Last of the Wild

DEFINITION

The 10% wildest areas of the terrestrial planet. The areas of the world with the least amount of human influence, they represent large, intact tracts of relatively undisturbed ecosystems and are therefore important for biodiversity.

DESCRIPTION

The Last of the Wild areas were identified by the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) and the Center for International Earth Science Information Network (CIESIN) at Columbia University. They represent the 10% wildest areas of the terrestrial planet – those areas with the least amount of human influence. This approach identified large, intact tracts of relatively undisturbed ecosystems that are considered important for biological diversity. [1] They were intended to guide opportunities for effective conservation where the widest range of biodiversity can be conserved with minimum conflict.

SUPPORTED BY

The Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) and the Center for International Earth Science Information Network (CIESIN), Columbia University.

YEAR OF CREATION

2002 [1]. This was a one-off scientific process which is not currently being updated.

COVERAGE

Global in extent with 568 sites in different countries around the world. [1]

CRITERIA

These areas have been identified by systematically mapping and measuring the human influence on the Earth's land surface through proxies such as human population density, settlements, roads, and other access points, and including factors such as the size and remoteness of an area. [1] At the time of the analysis, approximately 17% of the Earth's land's surface was relatively less influenced by human beings. Within biogeographic realms (e.g. Paleartic, Indo-Malay, Neotropic etc.), smaller biomes were defined based on WWF's delineation of terrestrial ecoregions [2]. Within these biomes, the '10% wildest areas' were identified based on the map of human footprint. Of these, the 10 largest contiguous areas within each biome were identified as the 'last of the Wild' sites. [3] For some biomes these are over 100,000km^2 whereas for others they are as small as 5km^2.

MANAGEMENT

Some of the Last of the Wild areas contain existing protected areas that may have restrictions based on the type of ownership and legal status. However, a majority of them fall outside the protected area networks and some contain roads and settlements. [1] There are no specific restrictions or management for Last of the Wild areas.

BUSINESS RELEVANCE

Legal and compliance – Identification of the Last of the Wild areas does not afford these areas any legal protection or recognition. Any legal and compliance requirements that exist within these large landscapes will be due to the potential overlap with other areas of biodiversity importance, including legally protected areas.

Biodiversity importance – The Last of the Wild are areas of high biodiversity importance based exclusively on intact habitats with low vulnerability which are typically large geographic regions. It is a global scale prioritisation approach and therefore more detailed information is needed for site-scale assessment and decision making.

Socio-cultural values – The Last of the Wild areas are generally not associated with many socio-cultural values due to a lack of significant human presence and intervention within these areas.

REFERENCES & WEBSITE

1. Sanderson, E. W. et al. The Human Footprint and the Last of the Wild. Bioscience 52, 891–904 (2002).
2. Olson, D. M. et al. Terrestrial Ecoregions of the World : A New Map of Life on Earth. Bioscience 51, 933–938 (2001).
3. Brooks, T. M. et al. Global Biodiversity Conservation Priorities. Science (80-.). 313, 58–61 (2006).



Arctic wilderness landscape, Svalbard, Norway.

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