

Nomination of Kailash Sacred Landscape as World Heritage Site (27th January, 2016)

The Kailash Sacred Landscape Conservation and Development Initiative (KSLCDI) is a trans-boundary collaborative programme between China, India, and Nepal. It has evolved through a participatory, iterative process among various local and national research and development institutions within these countries. The Kailash Sacred Landscape (KSL) consists of a trans-boundary landscape that spreads over the borders of these three countries along their western tri-juncture, with holy Mt Kailash and Lake Manasarovar as the pivot. In China, KSL spreads over a large part of the Pulan County of the Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR), China. In India, KSL spreads over the central and northern reaches of district Pithoragarh. In Nepal, the Kailash Sacred Landscape spreads over the districts of Humla, Bajhang, Darchula, and Baitadi. All in all, these regions of China, India, and Nepal are adjacent to each other and show great ecological and historic cultural trans-boundary linkages. KSLCDI aims to achieve long-term conservation of ecosystems, habitats, and biodiversity while encouraging sustainable development, enhancing the resilience of communities and safeguarding the cultural linkages between local populations at the trans-boundary scale in the KSL. Overall, KSLCDI has been designed by and is being implemented with partner institutions in three countries, including ministries, state agencies, scientific institutions, NGOs and the private sector. The International Center for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD), an inter-governmental, apolitical knowledge hub based in Kathmandu, is synergizing and stewarding the institutions involved, ensuring uniform approaches in long-term socio-ecological monitoring, and devising livelihood-enhancing intervention strategies at the local and the landscape level. In the same process emphasis was given on the scope for nominating KSL as a World Heritage Site (WHS) of UNESCO. The guiding idea was that this WHS property will not be just limited to the iconic core sites of Mt Kailash and Lake Manasarovar in TAR, China, but will also enlist cultural/historic sites along the southern routes leading to this sacred region through the KSL parts of India and Nepal. Dr. Edwin Marshall Bernbaum, an American national and a globally renowned expert on cultural landscapes in mountain regions, has been working as a senior consultant for KSLCDI since February 2015 to prepare the ground for the application of KSL for a UNESCO WHS status. Hence Wildlife Institute of India in collaboration with ICIMOD hosted a scoping session for the nomination of KSL as a trans-boundary WHS on January 27, 2016. The key objectives of the session were:

- Shedding light on the potential of KSL to become a UNESCO WHS, and how would it be beneficial for the communities residing in the landscape.
- Providing clarity on the key steps involved in the process to nominate KSL as a UNESCO WHS, and finding the relevant institutions to be engaged in this process.
- Brainstorming on what is the immediate path ahead (a road-map to initiate the process in KSL Nepal), and how local stakeholdership can be included in this process.

Various Government and Non Government agencies like The Ministry of Culture, Uttarakhand State Government, The Ministry of Tourism, Uttarakhand State Government, State-level officials concerned with the annual Kailash-Manasarovar Yatra, State-level officials of The Archeological Survey of India, State-level representatives from INTACH participated in one day session held at WII.

The Major outcome of this consultative workshop was to initiate a dialogue for declaring Kailash Sacred Landscape as a World heritage site in the coming financial year of 2016-17.

