



UNESCO World Heritage Sites

Office of U.S. Senator Jeanne Shaheen

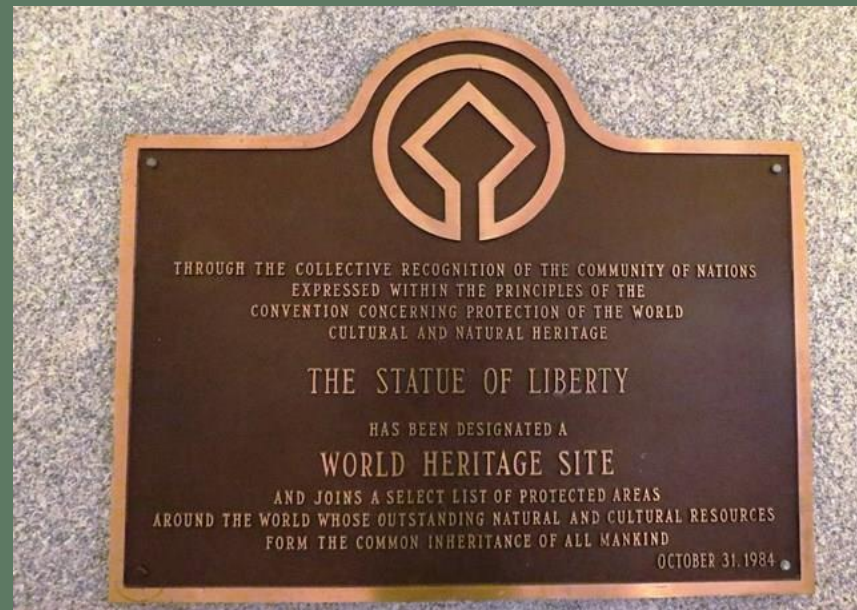
World Heritage Sites

- Areas designated by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) as areas of “outstanding universal value”
- Over 1,200 properties under the World Heritage Sites
- 25 World Heritage Sites in the United States, including Yellowstone National Park and the Statue of Liberty



Examples of World Heritage Sites

Sites are categorized as cultural, natural and mixed properties.



Brief History



The World Heritage Convention was adopted in 1972 to promote international cooperation for protecting cultural and natural sites for future generations.

Member countries are asked to identify their role in protecting potential sites and provide periodic reporting on the conservation status of sites on the list.

Member countries nominate potential sites for consideration by the World Heritage Committee (made up of 21 representatives from participating countries).

Nominated sites must demonstrate at least one of the selection criteria...

The site must...

- I) Represent a masterpiece of human creative genius;
- II) Exhibit an important interchange of human values... on developments in architecture or technology, monumental arts, town-planning or landscape design;
- III) Bear a unique... testimony to a cultural tradition... which is living or which has disappeared;
- IV) Be an outstanding example of a type of building, architectural or technological ensemble or landscape which illustrates a significant stage in human history;
- V) Be an outstanding example of a traditional human settlement, land-use, or sea-use which is representative of a culture (or cultures), or human interaction with the environment especially when it has become vulnerable under the impact of irreversible change;
- VI) Be directly or tangibly associated with events or living traditions, with ideas, or with beliefs, with artistic and literary works of outstanding universal significance;
- VII) Contain superlative natural phenomena or areas of exceptional natural beauty and aesthetic importance;
- VIII) Be outstanding examples representing major stages of earth's history, including the record of life, significant on-going geological processes in the development of landforms, or significant geomorphic or physiographic features;
- IX) Be outstanding examples representing significant on-going ecological and biological processes in the evolution and development of terrestrial, fresh water, coastal and marine ecosystems and communities of plants and animals;
- X) Contain the most important and significant natural habitats for in-situ conservation of biological diversity, including those containing threatened species of outstanding universal value from the point of view of science or conservation.

Selection Criteria



Selection Process Overview



In addition to prior preparation, drafting a nomination from the US could take 1–3 years, and formal consideration by the World Heritage Committee takes another 18 months.



Selection Process, Parts I and II

- Prospective sites must first be listed under the US Tentative List for nomination.
 - Proposed US sites must be federal property or sites already designated as national historic/natural landmarks.
- The Assistant Secretary of the Interior for Fish and Wildlife and the Office of International Affairs under the National Parks Service (NPS-OIA) manage this list.
- The Department of Interior chooses a site from this site each year to officially nominate to the World Heritage Committee.
- This list was last updated in 2017, and no further revisions are planned for now.



Current US Tentative List (By Date of Addition)

- Brooklyn Bridge (04/12/2017)
- Ellis Island (04/12/2017)
- Central Park (04/12/2017)
- Early Chicago Skyscrapers (04/12/2017)
- Pacific Remote Islands Marine National Monument (04/12/2017)
- California Current Conservation Complex (04/12/2017)
- Marianas Trench Marine National Monument (04/12/2017)
- Marine Protected Areas of American Samoa (04/12/2017)
- Big Bend National Park (04/12/2017)
- Civil Rights Movement Sites (01/30/2008)
- Dayton Aviation Sites (01/30/2008)
- Thomas Jefferson Buildings (01/30/2008)
- Mount Vernon (01/30/2008)
- Serpent Mound(01/30/2008)
- Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge (01/30/2008)
- Petrified Forest National Park (01/30/2008)
- White Sands National Monument (01/30/2008)



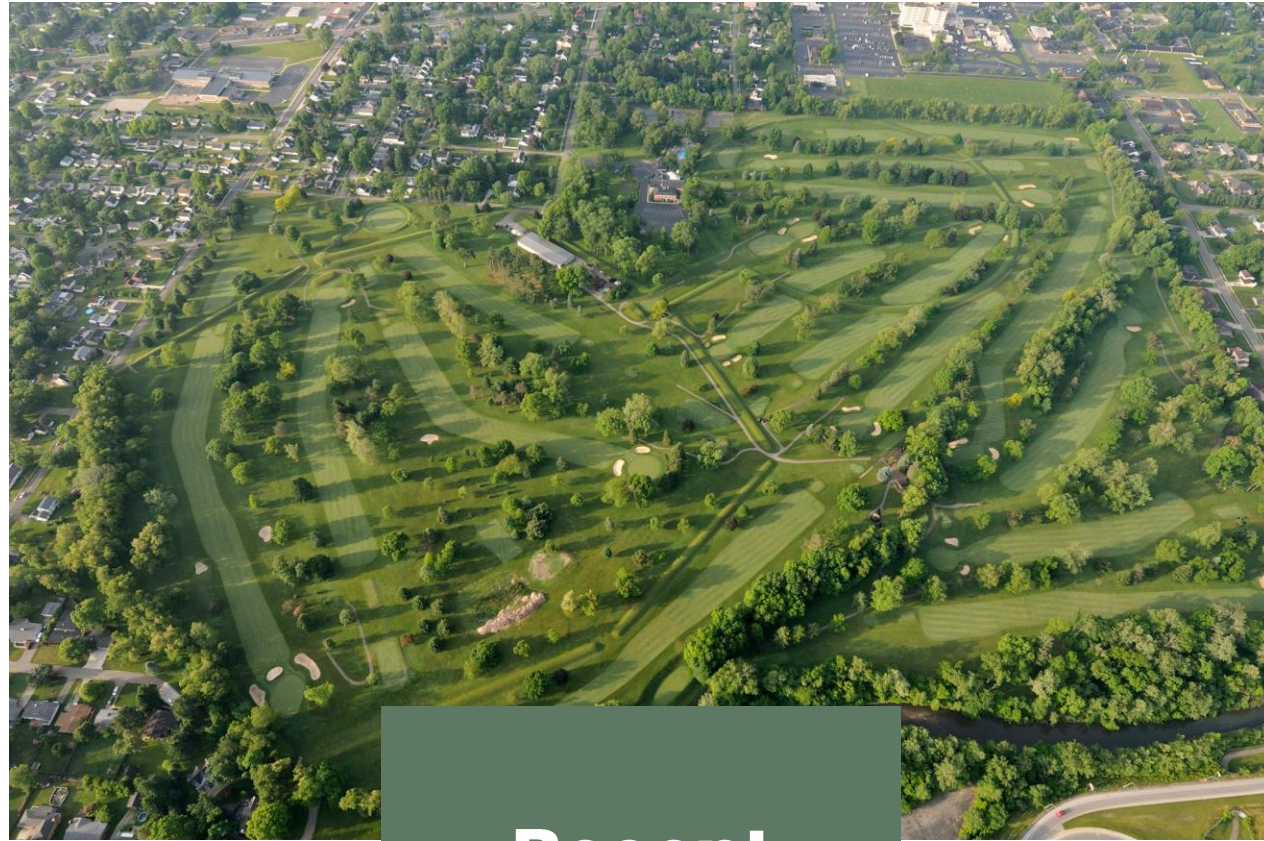
Selection Process, Parts III and IV

- After each country submits their nomination to the UN, three independent international non-governmental organizations review the nominations.
- They provide an evaluation of the nominated sites for the World Heritage Committee's consideration.
- The World Heritage Committee meets once a year to decide which sites will be inscribed on the World Heritage List based on their selection criteria.

Recently Inscribed US World Heritage Sites

- Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge (GA, next US nomination)
- Moravian Church Settlements (PA, 2024)
- San Antonio Missions (TX, 2015)
- Monumental Earthworks of Poverty Point (LA, 2014)
- Papahānaumokuākea (HI, 2010)





Recent Example



Hopewell Ceremonial Site

Located in Ohio, this site was one of the most recent US addition (2023) to the World Heritage Sites.

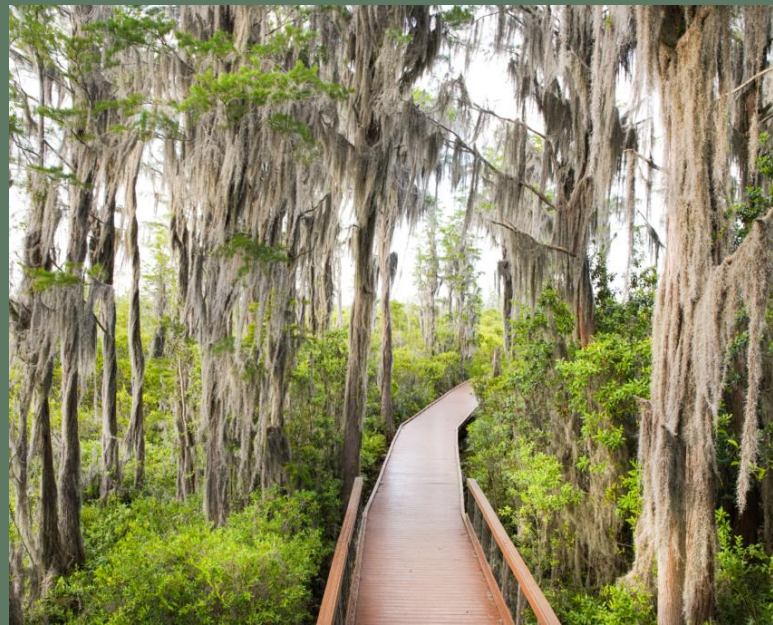
The complex houses monumental earthen complexes built by indigenous people over 2,000 years ago.

The Ohio History Connection worked with the National Parks Service on this project since 2008, when the site was first added to the Department of Interior's World Heritage Tentative List.

The State Department submitted the Department of Interior's 330-page nomination to the World Heritage Committee at the end of 2021.

Hopewell Ceremonial Site

- The community has drawn on the site's status as a World Heritage Site to promote community events, local businesses and educational programming.
- Ohio University suggests that \$12.5 million in income and 180 new jobs may directly result from the World Heritage Status in three years in the local areas.



Okefenokee Swamp (Proposed)

- This is a wetland refuge in GA which is currently on the tentative list and likely to be submitted this year.
- A study estimated that the designation would directly support 700 new jobs and double the annual economic output from \$79 million to \$140 million.

Everglades National Park

- This national park located at the tip of Florida was inscribed in 1979.
- To bring attention to environmental challenges, in 2010, the Obama administration and Senator Nelson (D-FL) asked the World Heritage Committee to list the park under the World Heritage in Danger.



Community Impact?



Some Frequently Asked Questions



Will becoming a World Heritage Site transfer American sovereignty and control over the site to the UN?

- No. Official recognition does not impose legal restrictions on owners of sites, nor does it give the UN any authority or ownership of the World Heritage Sites.

Once the process begins, can the process be halted? Could the community or state request the designation to be removed?

- While no communities have ever requested a US site to be removed from the World Heritage list, withdrawals from nomination or designation would be initiated through the Department of the Interior.

Is the US obligated to pay dues to the World Heritage Fund? Will the community need to pay the UN or the World Heritage Fund?

- The US government pays for annual dues to the World Heritage Fund as authorized by Congress. The community does not provide funding to UN bodies — funding would only be needed for putting together the application.



The List > World Heritage List

World Heritage List

Views Order by Order by: Country Component parts: All x

1223

Properties

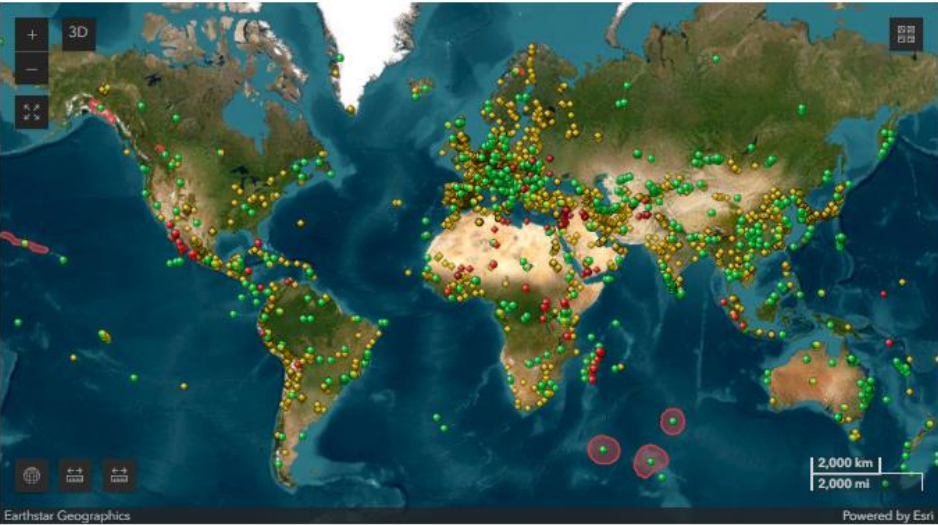
49

Transboundary

168

States Parties with properties out of 196

+



The World Heritage List includes **1223** properties forming part of the cultural and natural heritage which the [World Heritage Committee](#) considers as having outstanding universal value.

These include **952** cultural, **231** natural and **40** mixed properties in **168 States Parties**. As of October 2024, **196 States Parties** have ratified the [World Heritage Convention](#).

Legend

Category of property

Yellow diamond Cultural Green diamond Natural Red diamond Mixed

Property inscribed on the List of World Heritage in Danger

Red diamond Cultural Red diamond Natural Red diamond Mixed

Disclaimer

The Nomination files produced by the States Parties are published by the World Heritage Centre at its website and/or in working documents in order to ensure transparency, access to information and to facilitate the preparations of comparative analysis by other nominating States Parties.

The sole responsibility for the content of each Nomination file lies with the State Party concerned. The publication of

National Park Service

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A Quick Guide to the World Heritage Program in the United States

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What is a World Heritage Site?

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

What is meant by the term Outstanding Universal Value?

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



Mesa Verde was one of the first two U.S. World Heritage Sites, inscribed in 1978.

NPS image

Additional Resources

UNESCO Resources

- <https://whc.unesco.org/>
- <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/>

US Public Lands Agencies

- <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/internationalcooperation/worldheritage.htm>
- <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/internationalcooperation/a-quick-guide-to-the-world-heritage-program-in-the-united-states.htm#:~:text=Because%20of%20U.S.%20and%20international,in%20identifying%20properties%20for%20nomination.>
- <https://www.fws.gov/story/2024-04/becoming-world-heritage-site>

Examples of Current and Proposed Sites

- <https://hopewellearthworks.org/>
- https://okeswamp.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/EIA_WHS_Okefenokee_2024_Final-1-1.pdf