

## Certifying protected areas controversial among experts

*Delegates at the Vth IUCN World Parks Congress discussed options for protected area certification systems, and confirmed the need to fully investigate the costs and benefits of different approaches.*

By Dan Paleczny, Canadian Council on Ecological Areas (email: paleczny@accel.net)

Protected areas only do their job properly if they are managed effectively. Recently there have been calls for some kind of “certification system” to ensure that parks are being well-managed and retaining their values.

According to former CEO of South Africa National Parks, Robbie Robinson, who opened the discussion, “there’s a very serious need now for certification to make sure that the worlds 60,000 or so protected areas remain intact, in perpetuity. Today, even some World Heritage Sites—the globe’s premier protected areas – don’t meet a sufficient standards of protection,” according to Robertson.

Nigel Dudley, co-author of the congress discussion paper “*Protection Assured*” described the array of options under consideration, and delegates debated the merits of different approaches.

Dudley noted that many stakeholders are asking for more accountability on the commitment to protect. Certifying protected areas is one way of assuring or improving accountability. However, proposals have proved to be very controversial, with sharply polarized points of view.

“We don’t yet know if it is a good idea, but the protected area community needs to talk about this,” said Dudley. Indeed, congress delegates supported this point with a recommendation to investigate the suitability and options for developing more detailed proposals for certification systems.

There are many potential benefits of having a certification system, according to Dudley. These include providing better guarantees of management, improving support for protected areas, gaining expert advice from reviewers, and being able to secure funding for projects from donors and governments. However, he also pointed out a range of possible drawbacks, citing concerns about

### **Facts about Management Effectiveness**

(source: Protection Assured)

- 70% of Europe’s protected areas are exceeding critical loads for pollutants.
- In Cameroon, all protected areas face threats and over half suffer degradation.
- In Gabon, logging concessions have been granted in all national parks, petroleum operations are in two, and bushmeat hunting in protected areas is increasing.
- In India, 34 % of protected areas had low legal and management status.
- In Brazil, 75% of protected areas are endangered because they have not been adequately managed and are consequently vulnerable.
- In Columbia, 76% of protected areas were adversely affected by hunting.
- In Canada, only one of 39 national parks is judged free of ecological stress.
- Many threats arise from activities that are far away from protected area boundaries.

insufficient financial or human capacity, and the potential challenge in designing a system that is fair for the wide range of country needs.

Delegates discussed two key proposals. First, an accreditation system could be designed, whereby a credible body, such as the World Commission on Protected Areas, could develop basic standards and accredit country assessment processes, thereby assuring consistent standards and giving individual assessment systems greater credibility. There are already about 20 such systems in existence, according to Dudley.

A second approach would focus on certifying private and community managed protected areas. Done on a voluntary basis, this would enable countries to recognize the important contributions made to their systems by private interests. The owners, in turn, would be able to secure funding for projects, given that they have made a commitment to protection. Countries such as Brazil and South Africa have a significant number of private protected areas and could substantially benefit from this proposal.

Workshop participants recommended that WCPA investigate certification for all management types, and offered strong endorsement for the work of the task force that was set up to investigate the options.

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