Protected areas

DEFINITION

A clearly defined geographical space, recognised, dedicated and managed, through legal or other effective means, to achieve the long-term conservation of nature with associated ecosystem services and cultural values.

IUCN 2008[1]

DESCRIPTION

The IUCN definition of a protected area is *"A clearly defined geographical space, recognised, dedicated and managed, through legal or other effective means, to achieve the long-term conservation of nature with associated ecosystem services and cultural values"*.[1] (for more information and background see the definition of Protected area).

The term protected area refers to a very wide range of land and water management types that have some value for biodiversity and landscape conservation. Designating areas for protection is a cornerstone strategy of biodiversity conservation[1] and the practice and concept of protected areas has evolved over time. Countries around the world have extensive systems of protected areas which vary considerably, depending on national needs and priorities, and on differences in legislative, institutional and financial resources.

Protected areas can be found across different environments from the mountains to sea, across deserts, forests, freshwater lakes and even national boundaries (territories). They are known by a multitude of names in different countries ranging from national park, nature reserve, wilderness area, wildlife management area, tourism management areas and ecological stations to sacred groves. Many of these nationally designated protected areas also form part of international protected area systems created under global conventions (e.g. World Heritage sites) and regional agreements (e.g. Natura 2000 sites in Europe). The mechanism and degree of protection varies considerably across types of protected area. For detailed information on each type of protected area, please browse the pages in the 'Protected Areas' category of the Areas theme.

To reduce the confusion around the use of many different terms to describe protected areas, the IUCN,

through its World Commission on Protected Areas (WCPA) [2], have developed a definition and six internationally recognised protected area management categories which define protected areas according to their management objectives. For more information, please see the page on IUCN Protected Area Management Categories.

SUPPORTED BY

National governments and sub-national institutions, regional and international bodies, agreements, conventions and programmes.

HISTORY OF PROTECTED AREAS

The earliest types of protected areas for the conservation of resources can be traced back to around 200 BC when land owned by royalty was designated as private hunting reserves. [3] Gradually, protected areas were opened or created for public recreational use. One of the earliest modern protected areas is considered to be Yellowstone National Park, designated in 1872 as a 'public park or pleasuring ground for the benefit and enjoyment of the people'. [3]

Concern for the loss of biodiversity increased in the early 1900s, and the international recognition of protected areas as a tool for conservation gained prominence in the 1950s. In 1962, the First Conference on National Parks was held and the first UN List of National Parks and Equivalent Reserves that amalgamated all of the world's protected areas was produced. [4] During the 1970s, several global multilateral environmental agreements were adopted such as the World Heritage Convention, the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance and the Birds Directive in the European Union. These agreements are still highly regarded today and form the basis of the legal structures that protect some of the most important areas of biodiversity.

During the 1980s, several regional frameworks for the protection of biodiversity were adopted such as the Barcelona Convention for the protection of Mediterranean areas. The adoption of the Convention of Biological Diversity in 1992 set internationally agreed targets for increasing the global area covered by protected areas. [5] These targets have been important catalysts in the upwards trend of protected area designations, such as the marked increase in marine protected areas that has been observed since the early 2000s.

COVERAGE

According to the World Database on Protected Areas (WDPA) there are over 210,000 protected areas around the world. The proportion of areas protected globally (percentage of terrestrial area and territorial waters up to 12 nautical miles) amount to 11.9%. The proportion of terrestrial areas protected amounts to 12.9% and marine areas to 6.3%, as recorded in WDPA for 2009. [6]

CRITERIA

The criteria used to define protected areas vary widely, depending on the objective and on the mechanisms behind the establishment of the protected area. They are usually locations of significant environmental, cultural or natural value that in most cases have some form of management authority in place for their protection. For the criteria associated with different types of protected area, please see the relevant section in the areas under the 'Protected Areas' category.

MANAGEMENT

Governance types

Protected areas can be under the control and responsibility of a range of actors. Governance types describe the different means of management authority and responsibility that can exist for protected areas but they do not necessarily relate to ownership. These 'governance' types have been categorised by IUCN as the following: [1]

1. Governance by government. This includes federal, national or sub-national ministry or agencies in charge as well as government delegated management (e.g. to an NGO).
2. Shared governance (often termed co-management). This includes transboundary management between more than one government (see Transboundary Protected Areas), as well as collaborative and joint management that can take place between government and non-governmental actors.
3. Private governance. This includes areas declared and run by individual land-owners, non-profit organisations and for-profit organisations (see Privately Protected Areas).
4. Governance by indigenous peoples and local communities. This includes indigenous peoples protected areas and territories and community conserved areas (see Indigenous and Community Conserved Areas).

As protected areas are created for a range of purposes, there are a wide variety of management approaches applied. These vary from those which are highly protected sites where few if any people are allowed to enter, to much less restrictive approaches where conservation is integrated with traditional and sustainable human activities and practices. Some protected areas ban activities like food collecting, hunting or extraction of natural resources while for others it is an accepted and even a necessary part of management. For detailed management practices associated with different types of protected area, please see the relevant section in the areas under the 'Protected Areas' category.

BUSINESS RELEVANCE

Legal and compliance – The classification of a protected area which meets the IUCN definition requires that such areas are managed for conservation by legal or other effective means, and therefore legal recognition and protection at the national or sub-national level is likely to be present in these sites, although not compulsory if other means of conservation are in place (e.g. through recognition of land tenure). The level of legal protection and enforcement will vary between countries, and will depend on the governance type of the area that receives differing levels of recognition by government in different countries. Nonetheless, a number of national laws are likely to apply to these sites which control economic activities in order to maintain the conservation values.

Protected areas are typically designated by national governments. The basis for their designation may be:

1. *National* – designated under national law, as part of the protected areas system established within the country to meet national goals and priorities. The majority of protected areas are created in this way.
2. *Regional* – designated in order to fulfil a national commitment to a regional convention or agreement which the government of the country has signed. Existing protected areas may be put forward, or new protected areas created to meet such obligations.. Examples include, but are not limited to:

- Specially Protected Areas of Mediterranean Importance (established under the Barcelona Convention for Mediterranean countries)
- Natura 2000 (established under legislation applying to all member states of the European Union)

3. *International* – designated in order to fulfil a national commitment to an international convention or agreement which the government of the country has signed. In common with Regional-level sites, existing protected areas may be put forward, or new protected areas created to meet such obligations. The three international conventions or programmes under which protected areas are designated are:

- Convention on Wetlands of International Importance, Especially as Waterfowl Habitats (Ramsar Convention)
- The Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage (UNESCO World Heritage Convention)
- UNESCO Man and the Biosphere Programme.

In areas designated at a national level, legal protection is granted by the national legal instruments in place. Areas designated under regional or international agreements are protected if the state ratifies the relevant Convention, which means that the state consents to being bound to the treaty. The criteria of the convention may state that the site must be legally protected in order for it to be regarded as designed under the convention. For example, for a site to be inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List a site must have been given legal protection at the national level [7]. However not all conventions require legal protection as one of their designating criteria. It is not a criteria within the Ramsar Convention for sites to be legally protected, although many governments do extend legal protection to these areas in recognition of their value [8].

As designated protected areas, these sites receive international attention and have been incorporated into a number of environmental safeguard standards. These include those of multilateral financial institutions including the World Bank [9], the International Finance Corporation [10], the European Investment Bank [11], the Asian Development Bank [12], the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development [13] and the Inter-American Development Bank [14]. Such standards often require that no project activities are accepted within or around these areas unless they do not adversely impact the area and are compatible with the conservation aims of the protected area. In cases where projects are eligible for funding, additional requirements often apply, including consultation with and informed consent by stakeholders and managers, as well as the implementation of additional programs to enhance the conservation aims of the protected area. These standards often refer to those that have been designated as well as areas officially proposed for protection.

In addition, a number of sector specific safeguard standards refer to protected areas, many of which are related to certification programs, such as the Roundtable on Sustainable Biomaterials (RSB) [15], the Alliance for Responsible Mining (ARM) [16] and the Responsible Jewellery Council (RJC) [17], which require members to identify and respect legally protected areas. Protected areas form one of the values of the High Conservation Value (HCV) [18] approach and are therefore included in a number of certification programmes and standards that adopt this approach requiring that such values are maintained or enhanced. These include the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO) [19], the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) [20], and the Round Table on Responsible Soy Association (RTRS) [21] and the Climate, Community and Biodiversity Alliance (CCBA) [22].

Biodiversity importance – The actual biodiversity criteria used to identify and designate protected areas will vary between countries and between areas, however all protected areas meeting the IUCN definition must be designated "to achieve the long-term conservation of nature". The specific biodiversity values to be protected and conserved will vary significantly between areas, and further surveys and detailed information will be required to support site-scale assessment and decision making.

Socio-cultural values – The social, economic and cultural values also vary significantly and site level information is required to determine the socio-cultural values of each protected area, which could be considerable.

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Entrance gate to the Serengeti National Park, Tanzania.

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Category:

Protected areas

Related pages

Protected area (Terms)

Tools

Protected Planet a tool for visualizing information on protected areas at the site level, country level, regional level and global level. This includes information on the IUCN category where known. Protected Planet brings together spatial data, descriptive information and images from the World Database on Protected Areas, WikipediaTM and PanaramioTM.

The Integrated Biodiversity Assessment Tool (IBAT) provides a visualisation and GIS download tool for protected areas, including the IUCN category where known.

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