Mountain Protected Areas UPDATE

December 2024 # 124

The Northern Pindos National Park includes the second-highest mountain of Greece: Smolikas (2.637 m), and the impressive mountain ranges of Tymfi, Lygkos, Vasilitsa, and Mitsikeli. Photo: *peopleinnature*

A note from the editor

Welcome to the 124th Mountain Update! This Update is a little different with a focus on the **Sierra Nevada Natural Area**, Spain; where park staff and community have just celebrated the national park's 25th anniversary and renewal of IUCN Green List membership. For protected area managers working with local communities in and around their parks this is particularly interesting. There is also my favourite, a story from Bolivia and one about the importance of strategic planning—taking into account biodiversity and risks from development.

And of course—don't forget to celebrate International Mountain Day, 11 December!

December 2024

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Mountain SG Committee

Mountain Update is a quarterly newsletter distributed to members of the Mountain Protected Areas Network.

The Mountain Specialist Group acknowledges the First Peoples and Nations of the lands and waters where we live and work and we pay our respects to their Elders past, present and emerging. We acknowledge and respect the deep spiritual connection and the relationship they have to Country.

The views expressed in this UPDATE are not necessarily those of the IUCN WCPA.

IUCN WCPA Mountain UPDATE # 124 Editor: Gillian Anderson peopleinnature@bigpond.com

Global:

Preserving Our Peaks: a call for urgent action to protect mountain ecosystems

On this International Mountain Day (11 December), IUCN puts the spotlight on mountain World Heritage sites and their importance to life on Earth, and calls for increased support for mountain ecosystems.

Mountains are important

From the Dolomites (Italy), widely regarded as among the most attractive mountain landscapes in the world, to the Historic Sanctuary of Machu Picchu (Peru), a masterpiece of art and engineering embedded within the biodiverse Andes, about a fifth of the over 1200 World Heritage sites recognize mountain ecosystems and the way mountains have shaped humanity.

IUCN's work on World Heritage shows that a third of all World Heritage sites inscribed for their nature conservation values are mountain sites, that mountain World Heritage sites are among the most common biomes on the World Heritage List, and that those sites account for approximately two-thirds of all visitors to natural World Heritage sites worldwide. Those visitors range from hikers in the Great Himalayan National Park (India), rock climbers in Yosemite National Park (USA), or cyclists in the Swiss Alps Jungrau-Aletsch, and many others.

Mountain regions are home to more than 85% of the world's species of amphibians, birds, and mammals, despite covering only 25% of all land area. The Great Smoky Mountains National Park (USA), for instance, is home to the world's greatest diversity of salamander species, while over 130 bird species occur in the Simien National Park World Heritage site (Ethiopia).

Nearly two billion people rely on mountain water for drinking and irrigation. The *levadas* in the Laurisilva of Madeira (Portugal), for instance, carry water from the forest to the towns, while Mount Qingcheng and the Dujiangyan Irrigation System (China) recognizes an ecological engineering feat that has diverted water for irrigation without the use of dams for over two millennia.

Mountain World Heritage sites under pressure

Despite their remarkable importance for biodiversity and water security, one third of mountain World Heritage sites are threatened. Almost half of World Heritage sites could lose their glaciers by 2100, and many World Heritage sites have become the last line of defence for species such as mountain gorillas.

Simien National Park (Ethiopia) UNESCO WHA photo: *Marc Foggin*

Peter Jacobs of the WCPA Mountains Specialist Group also points out that while about 18% of mountain areas are protected (ex Antarctica) there is inconsistency across mountain ecosystems and across elevation gradients. Up to 40% of snow and ice areas are protected globally yet mountain grasslands, which contain 15% of mountain ecosystems, are less than 10% protected. Furthermore, 40% of the world's mountain ranges have no protection.

As we move toward the goal of 30*30 we need to identify priority areas for protection to incorporate the range of mountain ecosystems and encompass full elevation gradients. We have developed a decision support tool to assist this thinking at a landscape scale.

Kanchenjunga , Eastern Himalayas

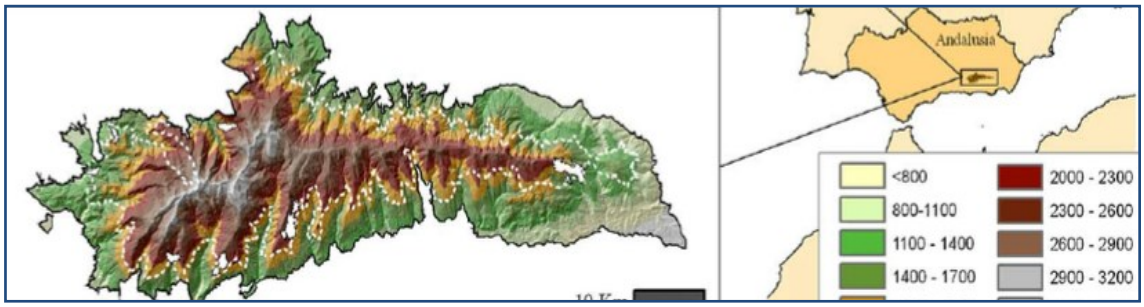
Europe

Sierra Nevada Natural Area, an overview: Spain

Notes from brochure "25th Anniversary: National & Natural Park of Sierra Nevada"(Junta de Andalucia)

The Sierra Nevada Natural Area, which consists of the National Park and Natural Park of the same name, is renowned for extensive mountainous terrain, and the highest peak in the Iberian Peninsula, the imposing Mulhacen, (3,479 m). Due to its huge variety of landscapes and its unique natural attributes, it has received various levels of protection. Besides being both a natural park (1998) and national park (1999), it is also internationally recognised as a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve (1986).

The result of all this is a degree of protection which ranges from the highest areas, where the most remarkable and fragile ecosystems are located within the national park; to the lower areas home to majority of urban and intensive use areas, within the zone of influence. Between the two lies the mid-mountain strip of Natural Park (see map below).



National Park—within white dotted line (highest conservation value)

Natural Park—outside the white dotted line (area of great value, where some human activity has taken place)

The weather and the difference in altitude mean that a diverse range of plants, especially adapted to difficult conditions, grow there. In the higher mountains, such as Veleta and Tajo de los Machos, you will find native species such as the Sierra Nevada violet and "la estrella de las nieves" (snow star) growing in amongst and out of the cracks in the rock face. At this altitude there are also beautiful valleys of glacier lagoons such as Siete Lagunas (Seven Lagoons). Mid-way up, deciduous forests dominate the landscape: Pyrenean oaks, maples, and wild cherry and chestnut trees. These forests are responsible for the change in the appearance of the landscape throughout the seasons. At lower levels of the mountain there are holm oaks and riverside forest that accompanies the course of the rivers.

Start of the walk to Mulhucen, forest to open grasslands photo: *peopleinnature*

The variety in flora and climate guarantees diverse fauna. In the high mountains you can see the majestic golden eagle, the blue rock thrush and the red-billed chough. Dippers, golden oriole and the kingfisher reside in the tranquil shade of the riverside forest.

A large community of mammals such as wild boar, foxes, badgers and genets live deep in the forest and scrubland. The most plentiful of all is the mountain goat. There are also many invertebrate species including more than twenty species of butterfly and more than thirty kinds of beetle.

Tartessians, Phoenicians, Greeks, Carthaginians and Romans all resided here at some point, but it was the Moors who left the biggest impression. Their legacy lives on in architecture and irrigation systems (the "asequia" water channels). The Alpujarra villages are stunning architecturally, with "pueblos blancos" (white houses, *photo right*) nestled in the mountain side and spilling out on either side of the roads, typically featuring small windows, flat roofs, thin chimneys, and porches called "tinaos".

Inevitably, the tourist industry has flourished in this area with skiing, mountaineering, fishing, hiking, mountain biking and sightseeing. There is an ever growing 'ecotourism' sector linked to nature based adventure and wellness, village gastronomy (ham, cheese, wine) and accommodation.

Europe

Sierra Nevada National Park, star of International Mountain Congress: Granada, Spain

Notes below from the Congress, IUCN Blog and Europa Press Andalucía

On November 8 & 9, the II International Congress of Mountains (CIMAS II) was held in Granada, Spain. Organised by Andalusia's regional government, the congress served as the culmination of the *25th anniversary celebrations of Sierra Nevada National Park* and to celebrate the renewal of the National Park's status as an *IUCN Green List site*.

Many participants were from municipalities / villages surrounding the national park—a community with a strong interest in protecting the natural environment and promoting ecotourism. *Photo right: participants enjoying local produce*

The event included sessions on topics such as conservation, global change, public use, mountain sports, resource use, the need for science and management to work closely together, nature conservation through technological innovation, ecotourism (and branding) and many other mountain park-related subjects. It is interesting to note many of the issues discussed are common in protected areas around the world.

A number of very experienced and committed mountain protected area managers also spoke about their parks, both values and challenges.

An example was the **Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta Natural National Park** in Colombia. It is the highest coastal mountain system in the world, a place where indigenous knowledge and nature converge. The sheer changes in elevation from sea level to 5,775m create a wide variety of ecosystems within a small area, where the diversity of plant and animal life creates a unique exuberant region.

UNESCO declared it a Biosphere Reserve and World Heritage Site in 1979, given the network of ecosystems that countless forms of life and several indigenous communities call home.

Park managers from Colombia, Chile & Spain at the Congress

Lucía Prieto from **IUCN Centre for Mediterranean Cooperation** assisted the regional government of Andalusia, a key IUCN Member in Spain, in organising lectures for the event. *Peter Jacobs*, Chair of the WCPA Mountain Specialist Group, was invited to share his insights on the significance of mountain protected areas, biodiversity protection and sustainability in mountain ecosystems, including their critical importance in achieving global conservation goals such as 30x30. *photo right: Peter Jacobs*

The need for the appropriate use of technology to deliver safe and nature-friendly outdoor experiences was also addressed by Hartmut Wimmer from Outdoor Active and the IUCN Tech4Nature initiative.

Huawei and IUCN presented the achievements and next steps of the Tech4Nature project, which seeks to "transform species and ecosystem conservation practices, as well as visitor management, through innovative technological solutions."

In its first phase, Tech4Nature collaborated with four protected areas in Spain: the Sierra Nevada, Ordesa and Monte Perdido, and Sierra de Guadarrama National Parks, and the Sant Llorenç del Munt i l'Obac Natural Park, to "assess their needs in monitoring and management of public use".

In the Sant Llorenç del Munt i l'Obac Natural Park, a system of cameras, GPS and alerts was implemented to monitor the impact of visitors on the local fauna, focusing on the protection of a pair of Bonelli's eagles during their reproductive cycle.

The second phase of the Tech4Nature project will continue the collaboration with these parks to "improve conservation and visitor management through advanced technological solutions such as the development and testing of low-cost technological solutions for ecological and visitor monitoring, the improvement of data analysis capacity in protected areas, as well as exploring the use of outdoor navigation apps to improve interaction between visitors and wildlife."

Europe

Sierra Nevada National Park Green List Attributes: Spain

An IUCN Green List Site

"Sierra Nevada National Park is proud to have renewed its membership in the IUCN Green List and continue belonging to a club of excellence in nature conservation that respects the local community and implements appropriate management that responds to the challenges of climate change, health, and well-being," said Francisco de Asis Muñoz Collado, Director of Sierra Nevada National Park.

Photo left: CIMAS II Green List presentation Nov 2024

Conservation

- *Maintenance of high natural biodiversity*. Sierra Nevada is a biodiversity hotspot within the Mediterranean Basin hotspot, with very high rates of diversity and endemicity. The monitoring of species, especially the most vulnerable, and adaptive management make it possible to maintain their conservation situation stable in a scenario of strong changes, especially climatic changes, which may compromise their persistence in the medium to long term.
- *Maintenance of deciduous forests* even though the Mediterranean nature of the Sierra Nevada, especially due to its summer drought, is not a favourable factor. Scientific knowledge of its ecological determinants is allowing its monitoring and the design of specific management measures for its conservation.
- *Sierra Nevada Global Change Observatory*. A significant effort has been made to achieve a detailed knowledge of biodiversity, ecosystems and the services they provide in order to transfer this knowledge to management to ensure their conservation.

Populated for more than 2,000 years, the Sierra Nevada is the perfect place for witnessing humans and wildlife co-existing in the high mountains. There are about 43 villages located within the Sierra Nevada Natural park that encircles the Sierra Nevada NP.

Good governance

- *A robust legal framework that is accessible to citizens.* The declaratory laws of the Natural Park (1989) and the Natural Park, as well as the Management Plans are published in the Official Gazettes.
- *Transparency and accountability.* All the activity of Sierra Nevada is subject to prior planning that takes the form of an "Advance of the Annual Plan of Works and Investments" and a subsequent evaluation that is detailed each year in the "Annual Report of Activities and Results". Both documents are submitted for approval by the Participation Council and are available to all citizens on the website.
- *Public participation and citizen accessibility to the Administration.* Citizens have direct access to the Units that process their files, allowing them to know their status at all times. On the other hand, the participation of any citizen or corporation in the management of Sierra Nevada is guaranteed not only by being represented in one of the groups that are part of the Participation Council, but also by the existence of specific legislation that regulates public participation in any legislative initiative or complaints.

Community benefits

- *Existence of the Area of Socioeconomic Influence* (AISE) – with direct participation of the Mayors in the Participation Council. The legislation on National Parks defines this area as the 60 municipalities of the towns that contribute territory to the National Park. These Municipalities receive specific attention from the Administrations, carrying out active policies for their development and ensuring the integration of the National Park with it, as well as promoting sustainable economic activities linked to the revitalization of the National Park environment.
- *Policy of direct subsidies to the Municipalities of the AISE*. Specific public aid is provided for initiatives that contribute to improving the quality of life of the populations in the socio-economic environment of the Parks in line with environmental conservation.

America—south

I've never worn trousers up a mountain & I never will: Bolivia

Cecilia Llusco 39, is one of about 10 Indigenous female mountain guides in Bolivia, she has scaled its highest peaks & changed the tourism landscape

Taken from The Guardian September 2024

Cecilia Llusco contemplates Huayna Potosí, her destination and part of the Cordillera Real mountain range in Bolivia. "It is not all about reaching the summit," she says. "Sometimes it's about enjoying being in the mountains and going as far as you can, without suffering because of them. Since I began climbing mountains, I've learned the same applies to life," she adds. "It's not about getting to the top, but enjoying yourself on the journey. The most important thing is to be happy."

Her long black hair is tied in two plaits, linked with a large safety pin and wool decorations in red, yellow and green, the colours of the Bolivian flag. She is wearing a pollera, a voluminous floral skirt over layers of pink petticoats. She has paired it with a pink diamanté top, beneath a pink cardigan and a red fleece gilet.

"I have never worn trousers to go up a mountain and I never will. Our polleras don't impede us," she says of the traditional Aymara garment.

The name Huayna Potosí means "young mountain" in Aymara, Llusco's first language, spoken by more than one million people in Bolivia. The mountain is considered sacred and people bring offerings of coca leaves and alcohol to seek permission to ascend. It is about 15 miles (25km) north of La Paz, the highest administrative capital in the world, at more than 3,500m above sea level.

Llusco has been leading expeditions up Huayna Potosí, as well as other mountains in Bolivia, for about six years, but has been working in tourism since the age of eight when she began accompanying her father, a trekking guide.

Tourism in Bolivia has mostly recovered since the pandemic. Last year, 1,477,039 people visited the country spending $688m according to the country's National Institute of Statistics. Tourism generated 326,580 direct and indirect jobs during 2019, making it the fourth most important sector after mining, soya and hydrocarbons in exports, and contributing almost 4.6% of GDP. More Bolivians are now venturing outdoors and hiking, says Llusco, but climbing high mountains predominantly remains the preserve of foreign tourists.

Llusco says that although the male-dominated tourist industry is changing, she is still often the only woman working on the mountain.

Photo: 2015 on day before Llusco & 10 other women summited Huayna Potosí, calling themselves cholitas escaladoras (the climbing cholitas).

Bolivia's Indigenous population has seen greater recognition since Evo Morales served as the country's first Indigenous president between 2006 and 2019, but it is not an easy place to be a woman; in 2021, the country had one of the highest rates of femicide in South America.

"*It has been very difficult for me, and the whole group, to face the sexism and discrimination we've had to go through*," says Llusco. "*We have stumbled because we are women who wear polleras.*

"But we also have support that encourages us to keep going. Together, we are stronger. We support each other and teach our children to follow in our footsteps."

'I've never worn trousers up a mountain and I never will': a Bolivian cholita climber on sexism and her next summit | Global development | The Guardian September 2024

Ed Note: I loved this article by Sarah Johnson—please read it all

Sunda Clouded leopard at risk from development: Borneo

From Monabay November 2024 [Study shows, via clouded leopards, how to better protect forests]

Protected areas are intended to protect the species and habitats they contain. When well-managed, they can result in clean water, healthy soils, and reduced poaching pressure, all of which can spill over to nourish and replenish surrounding areas. But new research from Borneo suggests we could improve the performance of these sanctuaries of life by better selecting where to locate them in the first place.

Focusing protection efforts in forest areas with not only high biodiversity but also high risk of development could significantly improve conservation outcomes for key measures of biodiversity, according to the study published in *Nature Biodiversity*. It used the Sunda clouded leopard (Neofelis diardi), a wildcat about the size of a medium dog, as a proxy for these measures. A more "assertive" approach to protected area placement that prioritizes protection of high-biodiversity forest areas facing imminent development pressure could significantly improve conservation outcomes for key forest-dependent species, the study says.

Improving protected area design and management is vital as the urgency of environmental action builds, especially in regions facing escalating development threats, such as Borneo.

As in many parts of the world, Borneo's existing network of protected areas are largely located in rugged and remote places that are safeguarded mainly by their inaccessibility to development, rather than by strategic conservation planning.

A Sunda clouded leopard photographed by a camera trap in Borneo. Sunda clouded leopards spend most of their lives in the leafy shade of the forest canopy. Equipped with exquisite camouflage, superb climbing skills and outsize canines, they're formidable arboreal predators. But amid a development boom, the big cats' uncompromising dependence on forest cover could prove a fatal weakness. Photo: A.J. Hearn and WildCRU/ University of Oxford.

Scree and Talus

England has 10 national parks; the Norfolk Broads, Dartmoor, Exmoor, the Lake District, the New Forest, Northumberland national park, the North York Moors, the Peak District (*photo right*), the South Downs and the Yorkshire Dales. This year marks the 75th anniversary of the National Parks Act and in the past two decades the parks have faced severe hardship, including their budgets being cut by approximately 40% since 2010. **The Guardian November 2024**

Good news from Victorian National Parks Association **(VNPA) Australia November 2024**

Tucked away in a 'project status update' is a win for the Victorian Alps. And a sigh of relief for everyone who laboured long and hard to protect this beloved landscape.

The 80 commercial glamping structures proposed by Parks Victoria are off the table. Or should we say mountain.

Home to the magnificent Mt Feathertop and the moss-bedded Bogong High Plains, the Alpine National Park is a living, fragile gem. This was never the place to build privately-run luxury accommodation for a minority of park visitors. And now it won't be - although there is still plenty of work to be done to ensure funding is directed into existing walking track and facility maintenance.

Not so good news from VNPA

Similar to the national park budget in the UK story (above) park management budgets are being slashed, and the establishment of long promised small mountain national parks has been shelved by government.

Instead of legislating the new parks that would protect threatened plants and animals (Brush-tailed Phascogales, Mt Cole Grevillea, Wombat Bossiaea, Greater Gliders, Mountain Skinks, to name a few) the Government is hastening their decline; they've had years to pass the legislation. Furthermore, in announcing a review of management of the vast forests of eastern Victoria, the State government has committed to no new national parks; so much for 30*30!

Introducing 'longevity conservation' **The Conversation November 2024**
Keller Kopf Charles Darwin University

Old animals play vital roles in the maintenance of biodiversity and ecosystem services. Yet harvest management and conservation practices tend not to focus on preserving age structures within populations. And the loss of old individuals is not yet recognised by the *International Union for Conservation of Nature* as a means of listing threatened species.

Biodiversity conservation and threatened species policies should protect age structure. This is particularly important in long-lived species that produce more offspring with age, or where migration, social networks and cultural transmission of knowledge are required for survival.

Like big, tall trees in old-growth forests, older animals are irreplaceable. Pulling them out leaves the ecosystem less resilient to future shocks.

From Mountain Partnership

Albertine Rift Conservation Society (ARCOS Network), in collaboration with the Africa Regional Mountain Forum (ARMF) and the African NGOs Alliance for Environmental Sustainability (ANAES), developed an impactful position paper for COP29.

This position paper emphasizes the urgency of addressing the climate crisis in African mountain regions, advocating for increased financial support and the integration of sustainable mountain development into global climate change frameworks. The paper highlights the vulnerability of mountain communities who are disproportionately affected by climate change impacts but possess valuable traditional knowledge for adaptation.

Trends in climate adaptation solutions for mountain regions **October 2024**

Mountain Partnership member, Adaptation to Altitude , has published a new study that reviews climate adaptation solutions in mountain regions using data from the Adaptation at Altitude Solutions Portal. The study addresses the urgent need to document adaptation progress in these areas. Using a data-driven approach, the research explores the characteristics, feasibility and potential of these solutions.

Scree and Talus cont.

Australia's Black Summer 2019-2020 ABC Science

How often and where prescribed burning takes place needs a rethink if Australia's plants and animals are to be preserved, according to a study of biodiversity loss due to the Black Summer fires.

But the severity of these losses depended largely on past fire history within the 10.3 million hectares that burnt, according to a new study published in the journal Nature. Read here Nature Article A new study examining plant and animal species after the Black Summer fire season found greater biodiversity loss in areas subject to frequent prescribed burning.

Sites with three or more fires in the 40 years leading up to 2019–20 were far more negatively impacted than previously unburnt areas or sites that had burnt once during that time.

Ecologists are urging management practices to reduce fire frequency, adopt more rapid suppression measures and expand the national nature reserve system.

Billions of animals burned

Almost 3 billion koalas, kangaroos and other animals are estimated to have been killed or displaced in Australia's 'Black Summer' bushfires, according to an updated study trebling the previous estimate of 1 billion.

Easy to catch, yet little known: Meet the Chinese mountain cat

The Chinese mountain cat (*Felis bieti*) is a little-known felid found only on the eastern edge of the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau, in northwestern China. The species was first photographed in the wild in 2007, and until recently, very little has been known about its distribution and basic ecology.

Researchers collected vital data on an active Chinese mountain cat den in 2018, while a recent study in Menyuan county, Qinghai province, managed to GPS-collar Chinese mountain cats for the first time. **Unfortunately recent genetic research highlights the growing threat posed by hybridization with domestic cats.**

You wouldn't believe it's Australia

Ice climbing is a popular winter activity in the northern hemisphere, but it's also experiencing a surge in popularity in Australia, particularly for aspiring mountaineers looking to skill up before travelling overseas. And the most reliable site for ice climbing in Australia is Blue Lake — one of only four glacial lakes on mainland Australia.

Formed when glaciers carved out a basin in the granite bedrock during the last Ice Age 20,000 years ago, Blue Lake was a watering hole for grazing cattle until the national park was gazetted in 1944. Kosciuszko National Park is part of the Australian Alps.

Trying to 'reset the balance' between climbing and cultural heritage

The Victorian government (Australia) has released a long-awaited plan for protection of culturally significant sites in the **Mount Arapiles-Tooan State Park**. An estimated 48 per cent of climbing areas will close under the proposed amendments.

Barengi Gadjin Land Council Aboriginal Corporation, the body representing traditional owners of the area, said the cultural protections had been more than 30 years in the making. The draft management plan — which amends the original 1991 version — was released in early November after a series of archaeological and ecological surveys in the state park area. Sites such as scar trees, rock art and a stone tool manufacturing area in the park were of international significance, the Aboriginal corporation said.

But climbers are in strong opposition to the new plan amendments. The consultation process has now been lengthened after local residents and climbers said they felt "shut out of the process".

Looking for Mountain Research and many other excellent tools and publications? The Mountain Update has only a very tiny selection! Try Mountain Research & Development (MRD), Global Mountain Biodiversity Assessment (GMBA), Mountain Research Initiative, ICIMOD and Mountain Partnership—to mention a just few great sources of mountain information!

Important links

IUCN World Commission on Protected Areas for an outline of the role of Mountain Specialist Group WCPA Mountain Specialist Group

Please go to https://youtu.be/_NuY89TWscI a short video of Protecting Mountains IUCN WCC presentation by *Peter Jacobs* (Chair Mountain Specialist Group).

Some events of interest

Events - MRI - Mountain Research Initiative

Mountain Partnerships Events **Here**

Alparc: Alparc Events

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While Mountain Network members can choose not to be WCPA members and still be involved and receive the Mountain UPDATE, the WCPA Chair, and Mountain Specialist Group Executive and would like to encourage all to become WCPA members. This helps to secure good governance and management of the WCPA and the Mountains Group and enlightens all members to the wider activities of the WCPA.

To learn more about WCPA membership go to: WCPA Get Involved

For any relevant mountain protected area news, please email me (Gill) on peopleinnature@bigpond.com

I look forward to hearing from you soon!