

## MAINTAINING PROTECTED AREAS FOR NOW AND THE FUTURE

### Management Effectiveness Workshop Stream

V<sup>th</sup> IUCN World Parks Congress,  
8-17 September 2003, Durban, South Africa

**How well is the global protected area estate managed? Are these areas meeting their conservation objectives? An evaluation of management effectiveness evaluation is a first step to diagnose the ills and prescribe correct treatment.**

It is remarkable to realise how little we know about the status of many of protected areas – far less than we usually know, for example, about the health of agricultural land, the rate of growth in commercial forests and the viability of fish stocks. This is more than an issue of just academic interest. What little we do know suggests that many protected areas are not in particularly good shape, suffering from a variety of impacts and in some cases in danger of losing the very values for which they were created in the first place. Others exist in name only – the so-called ‘paper parks’ that are present as lines on the map but have never actually set up.

We clearly need to put as much effort into achieving sound and effective management of protected areas as into setting up new areas. Management effectiveness has therefore become a prominent issue in the last couple of decades. The previous IUCN World Parks Congress (1992, Caracas, Venezuela), identified effective management as one of the four major protected area issues of global concern, and the recommendations of the Caracas Congress included a call for IUCN to further develop a system for monitoring management effectiveness of protected areas. In 2000, IUCN published *A Framework for Assessing the Management of Protected Areas*, which suggested tools that can be used as the basis for such assessments, without presenting a straightjacket into which every system should fall. Indeed, several complementary methods exist nowadays.

Obviously, assessing the successes and failures of managing a natural reserve in Cameroon would be different from evaluating performance of a marine protected area off the coast of Australia, and from looking into how an urban park in Los Angeles is being managed.

Whatever the local context, management effectiveness evaluation can assist a protected area in providing information, adapting management techniques, mobilizing resources to address threats, and finally achieving greater transparency and accountability. In other words, the aim is to find out what factors mostly affect the health of protected areas and where attention should be paid to improve management outcomes. Management effectiveness evaluations are being adopted and applied by more and more managers around the world working for both government agencies and NGOs. But there are lots of challenges

ahead: for example, how to assess the ecological integrity of protected areas, or how to better address the needs of local and indigenous communities in the process, how to reflect their knowledge of a park in the assessment report?

One area of discussion at the Congress is the desirability of developing some sort of accreditation or certification system for protected areas. It is a subject of heated debate in the protected area community, where the opinions are strongly divided.

**“We are not trying to set a single model, but to develop comprehensive approaches that are matched to local circumstances,” – Marc Hockings, University of Queensland, Management Workshop Stream Coordinator**



## FACT BOX

**IUCN** classifies protected areas by management objective and has identified six distinct categories:

**I. Strict Nature Reserve/Wilderness**

**Area:** protected area managed mainly for science of wilderness protection

**II. National Park:** protected area managed mainly for ecosystem protection and recreation

**III. Natural Monument:** protected area managed mainly for conservation of specific natural features

**IV. Habitat/Species Management Area:**

protected area managed mainly for conservation through management intervention

**V. Protected Landscape/Seascape:**

protected area managed mainly for landscape/seascape protection and recreation

**VI. Managed Resource Protected**

**Area:** protected area managed mainly for the sustainable use of natural ecosystems.

An example of an existing certification system for protected areas can be found in **Europe**, where WWF developed a system called *PanParks*, which is based on the management of park tourism.

A **Reef Manager's Guide to Action** with useful tips on how to make coral reefs more resilient to climate change impacts is now being developed by an array of conservation organizations, including NOAA, The Nature Conservancy, WWF, and the Global Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority.

Proponents of such systems say that certification may be a way to “guarantee” effective management of protected areas, meanwhile the opponents suggest that such systems may discriminate against less “charismatic” protected areas.

The world's protected areas provide many direct benefits to local residents, therefore another item on the agenda of the workshop is setting benchmarks to prevent protected areas from “collapsing from the inside” in cases when the ecological integrity of a protected areas is seriously undermined. The workshop will examine what levels of take are indeed sustainable in different ecosystems, and how to establish appropriate management systems to ensure that any extraction of resources does not compromise the long-term wellbeing of protected areas. Specific techniques for assessing management effectiveness in marine protected areas, managing protected areas in the face of climate change, and managing alien invasive species will be also discussed.

Finally, the plans for the future include building a global database containing information on the management effectiveness of the protected areas estate. Looking at such a global picture could help governments and donor agencies prioritise efforts in developing the protected area system. Another avenue of improving knowledge and communication on the topic is a proposed IUCN World Commission on Protected Areas Learning Network (PALNet) which will be presented at the Congress.

A fundamental premise of protected areas is that they should remain in perpetuity, to conserve their biological and cultural values. The long-term wellbeing of protected areas inevitably depends on how well they are managed, and management effectiveness assessments can provide these answers.

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