

# Background

## Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of protected areas in Vietnam. It charts the development of the protected areas system from the establishment of Vietnam's first protected area at Cuc Phuong in 1962, through to current debates about the development of the system of Special-use Forests and other protected areas within national policy and planning. Vietnam's systems of protected areas are undergoing rapid expansion: efforts are currently underway to expand the system of Special-use Forests to meet a national target of 2 million hectares by 2010; and institutional and legislative frameworks for the designation and management of wetland sites and marine protected areas, are currently being developed. It seems likely, therefore, that the next few years will see the establishment of a considerable number of new protected areas. This expansion process is set against considerable institutional change in the forestry, fisheries and environment sectors.

### What are protected areas in Vietnam?

Vietnam's protected areas systems are still evolving in terms of both coverage and institutional arrangements. Currently, the only protected areas to have been decreed by the government of Vietnam are Special-use Forests. These protected areas comprise mainly terrestrial forest sites but also include a small number of wetland sites and marine areas. Currently, only 11 national parks and a modest number of nature reserves have any tangible level of infrastructure and management. Institutional and legal arrangements for wetland sites and marine protected areas have yet to be finalised. Table 2 shows the numbers of decreed and proposed protected areas in Vietnam, based on the data compiled in this sourcebook. Most of Vietnam's 'existing' and 'proposed' protected areas fall into one of two main categories: Special-use Forests and marine protected areas. This chapter also describes the status and institutional arrangements for wetland sites. Currently, these overlap with the system of Special-use Forests and the proposed system of marine protected areas. However, there exist proposals to establish a system of protected wetlands, and these are outlined

below. Finally, a small number of Vietnam's protected areas are designated as Ramsar Sites, World Heritage Sites, or Man and the Biosphere Reserves.

**Table 2: Decreed and proposed protected areas in Vietnam**

Category	Decreed	Proposed	Total
Special-use Forest	93	71	164
Marine Protected Area	0	24	24
MAB Reserve	1	0	1
Total	94	95	189

## Special-use Forests

### *Evolution of the Special-use Forests system*

The origins of the Special-use Forests system can be traced back to 1960, when President Ho Chi Minh announced Ordinance No. 18/LCT: the 'Law on Organisation of the Government Council of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam'. This ordinance included a proposal to establish the General Department of Forestry. In 1962, on the advice of this department, the government established Cuc Phuong Protected Forest, the first protected area in Vietnam.

Following the establishment of Cuc Phuong Protected Forest, and despite the on-going Second Indochina War, the General Department of Forestry continued to undertake forest surveys in northern Vietnam, and designated 49 Special-use Forests. Despite these efforts, the high demand for timber during the war and lack of resources meant that these areas received rather few management inputs. Forest degradation continued to occur.

Following the end of the war in 1975, attention focussed on identification and survey of potential protected areas throughout the now unified country, including the Central Highlands and the Mekong Delta. The establishment of 10 Special-use Forests was decreed by Decision No. 41/TTg of the Prime Minister, dated 24 January 1977. These were Ba Be, Ba Mun, Ba Vi, Bac Son, Ban Dao Son Tra, Den Hung, Pac Bo, Rung Thong Da Lat, Tam Dao and Tan Trao. Together, these covered 44,310 ha. The establishment

of Nam Cat Tien National Park was then decreed in 1978, followed by that of Mom Ray Nature Reserve in 1982, Con Dao National Park in 1984, and Cat Ba National Park in 1986 (MARD 1997).

On 9 August 1986, the Chairman of the Council of Ministers issued Decision No. 194/CT. This landmark decision decreed the establishment of a further 73 Special-use Forests nationwide, comprising two national parks, 46 nature reserves, and 25 cultural and historical sites (MARD 1997). However, many of these Special-use Forests were left without management boards, budgets or investment plans. On 30 December 1986, the Minister of Forestry issued Decision 1171/QĐ, which contained the first set of management regulations for Special-use Forests.

Expansion of the Special-use Forests system continued in the early 1990s: Yok Don National Park was decreed in 1991, followed by U Minh Thuong Nature Reserve in 1993, and Xuan Thuy, Tram Chim and Tien Hai Nature Reserves in 1994. Subsequently, Ta Kou and Ke Go Nature Reserves were decreed in 1996, followed by Thanh Phu Nature Reserve in 1998. The addition of these areas brought the total number of decreed Special-use Forests to 93, comprising 11 national parks, 55 nature reserves and 27 cultural and historical sites, with a total decreed area of 985,280 ha.

A national review of the forestry sector highlighted many Special-use Forests that were too small and/or too degraded to meet their conservation objectives (MOF 1991). This review proposed a significant increase in the area set aside to conserve the nation's biodiversity. In 1994, Vietnam ratified the Convention on Biological Diversity, and Vietnam's national planning response to this convention, the *Biodiversity Action Plan for Vietnam*, reiterated the recommendations of the forestry sector review (Government of SRV/GEF 1994). In 1995 the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD) was formed, by the amalgamation of the Ministries of Forestry, Agriculture and Irrigation. MARD announced plans to further expand the system of Special-use Forests to 2 million hectares.

In 1997, MARD hosted a national conference on the Special-use Forests network at Cuc Phuong National Park. Following this conference, the Forest Protection Department (FPD) of MARD prepared a list

of 94 Special-use Forests, comprising 12 national parks, 64 nature reserves and 18 protected landscapes (FPD 1998). This list is popularly known as the '2010 list'. The 2010 list proposed decreeing a number of new Special-use Forests and removing a number of decreed Special-use Forests from the national system, in order to bring the total area of the system to 2 million hectares by 2010, covering over 6% of the national land area. For various reasons, the 2010 list has not been submitted to the government for approval.

The Forest Inventory and Planning Institute (FIPI), with support from BirdLife International and the European Union, then began to identify and prioritise areas for inclusion in an 'expanded' Special-use Forests network, and to advance the gazettment process for key sites. This initiative included a review of the existing system of Special-use Forests, which made recommendations aimed at improving the equitability of the system with regard to representation of different forest types, ecoregions, elevation zones and globally threatened species (Wege *et al.* 1999). A revised proposed list of Special-use Forests, which integrates the 2010 list with the recommendations made by FIPI and BirdLife, is currently being prepared by FPD and FIPI (FPD and FIPI in prep.). This list is expected to be submitted to the government for approval shortly. This sourcebook, which includes site cards for all the sites listed in the 2010 list and the revised proposed list, is another output of the European Union-supported project 'Expanding the Protected Areas Network in Vietnam for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century'.

### *Special-use Forests today*

The term Special-use Forest refers to one of the three forest management categories in Vietnam, the others being production forest and protection forest. Special-use Forests are designated on the basis of their importance for conservation of Vietnam's biodiversity or cultural and historical heritage. Until January 2001, Special-use Forests were divided into three categories: national parks, nature reserves and cultural and historical sites. Special-use Forests are usually terrestrial forest areas but, in some cases, wetlands and marine areas are also included within Special-use Forests. This introduces the potential for overlap with systems of wetland and marine protected areas that may be developed in the future (see below). Certain Special-use Forests no longer retain any natural forest

cover, while the forest resources of a number of others are heavily degraded. Indeed, a review published in 1999 found that the Special-use Forests system contains large areas of non-forest land, principally agricultural land, scrub and non-natural grassland, which comprises over 40% of the total area of the system (Wege *et al.* 1999).

A number of laws, decrees, directives and other official documents have direct or indirect relevance to the management of Special-use Forests and other protected areas (see Table 3). Until January 2001, the principal legal and regulatory framework for Special-use Forests in Vietnam was laid out in Decision 1171/QD of the Minister of Forestry, dated 20 December 1986. Special-use Forest categories were outlined in Articles 2 and 3 of this decision, and management regulations were outlined in Articles 11 and 12.

On 11 January 2001, new regulations for the management of Special-use Forests were promulgated by Decision No. 08/QD-TTg of the Prime Minister.

Article 6 of the new regulations classifies Special-use Forests into three categories: 'national parks', 'nature reserves' and 'cultural, historical and environmental sites (protected landscapes)'. The new regulations further divide nature reserves into two sub-categories: 'nature reserves' and 'habitat/species management areas'. The new regulations also state that the Ministry of Culture and Information should take responsibility for the establishment and management of cultural, historical and environmental sites, in cooperation with MARD.

Article 8 of the new regulations outlines the principal objective of buffer zones to be to 'reduce encroachment' of local residents into Special-use Forests, and specifies that all activities undertaken in buffer zones should aim at supporting the conservation, management and protection of Special-use Forests, including restricting access to 'outside residents' and prohibiting illegal exploitation of protected species.

**Table 3: Laws, regulations, decrees and official government decisions regarding the management of Special-use Forests (after MARD 1997)**

Legal Document	Date
1. Regulations on management regulations for production forests, protection forests and Special-use Forests: attached to Decision No. 1171/QD of the Minister of Forestry	30 November 1986
2. Law on forest protection and development	19 August 1991
3. Decree No. 18/HDBT on endangered species and management and conservation mechanisms	17 January 1992
4. Decision No. 327/CT on use of open land, bare hills, forest, coastal alluviums and water bodies	15 September 1992
5. Decree No. 14/CT on penalties/fines in forest protection and management	5 December 1992
6. Directive No. 130/TTg on protection and management of endangered plant and animal species	27 March 1993
7. Decree No. 77/CP on penalties/fines in forest protection and forest resources management	29 November 1996
8. Directive No. 359/TTg on urgent measures to protect and develop wild animal species	29 May 1996
9. Official Letter No. 2472/NN-KL-CV on strengthening wildlife protection and development	24 July 1996
10. Decree 163/ND-CP on allocation and lease of forest land to organisations, households and individuals for long-term forestry purposes	16 November 1999
11. Decision No. 08/QD-TTg on the management of Special-Use Forest, protection forest and production forest	11 January 2001

The overall management of the national network of Special-use Forests is primarily the responsibility of the FPD of MARD. However, various organisations are involved in Special-use Forest management at the provincial, district and site levels. The day-to-day management of national parks is the responsibility of a management board established for this purpose. National park management boards are usually, but not always, under the management of the FPD of MARD. The members of national park management boards are usually drawn from staff of the relevant provincial FPD, although staff are sometimes transferred from the provincial forest development department. Likewise, the day-to-day management of nature reserves and cultural and historical sites is the responsibility of management boards. However, these management boards are usually under the management of the relevant provincial people's committee, via the provincial FPD or Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD). As is the case with national park management boards, their members are usually drawn from the staff of relevant provincial FPDs, although, in some cases, they are drawn from other organisations, for example, forest enterprises. Currently, Special-use Forests account for the vast majority of protected areas in Vietnam, and cover the largest extent of the protected area estate.

### Wetland sites

#### *Towards a national system of wetland protected areas*

Wetlands are among the most threatened habitats in Vietnam, they also support some of Vietnam's most threatened species. For instance, 15 of Vietnam's 33 species of globally threatened birds are wetland-dependent species, including White-shouldered Ibis *Pseudibis davisoni*, Black-faced Spoonbill *Platalea minor*, Lesser Adjutant *Leptoptilos javanicus* and Bengal Florican *Houbaropsis bengalensis* (BirdLife International 2000).

Until very recently, government policy towards wetlands focussed on promoting their exploitation and conversion to other uses. The first official policy to address wetlands was formulated in 1994 and embodied within Prime Ministerial Decision No. 773/TTg on the 'exploitation and utilisation of uncultivated lands, estuary and coastal mudflats, and

water bodies in the plains and basins'. This policy actually contributed to the loss of wetlands by promoting their conversion into agricultural land. Although some wetlands are included within the national Special-use Forests network, for example Tram Chim National Park and Xuan Thuy and Vo Doi Nature Reserves, wetlands remain notably under-represented. In addition, the management objectives of Special-use Forests are generally focussed on conservation of terrestrial forests, not wetlands.

#### *Wetland protected areas today*

Wetlands have yet to gain official recognition as a distinct land-use or conservation management category. By ratifying the Convention on Biological Diversity, the government of Vietnam committed itself to establishing a representative network of wetland protected areas. The *Biodiversity Action Plan for Vietnam* included a list of 61 important wetland areas (Government of SRV/GEF 1994). More recently, the National Environment Agency (NEA) of the Ministry of Science, Technology and the Environment (MOSTE) identified 79 wetlands of national importance (see Table 4) (MOSTE/NEA 2000). Of the wetlands included on the MOSTE/NEA list, only 16 are included within decreed Special-use Forests. This list was prepared for submission to the government for approval, although this has yet to happen.

### Marine protected areas

#### *Vietnam's marine biodiversity*

With approximately 3,260 km of coastline (excluding islands), marine resources constitute an important natural asset to Vietnam. The diversity of marine natural resources makes an important contribution to the national economy, through the provision of marine products (fish, invertebrates, algae, etc.), energy (crude oil and gas), raw materials (mineral resources), storm protection, and recreation (Government of SRV/GEF 1994, ADB 1999).

While information on Vietnam's marine biodiversity is incomplete, 11,000 species have so far been recorded in Vietnam's marine and coastal waters (Nguyen Chu Hoi *et al.* 2000). Species diversity is known to increase from north to south, and fish abundance is higher in offshore than in inshore coral

reefs (Chou 2000). Vietnam's known diversity of hard corals, 350 species, can be compared with that of Indonesia or the Philippines, which have 450 and 400 species respectively (Chou 2000). Several species of marine turtles continue to use traditional nesting sites along the Vietnamese coastline (ADB 1999).

**Table 4: Wetlands of national importance according to MOSTE/NEA (2000)**

Site	Province	Area (ha)
Tinh Doi	An Giang	1,672
Tra Su	An Giang	939
Ho Cam Son*	Bac Giang	2,620
San Chim Bac Lieu*	Bac Lieu	132
San Chim Vam Ho	Ben Tre	5
Thanh Phu*	Ben Tre	8,000
Dam De Gi	Binh Dinh	600
Dam Thi Nai*	Binh Dinh	5,000
Dam Tra O	Binh Dinh	1,600
Ho Nui Mot	Binh Dinh	1,100
Ho Bien Lac*	Binh Thuan	2,000
Bai Boi*	Ca Mau	8,555
Dat Mui*	Ca Mau	4,388
San Chim Ca Mau*	Ca Mau	2
San Chim Dam Doi*	Ca Mau	132
Vo Doi*	Ca Mau	3,724
Lung Ngoc Hoang*	Can Tho	2,777
San Chim Thoi An	Can Tho	1.3
Ho Ba Be*	Cao Bang	450
Ea Ral*	Dak Lak	102
Ho Lac*	Dak Lak	12,744
Nam Ca*	Dak Lak	1,240
Trap Kso*	Dak Lak	96
Ho Tri An	Dong Nai	32,300
Nam Cat Tien*	Dong Nai	4,300
Tram Chim Tam Nong*	Dong Thap	7,612
Ayun Ha	Gia Lai	700
Bien Ho*	Gia Lai	300
Ho Tay	Ha Noi	526
Ho Dong Mo, Ngai Son	Ha Tay	900
Ho Suoi Hai	Ha Tay	1,200
Ho Ke Go*	Ha Tinh	3,000
Vuc Nuoc An Duong	Hai Duong	10
Cua Song Thai Binh*	Hai Phong	2,000
Cua Song Van Uc*	Hai Phong	1,500
Thuy Nguyen	Hai Phong	1,000

Site	Province	Area (ha)
Can Gio*	HCM City	2,215
Ho Hoa Binh*	Hoa Binh	72,800
Ha Tien*	Kien Giang	10,000
Kien Luong*	Kien Giang	4,000
U Minh Thuong*	Kien Giang	21,000
Ho Ia-ly	Kon Tum	6,450
Da Nhim	Lam Dong	900
Da The	Lam Dong	500
Dan Ki A	Lam Dong	300
Tuyen Lam	Lam Dong	200
Lang Sen*	Long An	3,844
Xuan Thuy*	Nam Dinh	12,000
Vung Ven Bien Nghia Hung*	Nam Dinh	9,000
Van Long*	Ninh Binh	3,500
Dam Nai*	Ninh Thuan	700
Dam Chinh Cong	Phu Tho	500
Cua Song Ba	Phu Yen	1,000
Dam O Loan*	Phu Yen	1,570
Ho Cu Mong*	Phu Yen	3,000
Ho Song Hinh	Phu Yen	4,100
Vung Ro*	Phu Yen	-
Vung Trao	Phu Yen	5,000
Dong Phong Nha*	Quang Binh	41,132
Ho Cam Khanh	Quang Binh	8,590
Ho Phu Ninh*	Quang Nam	3,600
Ho Thach Nham	Quang Ngai	3,600
Cua Song Tien Yen	Quang Ninh	5,000
Dau Tieng	Tay Ninh	5,000
Tien Hai*	Thai Binh	12,500
Vung Ven Bien Thai Thuy*	Thai Binh	13,100
Ho Nui Coc*	Thai Nguyen	2,600
Ho Ben En (Song Muc)*	Thanh Hoa	3,000
Ho Yen My	Thanh Hoa	95
Dam Cau Hai*	TT Hue	12,000
Pha Tam Giang*	TT Hue	8,000
Duyen Hai	Tra Vinh	2,000
San Chim Chua Hang	Tra Vinh	-
San Chim Tra Cu	Tra Vinh	2
Dam Vac	Vinh Phuc	250
Ho Chinh Cong	Vinh Phuc	400
Ho Chu	Vinh Phuc	300
Ho Thac Ba*	Yen Bai	19,000
Bau Xen	unclear	200

Names follow those used by MOSTE/NEA (2000).

Sites marked with an asterisk are included in the sourcebook.

**Table 5: Proposed marine protected areas in Vietnam**

Proposed Marine Protected Area	Province/City	Proposed by		
		Nguyen Huy Yet and Vo Si Tuan (1995)	Nguyen Chu Hoi <i>et al.</i> eds. (1998)	ADB (1999)
Ba Mun	Quang Ninh			✓
Bac Lieu bird sanctuary	Bac Lieu			✓
Bai Boi	Ca Mau			✓
Ban Dao Son Tra	Da Nang			✓
Binh Chau-Phuoc Buu	Ba Ria-Vung Tau			✓
Cac Dao Vinh Ha Long	Quang Ninh	✓		✓
Can Gio	Ho Chi Minh City			✓
Con Dao	Ba Ria-Vung Tau	✓	✓	✓
Cu Lao Cham	Quang Nam	✓	✓	✓
Cu Mong	Phu Yen			✓
Dam Doi	Ca Mau			✓
Dat Mui	Ca Mau			✓
Dao Bach Long Vi	Hai Phong	✓	✓	✓
Dao Cat Ba	Hai Phong	✓	✓	✓
Dao Co To	Quang Ninh	✓	✓	✓
Dao Con Co	Quang Tri	✓	✓	✓
Dao Ly Son	Quang Ngai	✓	✓	✓
Dao Phu Quy	Binh Thuan	✓	✓	✓
Dao Tran	Quang Ninh		✓	✓
Deo Ca-Hon Nua	Phu Yen			✓
Hai Van-Hon Son Tra	Thua Thien Hue and Da Nang		✓	✓
Hon Cau-Vinh Hao	Binh Thuan	✓	✓	✓
Hon Me	Thanh Hoa		✓	✓
Hon Mun	Khanh Hoa	✓	✓	✓
Nai	Ninh Thuan			✓
Nam Du	Kien Giang	✓		✓
Nha Phu-Hon Heo	Khanh Hoa			✓
O Loan	Phu Yen			✓
Phu Quoc	Kien Giang	✓	✓	✓
Quy Nhon	Binh Dinh			✓
Tam Giang-Cau Hai	Thua Thien Hue		✓	✓
Thai Thuy	Thai Binh			✓
Thanh Phu	Ben Tre			✓
Tho Chu	Kien Giang	✓		✓
Thuy Trieu	Khanh Hoa			✓
Tien Hai	Thai Binh			✓
Truong Sa	Khanh Hoa		✓	
U Minh Thuong	Kien Giang			✓
Vo Doi	Ca Mau			✓
Xuan Thuy	Nam Dinh			✓

### ***Marine protected areas today***

Currently, there is no legislative or institutional framework for marine protected areas in Vietnam (ADB 1999, Azimi *et al.* 2000). The current institutional situation is unclear because different aspects of marine resource management are the responsibility of different ministries, in particular, the Ministry of Fisheries (MOFI), MOSTE and MARD (NEA/IUCN 2000). For the purposes of this sourcebook, all marine protected areas are regarded as proposed protected areas.

Efforts have been underway for several years to develop a legal and institutional basis for marine protected area establishment and management. It would appear that these efforts will shortly bear fruit. The Hai Phong Institute of Oceanography, on behalf of MOSTE/NEA, compiled a shortlist of 16 proposed marine protected areas to be included in a national marine protected areas system (Nguyen Chu Hoi *et al.* eds. 1998). On the basis of this document, the government of Vietnam has recently set a target of 2010 to formally establish 15 marine protected areas (MOSTE/NEA 2000). Table 5 list all sites that have been proposed as marine protected areas to date, by either the Hai Phong Institute of Oceanography (Nguyen Huy Yet and Vo Si Tuan 1995), MOSTE (Nguyen Chu Hoi *et al.* eds. 1998) or the Asian Development Bank (ADB 1999).

Although information about some proposed marine protected area is relatively good, most have not been surveyed in detail. ADB (1999) note some key gaps in information available on marine biodiversity, for example, the distribution of coral reefs and seagrass beds in central Vietnam. The lack of comprehensive information makes setting priorities for the establishment of marine protected areas difficult.

### ***Current institutional responsibilities for marine resource management***

MOSTE is responsible for implementing the Law on Environmental Protection. MOSTE is also responsible for preparing a list of wetlands of national importance, many of which are coastal sites.

MOFI has recently been assigned the responsibility for establishing and managing the marine protected areas system (Azimi *et al.* 2000, Nguyen Chu Hoi

2000). Through the Fisheries Protection Department (FiPD), MOFI is responsible for implementing the Ordinance on Conservation and Management of Living Aquatic Resources. This ordinance provides a legal basis for establishing fisheries protection zones, which, while they are not protected areas, have some conservation objectives (ADB 1999, Nguyen Chu Hoi 2000).

Through the FPD, MARD is responsible for managing the national system of Special-use Forests, which includes many coastal sites and some marine areas.

## **Other protected area categories**

A number of other protected area categories exist in Vietnam. These comprise Ramsar Sites, World Heritage Sites, and Man and the Biosphere Reserves.

### ***Ramsar Sites***

Vietnam became a contracting party to the Convention on Wetlands, commonly known as the Ramsar Convention, on 20 January 1989. The convention provides the framework for national action and international cooperation for the conservation and wise use of wetlands and their resources. There are presently 123 contracting parties to the convention, with 1,060 wetland sites, totaling 80.6 million hectares, designated for inclusion in the Ramsar List of Wetlands of International Importance. On 20 September 1988, the Ramsar Convention Bureau designated Xuan Thuy as Vietnam's first Ramsar Site. However, in the 11 years since Vietnam became a contracting party, progress in implementing the convention has been slow and Xuan Thuy remains Vietnam's only Ramsar Site. Proposals for additional sites have been prepared but it remains unclear when, or if, new sites will be formally designated. Proposed Ramsar Sites include Tram Chim National Park, an area supporting some of the last remaining areas of seasonally inundated grasslands in the Mekong Delta; Thai Thuy proposed nature reserve, which supports intertidal flats and mangroves in the Red River Delta; the wetlands of Cat Tien National Park; and Tam Giang-Cau Hai proposed marine protected area.

### *World Heritage Sites*

The objective of the Convention Concerning the Protection of the World's Cultural and Natural Heritage (popularly known as the World Heritage Convention) is to conserve cultural and natural sites selected by the statutory body of the convention, the World Heritage Committee. This international agreement was adopted by the General Conference of UNESCO in 1972. The convention and the World Heritage Committee work to ensure that the outstanding values of listed sites are preserved for all humanity, and to ensure their protection through closer cooperation among nations. The Vietnamese National Assembly has ratified the convention, and the government has deposited its acceptance. Currently there are four World Heritage Sites in Vietnam: Ha Long bay, the complex of Hue monuments, Hoi An ancient town and My Son sanctuary. In addition, a proposal has been prepared for submission to the World Heritage Committee to inscribe the Phong Nha-Ke Bang limestone area as a World Heritage Site.

### *Man and the Biosphere (MAB) Reserves*

The mangroves of Can Gio, in Ho Chi Minh City, were designated as Vietnam's first Man and the Biosphere Reserve on 21 January 2000. Man and the Biosphere Reserves are designated as part of UNESCO's Man and the Biosphere Programme. The purpose of Man and the Biosphere Reserves is the conservation of ecosystems and the species they contain. In addition, Man and the Biosphere Reserves must be integrated into their social, economic and cultural environment, and, for this purpose, local populations should be involved as much as possible in their conservation and management.

## Looking to the future

### *Special-use Forests*

The 1986 regulations on Special-use Forest management made an important contribution to the development of Vietnam's protected areas network. For example, for some areas, they provided for the establishment of management boards in a number of Special-use Forests, and facilitated the allocation of central government funds for the development of basic infrastructure and staffing.

Despite these successes, problems remain. Many areas still do not have management boards nor funding to establish infrastructure or pay for recurrent costs. Where funds have been allocated by central government, investment priorities are often skewed towards the construction of infrastructure, at the expense of supporting management activities, such as community liaison and development, environmental education, and patrolling. Forest guards currently have few incentives or resources to undertake effective enforcement activities. In several national parks, there has also been considerable investment in *ex situ* conservation activities (such as establishing botanic gardens and zoos) at the expense of investment in *in situ* conservation management.

The 1986 regulations prohibited activities that might, in future, be used to generate incentives for local stakeholders to support protected area management. For example, the management regulations prohibited the collection of non-timber forest products (including firewood) or the development of tourism in nature reserves. Instead, Special-use Forest management boards have had to rely heavily on national forestry programmes, the objectives of which are often incompatible with biodiversity conservation (5MHRP 2001). The result is that there have been few incentives to comply with the 1986 regulations, few alternatives to continuing patterns of forest resource use, and limited law enforcement capacity at the local level. Perhaps not surprisingly, unmanaged access to the forest resources of Special-use Forests has been the norm.

A key limitation of the existing system of Special-use Forests remains the mis-match between the type of funding mechanisms available for Special-use Forest management, and the nature of management that is actually needed to implement effective conservation activities. For example, most Special-use Forests depend on funding from national forestry programmes, most notably the 327 Programme and its successor, the on-going 661 Programme. The latter programme, popularly known as the 5 Million Hectares Reafforestation Programme, aims to increase national forest cover to 5 million hectares by 2010. However, many of the threats to biodiversity at Vietnam's protected areas cannot be addressed through forest *establishment*. For example, hunting, either for local



consumption, or for commercial sale of live animals, meat, or other wildlife products, is one of the most pernicious threats to Vietnam's wildlife. Hunting and trapping of wildlife within Special-use Forests is widespread and common. Unfortunately, national forestry programmes do not provide an appropriate funding mechanism for managing this threat within Special-use Forests.

### *Wetland sites*

The new proposals developed by MOSTE/NEA (2000) represent an important step forward. However, further attention to wetland conservation issues will still be required. Even if the new proposals compiled by MOSTE/NEA are implemented, these will not adequately reflect the range of habitats and diversity present in the country. While coastal and estuarine sites are well represented in the proposed MOSTE/NEA system, freshwater sites are under-represented, particularly areas of seasonally inundated grassland which are now of critical conservation concern. *Melaleuca* forests and freshwater swamps are also poorly represented. At present, the institutional arrangements for managing the nationally important wetlands identified by MOSTE/NEA have not been determined. It is unclear whether these sites will be incorporated within the Special-use Forests and/or marine protected areas systems, or whether a separate system of wetland protected areas will be established in the future.

### *Marine protected areas*

Discussions on the legal and institutional status of marine protected areas are ongoing. Key to these discussions are collaborative arrangements between the different government stakeholders involved, at central and provincial levels (Nguyen Chu Hoi 2000). It is likely that MOFI will have overall management responsibility for the marine protected areas system but that sites with a terrestrial as well as a marine component will be managed by MARD together with MOFI. This situation is likely to continue for the foreseeable future. Management regulations for marine protected areas are also under discussion but these are likely to be broad and flexible, in order to allow management regulations to be tailored to specific geographical areas and management requirements.

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