



## WWF Position Paper

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# Protected Areas

## The issue

Protected areas are the cornerstones of national and international conservation strategies. They act as refuges for species and ecological processes that cannot survive in intensely managed landscapes and seascapes. They provide space for natural evolution and future ecological restoration. People – nearby and further afield – benefit from the genetic potential of wild species, the environmental services of natural ecosystems, recreational opportunities and the refuge given to traditional and vulnerable societies. Most people believe that we have an ethical obligation to prevent species loss due to our own actions. Flagship protected areas are as important to a nation's heritage as, say, Notre Dame cathedral or the Taj Mahal.

Protected areas are still being established. Today, there are over 100,000 designated protected areas listed by the UNEP-World Conservation Monitoring Centre covering 18.9 million km<sup>2</sup> or 12.7% of the Earth's land surface, along with over 1300 marine protected areas, covering about 1% of the oceans. The vast majority of these were identified and gazetted during the 20th century, in what is probably the largest conscious land use change in history. But this growth gives a false impression of the strength of the world's protected area network. Many are remote and inaccessible – ice caps, deserts and mountains – and not in the best places to protect biodiversity or benefit communities. There are also notable gaps: for example just 0.1% of original forest in the Southern Pacific Islands, 1% of the moist forests of the Cameroon Highlands of Central Africa, 1% of Gulf of Guinea mangroves, and 2% of lake systems are protected. Flagship species like tigers and rhinos suffer from lack of protected areas.

Growth in extent has not always been matched by effective management: many protected areas have not been legally established and have no management capacity – so-called “paper parks”. Even many legally gazetted protected areas remain at risk. Threats range from immediate problems, like poaching, illegal logging and mining, settlement, and uncontrolled fires, to longer-term problems such as toxic contamination and climate change; these pressures are driven by underlying causes including poor governance, poverty, greed and lack of alternative livelihoods. The quality of protected areas can suffer from, for instance, removal of species through poaching, general ecological damage, and, in extreme cases, almost total destruction. Even where protected areas remain intact, effectiveness can be reduced by isolation and fragmentation if surrounding use changes dramatically. Lack of funding hampers management while human population pressures increase stresses. It is still unclear how seriously governments take their commitments to protection in the long term; at worst some governments may have designated protected areas simply to save them for later exploitation. Strong arguments in favour of protection are needed if protected areas are to attract political support and the resources required to preserve their values in the long term.

**How much is enough?** People often ask how much land and sea conservation organizations want to have in protected areas. A single answer is impossible, in part because it depends on what is happening in the surrounding area. Protected areas surrounded by totally unsympathetic land and water use need to be very large to maintain all species; those in a more supportive area can be correspondingly smaller and still protect biodiversity. Ecoregion conservation and accompanying research is starting to give us the information needed to improve our ability to answer such questions in the future.

## WWF's role

Protected areas have been central to the work of WWF for 40 years, starting with a focus on endangered species and developing into a broader ecoregional approach. Our work includes:

- **Planning:** developing concrete proposals for coherent, viable protected area networks through the ecoregion planning process, as in the East African Marine Ecoregion or through programmes such as the Asian Rhino & Elephant Action Strategy (AREAS)

- **Supporting the establishment and expansion of protected areas:** in South Africa WWF has been instrumental in the establishment and expansion of 11 national parks, including the Cape Peninsula National Park, and more than 30 nature reserves
- **Collaborative management:** supporting the management of important protected areas, such as Korup Park in Cameroon
- **Funding:** for **capacity building** and **research**, as in Song Thanh Reserve in Vietnam
- **Sustainable financing mechanisms:** as in the Amazon Region Protected Areas Programme in Brazil
- **Partnerships:** on projects like the WWF–World Bank Alliance protected areas target
- **Participation:** to ensure a local voice in decisions, as in agreements on human-elephant conflict issues in Quirimbas National Park in Mozambique
- **Facilitation:** of joint programmes such as transboundary conservation on tropical wetland protection between Australia, Papua New Guinea, and Indonesia
- **Research:** providing technical support like gap analysis, pioneered by WWF Canada
- **Advocacy:** for protection – such as the Yaoundé Summit in Africa – and against threats – such as uranium mining in Kakadu, Australia

## WWF's position

**1. Protected areas:** IUCN defines a protected area as: *an area of land and/or sea especially dedicated to the protection and maintenance of biological diversity, and of natural and associated cultural resources, and managed through legal or other effective means*, and subdivides protected areas into six categories: 1a: Strict nature reserve/wilderness protection area; 1b: Wilderness area; II: National park; III: Natural monument; IV: Habitat/Species management area; V: Protected landscape/seascape; VI: Managed resource protected area. WWF is pursuing the creation of new protected areas and its *Gifts to the Earth* instrument is proving valuable to recognize particularly significant new commitments.

**WWF believes** that the IUCN definition should be supported. We regard biodiversity conservation as the primary aim of protected areas but recognise their many additional benefits. We support using categories to strengthen management, like the World Conservation Congress recommendation on mining in Category I-IV protected areas. We also recognise the value of many protective functions *outside* IUCN protected areas, such as avalanche control, watershed protection, and other strategic reserves.

**Gifts to the Earth:** a public celebration by WWF of a globally significant conservation action, or a demonstration of environmental leadership, by a government, company, or individual. Over 60 of the 89 Gifts to the Earth to date involve protected areas: e.g. the Canadian Deh Cho, including withdrawal of 10 million hectares of land from commercial development until a protected area network is agreed and created.

**2. Building a comprehensive protected areas system:** currently many protected area networks are unrepresentative in that they omit important ecosystems. There is an urgent need to complete **ecologically representative networks** of protected areas, particularly in ecosystems that are under-represented, such as coastal areas and open seas, wetland areas, tropical moist and dry forest, lowland temperate forests, savannah and grassland.

**Ecoregion conservation:** An ecoregion is “a relatively large area of land or water that harbours a characteristic set of species, communities, dynamics and environmental conditions”. Ecoregion conservation aims to conserve ecological processes by integrating site-level activities within a larger strategy, based around a 50-100 year *biodiversity vision*, incorporating both socio-economic and biological viewpoints, resulting in visionary, ambitious approaches. WWF has prioritized 238 critically important ecoregions – the *Global 200* – for a particular focus. A key part of such strategies is the use of gap analysis as a planning framework for identifying candidate sites for protection.

**WWF believes** that ecoregional conservation represents a major opportunity to use science-based approaches to strengthen protected area networks and to place these in a wider context. Completion of ecologically representative protected area networks is the most urgent priority in global protected area programmes, particularly for marine protected areas where WWF advocates extending the system to 10% of marine area.

**3. Maintaining protected areas for now and the future:** many protected areas remain at risk, either because they are not gazetted or because legal status and management has not eliminated threats. WWF has been closely involved with the World Commission on Protected Areas' work on management effectiveness since it began, often working with the World Bank.

**WWF believes** that ensuring effective protected area management is critically important. Regular assessment of management effectiveness will be implemented into all WWF's protected area projects, leading where necessary to adaptive management.

**Assessing management effectiveness:** the World Commission on Protected Areas has a framework for assessing protected areas, including consideration of: (1) context (importance, threats); (2) planning (design and planning); (3) inputs (resources needed); (4) process (how management is conducted); (5) outputs (meeting targets); and (6) outcomes (meeting overall objectives). Within the framework, several assessment tools have been developed, ranging from detailed long-term monitoring to scorecards. WWF and IUCN have developed management effectiveness guidelines for marine protected areas that are being tested at more than 20 sites. WWF has also been involved in several national or regional systems e.g. in Central America and Brazil, a Rapid Assessment and Prioritization Methodology for protected area systems, and a tracking tool (with the World Bank) for monitoring progress at the site level.

**4. Building broader support for protected areas:** protected areas have sometimes been established with little regard to indigenous and local communities – who may have been forcibly removed from their traditional lands or lost their rights to the land and have suffered as a result. On the other hand, protected areas can also provide sanctuary for fragile human communities and this role requires further development. WWF supports the WCPA position asserting the rights of indigenous traditional peoples and local communities in protected areas, and promotes increased local participation in protected area management.

**5. Protected areas and poverty reduction:** arguing for money to be spent on biodiversity protection is much harder when there is also a pressing need for social support, particularly for the poorest members of society. Managers can help by ensuring that protected areas do not penalize the poor. They may sometimes be able to do

more, by working with local communities to develop strategies to help poverty reduction. Work in Category VI managed resource areas in Latin America gives valuable experience, as do Category V protected landscapes and seascapes in Western European national parks. Strictly protected areas can help sustain livelihoods if they, for instance, secure water supplies. Further work on links between conservation and livelihoods are being explored in a portfolio of WWF projects.

**WWF believes** that protected areas are only viable if they are supported by indigenous and local communities living within or depending on them, and by most other local stakeholders at all levels (local, national, regional, global). WWF recognises the need to work towards a rational, transparent and equitable process that recognises these different rights and attempts to reconcile them. At best, protected areas can provide frameworks to assist in implementing solutions to problems like human-wildlife conflict. Justifying and building support are critical to ensure durable protection. If it appears that indigenous or local people have been forced off land or lost ownership and access rights to create protected areas, restitution measures should be considered. In the implementation of its programme, WWF is strongly committed to identifying how protected areas can provide mutual benefits for biodiversity and indigenous and local communities. We also recognise the importance of developing wider partnerships to implement protected area networks, like private landowners and trusts, water and energy companies, tourism enterprises, timber companies and development groups.

**Indigenous and traditional peoples:** The World Commission on Protected Areas has principles for working with indigenous and traditional peoples in protected areas. Extracts include that: "...they should be recognised as rightful and equal partners in the development and implementation of conservation strategies that affect their lands, territories, waters, coastal seas and other resources...full respect for the rights of indigenous and other traditional peoples to traditional, sustainable use of their lands...principles of decentralisation, participation, transparency and accountability shall be taken into account...indigenous and other traditional peoples should be able to share fully and equitably in the benefits associated with protected areas.....rights...in connection with protected areas are often an international responsibility..."

**6. Benefits beyond boundaries:** protected areas provide many additional services including:

- Provision of **environmental services** – such as water, fisheries and soils; e.g. around a third of the world's largest cities rely on protected forests for their drinking water
- Maintaining **natural resources** – e.g. many marine protected areas provide breeding grounds for the fish to support coastal communities and to insure against over-fishing
- Defence of **local cultures** – an increasing number of indigenous and traditional peoples are finding refuge in protected areas and some are setting up their own protected areas
- **Spiritual sites** – many important religious and spiritual sites are in, or would benefit from being in, protected areas and WWF's Sacred Gifts to the Earth scheme recognizes these
- **Mitigation of climate change** – through e.g. the buffering against storm activity and sea-level rise provided by mangroves
- **Reduction of border tensions** – transboundary protected areas have been used to help reconciliation in areas of past conflict, particularly through the Peace Parks initiative
- **Provision of recreational values** – including individual visits and mass tourism including initiatives like Pan Parks and nature-based tourism as in South Africa's national parks

- Providing **economic benefits** and **poverty reduction** – for local communities e.g. coral reefs are known to produce nearly US\$30 billion/year in revenues to world economies and many Category V and VI protected areas help to provide sustainable livelihoods
- Maintaining **genetic resources** – such as those of value to crop breeding and medicine

**WWF believes** that developing a wider set of arguments for protection is a key step in building a broad platform of support for protected areas. This implies identifying the benefits, promoting the message to a broad audience, and implementing lessons learned.

**7. Building a secure financial future:** in concert with this, many of the costs of protected areas can be offset through, for example, introducing payments for environmental services such as clean water, visitor charges, ecotourism enterprises and other means.

**WWF believes** that innovative ways of supporting protection should be implemented, including payment for environmental services, but that it will be impossible to offset *all* protected area costs so continued support from governments, private foundations, companies and international institutions will remain both vital and justifiable.

**8. Linkages in the landscape/seascape:** protected areas alone cannot protect all biodiversity. WWF sees them ideally as elements in a mosaic, with varying degrees of protection, which add up to ecoregions able to maintain both biodiversity and sustainable livelihoods, and to resist climate change. Mosaics can include: transboundary protected areas; Category V and VI protected areas and no-take zones; biological corridors; and sustainable uses outside protected areas including fishing areas, farms etc. Protection needs to be integrated into development strategies, rather than isolated from and thus vulnerable to such strategies and this implies negotiation and trade-offs between land uses. WWF's protected area work is matched with sustainable management (e.g. the Marine Stewardship Council) and restoration (e.g. Forest Landscape Restoration).

**WWF believes** that protected area networks need to be placed within a wider land/sea mosaic that supports conservation and sustainable development, and that this requires negotiation with other stakeholders to balance ecological, social, and economic needs.

**WWF believes** there is a need to balance the requirement of no net loss of biodiversity with no net negative impact on livelihoods within protected areas. At a minimum: do no harm. As most protected areas are located in developing countries, international transfers of resources are essential to support effective management and mitigate any negative effects on local people

**9. New ways of working together:** protected areas are not just the concern of national park authorities but should be a collaborative exercise involving many public, community and private interests. WWF has partnerships with donors, governments, companies, NGOs such as IUCN (with shared marine and forest strategies) institutions like the World Bank and hundreds of local NGOs and communities

**WWF believes** that such partnerships are essential if protected areas are to be integrated into mainstream sustainable development and that an important role for such collaboration is to ensure that conservation is a key consideration in major infrastructure plans (roads, gas pipelines etc) and in macro-level land use plans.

**World Bank-WWF Alliance:** in 1998, WWF joined forces with the World Bank to promote joint targets on sustainable forest management and protected areas, based around WWF's global forest strategy. These include targets of creating 50 million hectares of new forest protected areas and improving management effectiveness in 50 million hectares of existing forest protected areas by 2005

**10. Governance:** as protected areas develop, old governance structures are sometimes no longer sufficient, being too top down and isolationist. In its field programmes, WWF is working with partners on new ways of governing, ranging from greater stakeholder involvement to forms of co-management. For example, WWF and IUCN are working together to identify the legal framework that will enable High Seas marine protected areas, thus allowing us to protect the resources of the open ocean that are an open resource available to all countries.

**WWF believes** that management must remain flexible and responsive to local realities and supports giving more influence to local communities in protected area decision-making and management for example through co-management agreements.

**For further information:** Leonardo Lacerda, WWF International  
Tel: +41 22 364 9017; e-mail: llacerda@wwfint.org



# WWF Expectations for the 5th World Parks Congress

The World Parks Congress is run by IUCN and its World Commission on Protected Areas. It takes place every ten years and is the world's major forum for refining protected area policy, sharing experience about protected areas, and planning future developments. WWF supports the World Parks Congress and recognizes its critical role in global conservation policy.

## Key result areas

WWF has singled out five key areas where we hope to see positive results at the 5th World Parks Congress being held in Durban, South Africa, from 7–17 September 2003.

- **Governments:** government follow-through on existing commitments (e.g. Yaoundé Summit, China, Amazon Region Protected Areas Programme, major protected area commitments in French Guiana, the Russian Federation etc)
- **Private sector:** major commitments by the private sector relating to policy, recognition of protected areas, land for protection, and pledges of financial support
- **World Summit on Sustainable Development:** implementation of commitments made at the WSSD, particularly the target to substantially reduce biodiversity loss by 2010 and linking this to national Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers
- **Convention on Biological Diversity:** an agreed programme for the CBD including targets, reporting progress on management effectiveness, strengthening of the ecosystem approach, recognizing the threats of human-induced climate change, improved partnerships, changing governance, and cooperation with other conventions
- **World Commission on Protected Areas:** Clear recommendations and work programmes for each of the WCPA “themes”

## Key take-home messages

- **Broad-scale conservation:** the critical importance of planning and positioning protected areas within a wider ecoregional context
- **Multiple benefits:** the wide range of environmental, social and economic benefits from protected areas beyond biodiversity conservation
- **Management effectiveness:** the need to put theory into practice, use assessment to improve management and build effectiveness into marine protected areas
- **Setting standards for management:** the urgency of agreeing good standards for protected areas management and ways of assessing these
- **People:** the importance of ensuring that protected areas can help the poorest and least powerful members of society and play a role in poverty reduction
- **Global environmental change:** the urgency of addressing threats to protected areas and building on their role in mitigating climate change
- **New approaches:** the opportunities provided by private reserves, corporate involvement and new ways of financing protected areas
- **Defending protected areas:** recognizing that greater responsibility is needed from governments and the private sector including providing more resources, and mitigating threats including illegal logging, illegal fishing, and mineral exploration and extraction

**For further information:** Leonard Lacerda, WWF International  
Tel: +41 22 364 9017; e-mail: [llacerda@wwfint.org](mailto:llacerda@wwfint.org)