

FAQs: U.S. Withdrawal from UNESCO and U.S. Involvement with the World Heritage Program

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How does the U.S. withdrawal from full membership in UNESCO affect US participation in the World Heritage program?

When the withdrawal becomes effective at the end of 2018, the US will become a non-member observer and intends to continue to participate in several UNESCO programs such as the World Heritage Convention and Man and the Biosphere (MAB) program which do not require membership in UNESCO.

The World Heritage Convention is an international treaty to which the US was the first signatory in 1973. While the Convention's Secretariat is staffed by UNESCO, the Convention is a stand-alone international legal instrument.

During the last period of non-membership in UNESCO from 1984-2002, the US continued to be actively involved in the World Heritage program including serving as chair of the World Heritage Committee and nominating many of the US sites now on the World Heritage List. Though the U.S. is not eligible to serve on the World Heritage Committee at this time, when not paying dues to the World Heritage Fund, it is still a party to the Convention and can nominate sites.

Does withdrawal from UNESCO affect current U.S. World Heritage sites?

No. There are 23 sites in the United States that are included on the World Heritage List. The US will continue to uphold its responsibilities under the Convention to preserve and promote these sites and their outstanding universal value.

Will the U.S. continue to nominate its sites to the World Heritage List?

Yes, the US plans to continue to nominate sites to the World Heritage List. The nomination of buildings by Frank Lloyd Wright, which was referred back to the US by the World Heritage Committee in 2016, is being revised with the intent to re-submit it before 2019. Other possible future nominations are under consideration. The US candidate, or Tentative, List of possible future nominations was revised in 2017 with the addition of several new sites, see:

https://www.nps.gov/subjects/internationalcooperation/revise_tentative_list.htm

Despite not paying its UNESCO or World Heritage dues since 2011, when Palestine was admitted as a member state, the US has continued to submit nominations of US sites to the World Heritage List and two US sites have been added to the World Heritage list since that time (Monumental Earthworks of Poverty Point in Louisiana in 2014, San Antonio Missions in Texas in 2015). The World Heritage Committee makes final decisions on what sites are added to the List.