russia, Finland and eastern Baltic countries and central southern European overwintering destinations. The Spit is part of the East Atlantic Flyway and an estimated 10 – 20 million birds fly over the site and lagoon in spring and fall. Most of the annual bird migration is made up of passerines although 6-7% of the total Western Palearctic population of Velvet Scooter and 3% of the total north-western European population of Goosanders overwinter in the area around the Curonian Spit.

3. COMPARISON WITH OTHER AREAS

Although there are no sites on the World Heritage Convention listed specifically for their coastal geomorphology there are many sites listed which include significant coastal features. 26 World Heritage sites are noted as having significant coastal features of either primary or secondary nature. These include sites such as Fraser Island in Australia, Olympic National Park in the USA, Greater St Lucia Wetland Park in South Africa, Banc d'Arguin National Park in Mauritania, El Viscaïno Whale Sanctuary in Mexico, Danube Delta in Romania and Donana National Park in Spain. Several other important protected areas have been established on sand spits including Naikoon Provincial Park in BC, Canada and Farewell Spit Nature Reserve in New Zealand

The Curonian Spit is a classic sand-spit lagoonal complex. Spit or barrier and lagoon systems are common around the world being found from polar regions in wide-ranging climates and tidal ranges, and extending along some 13% of the world's total coastline. They are particularly well developed along the east coast of the USA (extending 4,500km in length) and the Gulf of Mexico (1,000km), in many inland seas of low tidal range such as the Baltic Sea, Mediterranean Sea, Black Sea and Caspian Sea and along the coasts of Africa, India, Australia and the eastern coast of South America.

The Curonian Spit is noted as being the fifth longest sand spit formation in the world. The Spit is certainly the largest accumulative coastal relief form in the Baltic Sea along side other smaller spits in the Baltic including Visla, Merzuezha Helska and Leba Spits. Although the scale of the Curonian is impressive there are a number of longer sand spit systems within the world. Along the American coastline are individual sand spit systems more than 400kms in length, while the south coast of Iceland has a spit more than 200km long and on the southern coast of Australia the state of Victoria has a spit 150km long. In some respects the Curonian Spit may be most closely compared with the 860,000 ha Fraser Island World Heritage Area in Australia. Fraser Island is the world's largest sand island at 122kms in length and 5 – 25 kms wide. The Island was listed due to its complex array of dynamic coastal dune formations and freshwater lakes which are considered exceptional in number, diversity, age and developmental stages. Fraser Island is also listed for its unique natural vegetation associated with the dune mass.

The Curonian Spit has great importance as a landbridge (directing line) for migrating birds on the East Atlantic Flyway. Whilst the East Atlantic Flyway is one of the most important bird migration routes in the world it is not the only significant international flyway. Significant bird migration routes exist in other parts of Europe and Africa, East Asia and North America. The Curonian acts as a bottleneck for large numbers of birds (mostly passerines), however, other areas of the Baltic also experience high numbers of migrating birds, for example Falsterbo and Ottenby on the island of Oland in southern Sweden. Other areas which see large numbers of annual bird migrations include Gibraltar, Bosphorus, Kopa Peninsula and the Bering Strait. Of the 3,619 Important Bird Areas (IBAs) which cover 7% of Europe 6 are listed in the area of the Curonian Spit and Lagoon and of these, Nemunas Delta on the eastern side of the Curonian Lagoon, is noted as the most important bird area in Lithuania. Nemunas Delta is accordingly one of only 5 Ramsar sites in Lithuania. No IBAs are listed for the Curonian Spit area within the Russian Federation.

The nominated area is an important site for the overwintering of 4 species of internationally important waterbirds. However, areas in the immediate vicinity including the lagoon and delta are noted as more important overwintering sites (Kursiu Marios Lagoon – 12 species and Nemunas Delta Regional Park 14 species).

An additional comparison may be made with the 10,000 sq. km Wadden Sea situated between Germany, Denmark, and the Netherlands and regarded as one of the most important wetlands in western and central Europe. The Wadden Sea contains 450 kms of tidal mudflats, sandbars,

saltmarshes, and tidal channels including the barrier islands and is the largest sedimentary coastal area in Europe. It has been estimated that the area acts as a breeding ground for 4,000 of the North Sea's 7,000 species of plants and animals and is of vital importance to huge numbers of birds (9 million).

4. INTEGRITY

Both the geophysical landscape and the vegetated communities of the Curonian Spit are the result of natural processes and human intervention. Most of the forested landscape and the "avant" or fore dune itself are man-made and many other coastal features are the result of human intervention. In this sense the current landscape of the Spit is only 150 years old. In 1605, 75% of the Spit was forested, however, clearing and overexploitation reduced this to just 10% forest cover by 1700. Active reforestation and dune stabilisation has restored the forest cover to 71% today. The nomination notes that the Curonian Spit has been a "proving ground for introduction of species where over 60 species of woody plants stand the test for survival and stability for more than 100 years".

There are 9 small settlements found throughout the site with a total resident population of 4,200. This number swells in the summer months as the Curonian Spit attracts up to 1.8 million locals and tourists annually. Potential conflicts between municipal and tourism development needs and the needs of the National Park need to be acknowledged and managed.

Boundaries for the site appear adequate although the marine extensions seem to be in place simply as buffer zones rather than for reasons relating to marine and aquatic natural values. Both countries have afforded the highest standard of legal protection for the area. Management plans are in place with consistent zoning provided for. Transfrontier co-operation could be improved to ensure consistent management objectives and standards operate across national borders. Adequate levels of resourcing are being applied to the management of the reserves although there exist integrity concerns regarding declining budgets and the mix of expertise within the Russian sector of the Spit. Integrated interpretations and educational facilities and services are being developed within both sectors of the Spit.

In general IUCN believes that the integrity issues within the Operational Guidelines are adequately addressed. Nevertheless there are a number of issues which could be improved:

- = Need for improved transfrontier co-operation and sharing of skills. A formal management committee mechanism (perhaps similar to the Pyrénées - Mont Perdu model between Spain and France) needs to be established to cement co-operation and sharing of expertise between parks agencies, municipal authorities, bird researchers and local communities. In addition a memorandum of understanding and single integrated management plan should be developed between the two countries.
- = Need to secure stable resourcing for national park management particularly in the Russian sector of the Spit which seems dependent on income from forestry products.
- = Need to broaden skills of park staff. This is particularly the case within the Russian sector which needs to access expertise beyond forestry only.
- = Need to research biodiversity values of marine extension zones and implement appropriate management policies.
- = Need to anticipate increasing levels of tourism and plan for this. The area has enormous potential for nature based, cultural and ecotourism development. Ferry only access to the site from Klaipeda is an important control mechanism for limiting visitation. The impacts on the Spit of building of a bridge to replace the ferry should be carefully considered.
- = Need to review existing zoning system to better protect virgin forests and manage ornithological scientific activities.

5. ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

Whilst the issue of the site's listing as a cultural landscape is primarily one for ICOMOS, IUCN would offer the following comments:

IUCN believes the Curonian Spit is a cultural landscape which demonstrates interaction between humans and the environment. Ethnographic evidence of 13th Century Curonian people; changes in occupation over time; archaeological evidence of inundated fishing villages (13 villages buried in wind blown sand after deforestation); continuing traditional fishing activity; historic built structures; and contemporary development (tourism and recreation) attest to this on-going interrelationship. The site's current geomorphology and natural values are a result of the combination of natural processes and human intervention over the past 150 years.

The tragic consequences of 17th and 18th Century forest clearing and resultant action to revegetate the dunes provide an early example of humankind beginning to understand and appreciate their dependence on the natural environment.

The establishment of the world's first ornithological station, Rossitten Ornithological Station in 1901, is also a significant demonstration of early scientific inquiry into the natural world and the science of ornithology.

IUCN would therefore support the listing of the Curonian Spit as a cultural landscape. The site clearly has very important natural values which are integral to maintaining the values of the site as a product of the combined works of nature and man.

6. APPLICATION OF WORLD HERITAGE NATURAL CRITERIA

The Curonian Spit has been nominated under all four natural criteria.

Criterion (i): Earth's history and geological features

The nomination establishes a case for the regional significance of the Spit as a geomorphic feature and example of on-going geomorphic processes. The Curonian Spit is clearly the most impressive spit in the Baltic region. At the global level similar spits are found elsewhere and 13% of the world's coastline consists of this type of landform feature. The size of the Curonian Spit as the 5th longest in the world does not, in itself, argue outstanding universal value. The Curonian Spit is a modified landscape, strongly influenced by human intervention and so cannot be considered to represent natural unhindered coastal accumulative processes.

IUCN considers that the Curonian Spit nomination does not meet this criterion.

Criterion (ii): Ecological processes

The Curonian Spit contains a relatively diverse assemblage of fauna and flora which result from the mosaic of communities and environments established through human intervention. 74% of the forested landscape is artificial plantation and only 5% pre 18th Century virgin forest remains. The nomination acknowledges the role of the Spit as a testing ground for introductions of plant species. As a result of the low degree of naturalness the site does not demonstrate outstanding universal value under this criterion.

IUCN considers that the Curonian Spit nomination does not meet this criterion.

Criterion (iii): Superlative natural phenomena or natural beauty and aesthetic importance

There is no doubt that the Curonian Spit is an area of great beauty and impressive dimensions. The area possesses a scenically attractive mix of sea, land and lagoon landscapes and seascapes interspersed with settlements and cultural features. Such environments are not, however, unique within the world given the area of coastline where such features occur. Again the current landscape results from a relatively recent combination natural processes and human intervention and the Spit cannot be considered to be a product of nature alone.

IUCN considers that the Curonian Spit nomination does not meet this criterion.

Criterion (iv): Biodiversity and threatened species

The Curonian Spit provides habitat for a number of threatened or rare species. Some of these species have a northern and some of them an eastern or southern distribution, however, in general they do not represent endemics with a distribution limited to the nominated area. Many of these species are threatened regionally or nationally but few are threatened at the global level. There are no key species or ecosystems that depend solely on the Curonian for their survival.

The Spit is shown to be a very important part of the annual migration route of many birds and one of the important areas connecting north-western parts of Russia, Finland, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania with central and southern Europe. The Spit and Lagoon are also an important coastal wintering site for birds. There is also a long history of ornithological research on the Spit. The site operates as a transit site for birds although many do use it as a stopover. A number of other areas within this general area of the Baltic have similar or possibly higher value for biodiversity conservation than the Curonian Spit.

The Curonian Lagoon is the largest and most typical of the Baltic and, with its shallow depths, high nutrient levels and reed-bed margins, has high conservation in its entirety. Similarly the Nemunas Delta is a Ramsar site noted as the most important bird area in Lithuania due to its diversity of habitats and value to birdlife.

IUCN considers that the Curonian Spit nomination does not meet this criterion.

7. RECOMMENDATION

IUCN recognises that the Curonian Spit is an important site at the European scale and very significant within the Baltic Region as a whole, however, it does not meet the criteria for inscription onto the World Heritage List as a natural property. Therefore IUCN does not recommend that it be inscribed as a natural World Heritage site.

IUCN believes the Curonian Spit has potential to be inscribed as a cultural landscape. In this event IUCN would encourage the State Parties to address issues to improve the integrity of the site's natural values, particularly in the areas of improved transfrontier co-operation, better planning for increased tourism and securing sustainable resources.

The Bureau may wish to commend the State Parties for the co-operation they have achieved to date in improving the conservation of the site.