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Waterton-Glacier conditions up for discussion in Paris

By the Associated Press

HELENA - A panel meeting in Paris next week plans to discuss concern that human-caused warming of the climate is why glaciers in Glacier National Park are melting.

A dozen organizations last month filed a petition asking the United Nations to declare Glacier in Montana and the adjacent Waterton Lakes National Park in Canada endangered, because of glacial retreat and its effect on the environment of the parks. Together they are known as Waterton-Glacier International Peace Park, and are covered by a 1995 treaty as a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

The proposal to have the parks designated a World Heritage Site in Danger is scheduled for discussion at the Paris meeting next Thursday and Friday at the headquarters of the U.N. Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.

Also up for discussion are reports of environmental degradation at Nepal's Sagarmatha National Park, which includes Mount Everest; Huarascán National Park in Peru; Great Barrier Reef in Australia; and the Belize Barrier Reef Reserve System in Central America.

The meeting, titled "World Heritage and Climate Change," is expected to generate a report that will be considered by the World Heritage Committee in July, said Kassie Siegel of the Center for Biological Diversity, one of the groups seeking to have Waterton-Glacier declared endangered.

Participants in the meeting include Mechtild Rossler, chief of the World Heritage Committee's European and North American section.

The number of glaciers in Glacier Park has fallen from about 150 in 1850 to 27, said Dan Fagre, who coordinates global

change research for the U.S. Geological Survey at West Glacier. The mean summer temperature at Glacier Park has risen by about 3 degrees Fahrenheit over the past century, according to the USGS.

Declaring Waterton-Glacier in danger would require the World Heritage Committee to identify ways of mitigating effects of climate change, said Erica Thorson, an Oregon law professor who wrote the petition