

# Protection Assured

**Guaranteeing the effective  
management of the world's  
protected areas – a review of options**

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A background paper for the  
World Commission on Protected Areas

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## Preface

Growing concern about the status of many protected areas has led to increased interest in management effectiveness and calls for greater guarantees that protected areas are being managed to preserve the values for which they were created.

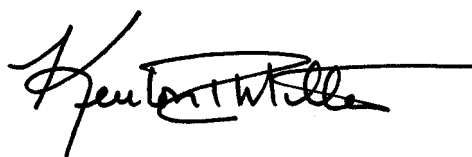
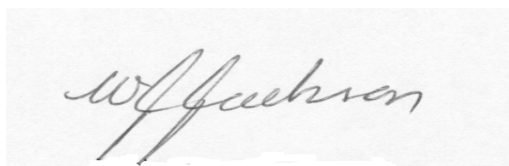
Options for providing such guarantees range from organised lists of protected areas under threat to various ways of assessing management effectiveness that would highlight well managed and poorly implemented protected areas equally; most current methods rely on some kind of self assessment but there have also recently been proposals for a ***protected area certification or verification system – of either the objective of protected area categories or of management effectiveness*** – to ensure the meeting of objectives and maintenance of standards, and to provide management guidance. Some protected area agencies welcome these ideas while others are firmly opposed.

As management effectiveness is a key theme for the World Commission on Protected Areas and the 2003 World Parks Congress, IUCN has asked WCPA to set up a small task force to investigate the range of options for identifying, verifying and certifying well-run protected areas. Proposals arising from the work of the task force will be presented to the World Parks Congress. This paper introduces the issues and raises some questions that need to be addressed by IUCN.

In the coming months, IUCN will be carrying out extensive consultation with protected area professionals, governments, ecotourism companies, conservation organisations and communities living in and around protected areas in order to make recommendations to the World Parks Congress on this important issue.

We welcome this contribution and look forward to a lively debate in the coming months.

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Cover photograph: Ha Long Bay World Heritage Site, Vietnam by Sue Stolton

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## Background – the world's protected area system under pressure

*Investing time and effort in protected areas only makes sense if there is a reasonable chance that they remain secure. Unfortunately, many protected areas are under threat and some have been so degraded so that they have lost ecological and cultural values.*

Protected areas are the cornerstones of national and regional conservation strategies. They provide refuges for species that cannot survive in managed landscapes and allow the continuation of natural ecological processes, evolution and, where necessary, ecological restoration. Many indigenous and local peoples are given a secure homeland by protected areas, which also help to conserve traditional cultural and spiritual sites. We all benefit directly from the genetic material from the world's plant and animal species and from the environmental services protected areas provide: for instance a disproportionate amount of the world's drinking water comes from forest protected areas. Marine protected areas and protected mangrove forests help to maintain coastal fisheries. National parks provide space for people to relax, practice sports and experience nature and wilderness. Most people also believe that we have an ethical obligation to prevent extinctions caused by our own actions.

An underlying assumption of national and international conservation strategies is that protected areas should remain protected in perpetuity. Investing time and effort in the selection and designation of protected areas only makes sense if there is a reasonable chance that they can be secured for the foreseeable future. This expectation of permanence is central to the whole concept of protected areas. The World Commission on Protected Areas (WCPA) defines a protected area as: *an area of land and/or sea especially dedicated to the protection and maintenance of biological diversity, and of associated cultural and natural resources, and managed through legal and other effective means* (IUCN, 1994 – our emphasis). WCPA goes on to state that such areas should be protected *permanently*, for the benefit of present and future generations (Phillips, 1998).

However, there is growing evidence that the values of many of the world's protected areas are under threat and a significant number are currently being degraded or are losing important values. The quality of protected areas and associated biodiversity can suffer in many ways, ranging from the removal of key species (often as a result of animal or plant poaching) through more general ecological damage to, in extreme cases, almost total loss of values. Even when protected areas themselves remain relatively intact they can be affected by isolation and fragmentation if surrounding land use changes dramatically. There is also a range of more subtle impacts that can reduce protected area values such as transboundary air pollution and climate change; fences or guards cannot stop many of the threats to protected areas. A study carried out for WWF found that some 70 per cent of Europe's protected areas are exceeding critical loads for pollutants (Tickle *et al*, 1995). Sometimes protected areas face opposition from local communities; in other cases governments undermine their security when they contain valuable resources. Reduced government expenditure on the environment and increasing pressures on natural resources sometimes compound these threats (Carey *et al*, 2000). Risks are increased because many "protected areas" are not actually protected in any very real sense at all. A significant proportion have been declared by a government but never implemented: a phenomenon known as "paper parks". While declaration can itself help protect the area from some pressures, far more is usually needed including legislation, management plans, trained staff, equipment and the support and co-operation of neighbouring communities. Although protected areas cover around 10 per cent of the world's surface, most of them are expected to survive on minimal resources.

## How safe are protected areas?

*Although we have limited information on the status of protected areas, increasing evidence suggests that many are under pressure or are actually experiencing degradation and subsequent loss of biodiversity.*

No global assessment of protected area effectiveness exists but many regional and national studies have now been undertaken. In 1984, IUCN produced a preliminary list of protected areas under threat (IUCN and CNPPA, 1984) and also supported two regional surveys of protected areas in Asia and Africa (MacKinnon and MacKinnon, 1986 [a] and [b]). In 1990, *The IUCN Register of Threatened Protected Areas of the World* listed 91 threatened protected areas in 50 countries (Thorsell, 1990). Further research started to reveal that many protected areas were being barely managed, if at all. Regional studies summarised in *A Global Representative System of Marine Protected Areas* found that only about 31 per cent of MPAs were generally achieving their management objectives (Kelleher *et al*, 1995). *A Global Overview of Forest Protected Areas on the World Heritage List* listed key WH sites at risk (Thorsell and Sigaty, 1997). A book written for WWF identified many protected areas currently at threat but did not attempt to quantify these (Carey *et al*, 2000). Research, undertaken for WWF and the World Bank in ten forest rich countries found that specialists believe only around 1 per cent of protected areas to be totally secure and almost a quarter to be currently undergoing degradation, but this was again mainly a qualitative analysis (Dudley and Stolton, 1999).

National studies appeared to confirm a worrying trend. A detailed study in Cameroon found that all protected areas faced threats and over half were suffering degradation (Culverwell, 1997). Similarly, a survey of protected areas in Gabon found that logging concessions had been granted in all national parks, petroleum operations in 2 and that bushmeat hunting was increasing (Brugiere, 1999). In India, 34 per cent of protected areas had low legal and management status in the latest completed survey (Singh, 2000). A survey of federal protected areas in Brazil found that 75 per cent of parks and reserves are endangered because of a combination of non-implementation and high vulnerability (Ferreira, *et al*, 1999). Academic research in Colombia found that for example 76 per cent of protected areas were adversely impacted by hunting (Castaño Uribe, 1992). The Nature Conservancy's *Parks in Peril* programme concluded that virtually all parks studied were vulnerable to large-scale threats that had their origins far from the park boundaries (Brandon *et al*, 1998). Problems are not confined to developing countries. Only one of Canada's 39 national parks, the new Vuntut in the northern Yukon, is free of ecological stress according to the Panel on the Ecological Integrity of Canada's National Parks (Parks Canada Agency, 2000).

To some extent, this situation may be transitional. The vast majority of the world's protected areas were declared during the twentieth century, in what may well be the largest conscious change of land use in history. Protected areas were and still are being created quickly, in a conscious land grab to provide some measure of protection before the last remaining fragments of particular ecosystems either disappear or undergo radical change. Creating the corresponding management plans, appointing staff, raising funds for management and building up relevant infrastructure takes far longer and we may hope that many of today's paper parks will be tomorrow's successfully managed protected areas. However, the current situation gives cause for concern and in consequence management effectiveness of protected areas is now a major theme for WCPA and for the World Parks Congress.

## **Assessing management effectiveness**

*Recognition of the scale of problems facing protected areas has forced a reassessment about their design and management. One important element is recognition of the need for better knowledge about the status and management effectiveness of protected areas.*

At present, many countries have no centralised source of information about the status of their protected areas – or even about their area and extent; knowledgeable individuals may have a good understanding about the status of individual protected areas but this will often not be written down or collected into any central database. Indeed, we generally know less about the status of protected areas than for example about the health of agricultural land or the viability of fish stocks. There is also often a very poor understanding about what management effectiveness means and how it might be measured.

There have been numerous attempts to devise ways of assessing protected areas, by academics, governments and NGOs. These have been reviewed by Hockings (2000). They range from reasonably detailed monitoring systems, such as one implemented on Fraser Island National Park in Queensland, Australia (Hockings and Hobson, 2000), to a rapid assessment system developed by WWF to prioritise protected areas at risk within a national protected areas system (Ervin, 2003). Most methods fall in between these two extremes. Examples include a methodology developed in Central America by WWF and the technical university CATIE (Cifuentes *et al*, 2000); a scorecard system devised by The Nature Conservancy and used in Latin America (Brandon *et al*, 1998), an African assessment system developed by IUCN, WWF and GTZ (Hakizumwami, 2000) and a more detailed system under development for World Heritage sites (Hockings *et al*, 2002).

In 1995, the World Commission on Protected Areas (WCPA) set up a Management Effectiveness Task Force to focus attention on the issue of management effectiveness and to look at options for assessment. Following work carried out at the University of Queensland and the UNEP World Conservation Monitoring Centre in Cambridge, UK, and on a series of workshops and meetings held in association with IUCN, WWF, the World Bank and the World Heritage Convention in the UK, Costa Rica and Australia, an overall framework for assessment was prepared (Hockings *et al*, 2000).

The WCPA framework was developed both to provide some overall guidance in the development of assessment systems and to encourage basic standards for assessment and reporting. It is not intended to be a straitjacket that seeks to force assessments in a particular direction, but rather an overview that helps in the design of systems, provides a checklist of issues that need to be measured and suggests some useful indicators. The framework is based upon the premise that the process of management starts with establishing a vision (within the context of existing status and pressures), progresses through planning and allocation of resources and, as a result of management actions, eventually produces goods and services. Monitoring and evaluation provide the link that enables planners and managers to learn from experience and helps governments, funding agencies and civil society to monitor the effectiveness of protected area networks. Assessment should ideally look at all aspects of the management cycle, including the context within which management takes place. It requires both monitoring and evaluation at various stages, each with a different type and focus of the assessment. Figure 1 presents a common framework within which evaluation and monitoring programmes can be established, combining context, planning, input, processes, outputs and outcomes.

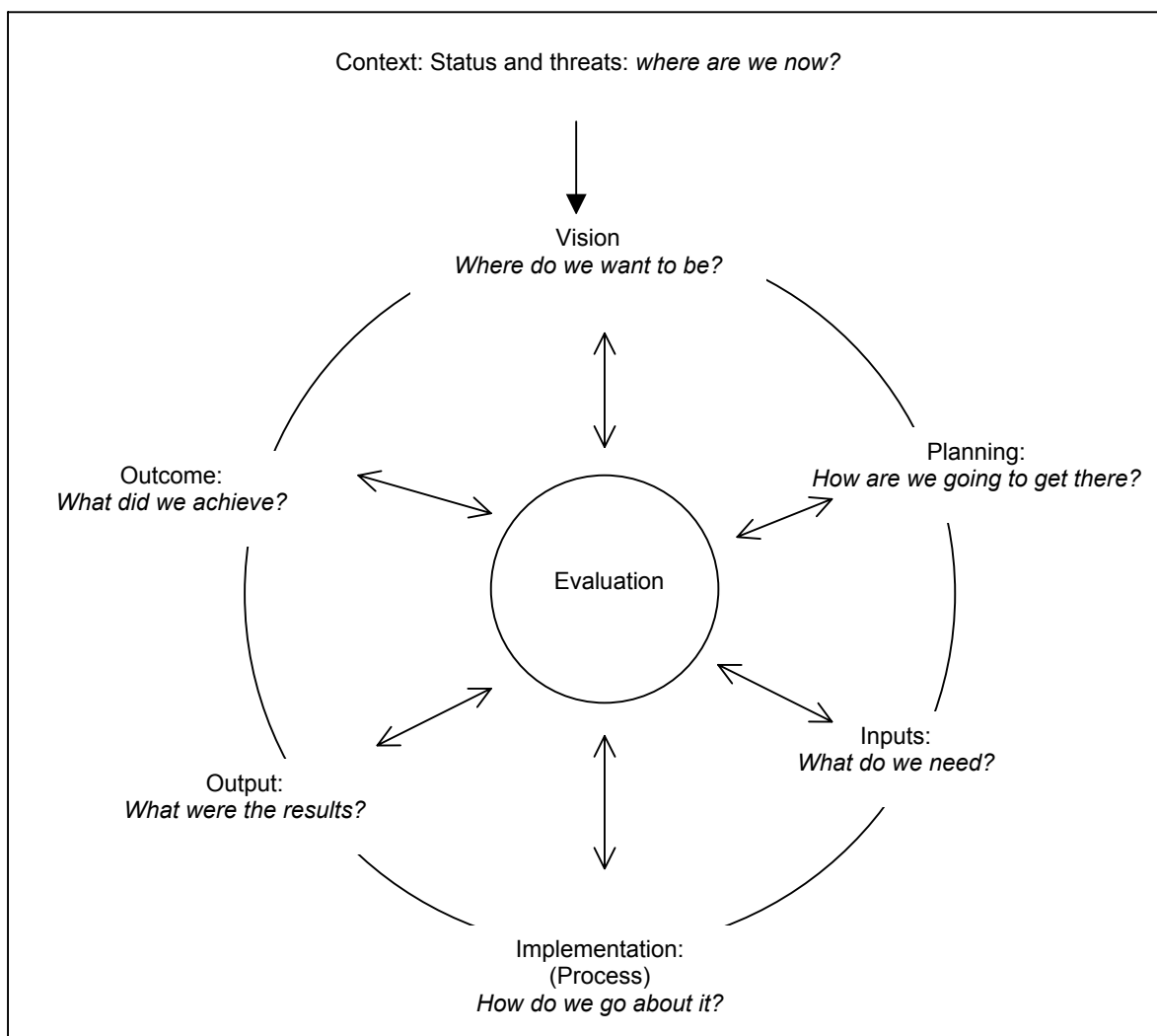


Figure 1: The management cycle proposed by the WCPA management effectiveness framework

At the moment, the WCPA management effectiveness framework and associated assessment tools have been developed in isolation, in most cases, from protected area authorities or agencies. There are exceptions to this, for example nationally based assessments in Canada and Brazil, and assessment methodologies developed with the World Bank, Global Environmental Facility and World Heritage Convention. However, these are generally partial in their geographical coverage, often based around differing standards and hard to compare. Countries that have taken management effectiveness assessment seriously and been public about the results often find themselves subject to public criticism, whereas countries with far less well-managed protected area systems avoid much criticism simply because few people know what is happening.

For this reason, there have been increasing calls for some ***standardised way of judging whether protected areas are well managed and of guaranteeing that such standards have been met.*** Demands come from taxpayers and donor agencies, anxious to know how wisely funds have been invested; from NGOs anxious about the state of protected areas; from governments to comply with existing reporting systems such as those of the Convention on Biological Diversity; and from managers themselves who want to develop approaches towards adaptive management and to argue for greater political and financial support. The main part of the current paper looks at various options for how such a guarantee could be provided.

## Guaranteeing protection

*There is increased interest in finding ways of verifying that protected areas are being managed effectively. Governments and international organisations have a variety of different options available to choose from; all of these have their proponents and critics.*

Until now, most attempts at regular reporting on protected area status have focused on problems and have only included those protected areas that are judged to be at risk. One important conceptual development that has been demanded is for some way to report also when protected areas have succeeded, met minimal standards or improved. Table 1 summarises some options; these are discussed in more detail in the following pages.

Different approaches to guaranteeing protected area management effectiveness	Examples
<b>Danger lists: focus only on protected areas at threat</b>	
<b>“Danger list”</b> : list of protected areas at threat that could either use agreed criteria of threat or be applied on an ad hoc basis. Sites only get listed if they are in trouble.	World Heritage in Danger list; Montreux list for Ramsar sites
<b>Self reporting: various methods for standardising assessment from within the protected area</b>	
<b>Standardised self-reporting system for protected area management</b> : an agreed system for reporting progress, relying on inputs from managers and their staff but with the possibility of involving others (e.g. local communities). Results in assessments that can be compared between sites, but provides no independent verification of accuracy	The UNESCO <i>Enhancing Our Heritage</i> project is developing such a standardised system for World Heritage sites and the World Bank is using a standard report card in its protected area projects
<b>Self assessment against a set of agreed “international standards” for protected area management</b> : Basic standards could be established globally or adapted to take account of regional circumstances.	An IUCN/WCPA working group is developing a set of basic standards for protected area management that could be used as a basis for such a system
<b>Standardised system of reporting under the auspices of the International Organisation for Standardisation (ISO)</b> : based around the ISO 14000 series of environmental management standards	ISO assessment been used in some protected areas in Europe (e.g. Catalonia, Spain and Finland)
<b>Independent assessment of management: options for certification schemes for protected areas</b>	
<b>Standardised third party reporting system for protected area management</b> : similar to the system above, but the assessment would be carried out by an independent assessor	
<b>Use of existing certification schemes</b> : such as organic agriculture, forest certification and marine fisheries certification within Category V and VI protected areas and buffer zones	The Marine Stewardship Council is providing certification in some marine protected areas
<b>Certification system – pass/fail for protected area management</b> : a system where protected areas are measured against agreed standards and are awarded a certificate only if they reach that standard	The Pan Parks initiative is developing such a certification system in Europe, although only aimed at a minority of national parks
<b>Certification system resulting in a score for protected area management</b> : a similar system to the one above, but instead of a pass/fail the protected area receives a combined score against the agreed standards	No such system has been found
<b>Certification of protected area categories</b> : third party assessment of the accuracy with which IUCN categories have been assigned to protected areas by governments	A project is being run by IUCN/WCPA in Europe to develop such a system
<b>Accreditation of assessment systems: to give assurance of thorough assessment</b>	
<b>Accreditation of PA assessment systems</b> : judgement of the suitability of assessment systems against agreed standards: e.g. WCPA could accredit assessment systems that it believes provide an accurate and fair way of assessing protected areas	No example from protected areas, but e.g. the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements runs an accreditation scheme for organic standards to ensure global equivalence.

Table 1: Some options for providing greater guarantees of protected area management effectiveness

- **“Danger Lists”**

Various institutions run lists of protected areas under threat, the two best known being those maintained by World Heritage and the Ramsar Convention (although it should be noted that not all Ramsar Sites are official protected areas).

- ***World Heritage Convention***: World Heritage sites are listed by UNESCO and WH natural sites include some of the world’s most important protected areas. Threats are identified in the “*World Heritage in Danger*” list, which includes sites considered by the World Heritage Committee to be “in danger” of losing conservation values. Criteria for inclusion remain fairly vague; some countries ask for protected areas to be added to gain political support for improvement while in others inclusion is regarded as a serious issue and enormous efforts are made to avoid a listing: most recently in the case of Kakadu National Park in Australia. The current listing probably does not include an even-handed approach to levels of risk and is a highly political document. The Convention also provides periodic reporting on the status of sites and the World Heritage Committee is moving to a more structured and rigorous method of regional reporting.
- ***The Montreux Record***: The Ramsar Convention – the UN convention that provides a focus for protection of key wetland sites – has maintained the Montreux Record since 1990, which lists Ramsar sites where an adverse change in ecological character has occurred, including an identification of major problems. As of February 1999, 380 sites were listed on the Montreux Record; the commonest criteria were drainage, pollution and eutrophication (Stone and Gujja, 1999).

Other lists are maintained on a national basis: for example the National Parks and Conservation Association in the USA publishes an annual *Ten Most Endangered National Parks* publication. Danger lists can be an important tool for advocacy, especially where they have official standing, but current examples suffer from lack of agreed criteria and also provide no way of recognising well managed protected areas except by omission from the list.

- **Self reporting**

Various methods of self-reporting exist, both within existing structures such as the International Organisation for Standardisation (ISO) and through systems designed for particular needs, such as those being developed for the World Heritage Convention and World Bank/GEF. Self reporting has the advantages of low cost, direct involvement of the manager, a likely feedback into management and sustainability: one obvious disadvantage is that such systems are reliant on the manager’s objectivity, honesty and understanding.

- ***Enhancing our Heritage project for World Heritage***: the project aims to improve the management of natural World Heritage sites through the development of standardised approaches to assessment, monitoring and reporting systems. Development of the monitoring system covers methodologies and techniques for carrying out threats analysis. It is also establishing methodologies that will include triggers to signal changes in threat status from “acceptable” to “danger” levels and criteria, which could be used to determine when the site would be suitable for removal from the *World Heritage in Danger* list. Particular aims include: developing an established assessment, monitoring and reporting programme for evaluating management effectiveness and World Heritage values; training managers and staff in its application; and improving cooperation between sites and local communities.



- ***World Bank/GEF/WWF tracking tool:*** at the other end of the spectrum in terms of detail, WWF and the World Bank have been developing a standardised questionnaire to be used on an annual basis to monitor progress towards key management objectives in all protected areas where the organisations have projects or major funding. The tracking tools aims to provide a harmonised reporting system for protected area assessment within both the World Bank and WWF by supplying consistent data to allow tracking of progress over time. It is relatively quick and easy to complete by protected area staff, so as not to be reliant on high levels of funding or other resources and is based around a system that provides four alternative text answers to each question so that it is easily understood by non-specialists (Stolton *et al*, 2003). The tracking tool is aimed to help ***reporting progress*** on management effectiveness and should not be regarded as an independent assessment, or as the sole basis for adaptive management.
- ***Developing international standards for protected areas:*** WCPA is currently cooperating on a project being run as part of the *Ecosystem, People and Protected Areas* (EPP) project to develop agreed standards for protected areas. Workshops have been held in Latin America, Africa and Asia. The standards for management, once agreed, could create a basis for other forms of self reporting (and indeed provide a basis for the two systems described immediately above). The EPP project aims to initiate a growing network of field learning sites to promote experimentation with ways of adapting to threats, or to make the best use of opportunities presented by global change factors. Lessons will be shared through a website, with five groups of experts coordinating lessons on global change, building a global protected areas system, management effectiveness, equity and local communities and developing the capacity to manage.

#### ▪ **Independent assessment of management**

The possibility of developing some form of certification is undoubtedly the most controversial of the options that are being discussed. Even mentioning the possibility of developing a certification system has provoked very strong negative reactions in some protected area professionals and some NGOs, while others support such developments and consider them a logical next step in guaranteeing protection. Third party certification – the assessment of protected areas by an independent assessor against agreed standards – is already being experimented with in a number of ways by IUCN members and others.

The concept of certification is that individual protected areas are certified / verified against agreed standards by an accredited, independent body – either an existing body such as ISO or some new organisation. A four-stage process would be needed:

- Accreditation body develops agreed basic standards
- Assessment systems develop standards
- Standards are accredited
- Individual protected areas are certified/verified against these standards

Such a system could supply international recognition for good management, with the additional potential that it could help with reporting to the Convention on Biological Diversity, to donors and to specialist users such as ecotourism companies. Independent assessment reduces the possibility of accidental or deliberate distortion in reporting, but adds a huge layer of cost and bureaucracy. Some of the arguments for and against any form of protected areas certification are summarised in Table 2 overleaf:

For certification	Against certification
It could create an important focus on management effectiveness of protected areas	Certification is likely to be extremely time consuming and could divert effort from practical management or capacity building
A certificate of good management could provide important political recognition to protected area managers within countries	Obtaining a certificate would be expensive and there is no obvious market advantage in having a certificate that could justify paying for certification
The certification process could provide a standardised way of reporting on protected areas, e.g. for international mechanisms such as the Convention on Biological Diversity	Resistance to certification amongst governments could conversely undermine their willingness to report on the CBD
Certification could result in independent (and free) advice to governments on the status of their protected areas and to managers on improving management, and could therefore be a valuable tool for adaptive management	Some government protected area agencies have stated strong opposition to the idea of certification
Independent certification could take pressure off protected area staff in countries or regions where it is politically difficult (or dangerous) for staff to identify particular threats	Being subjected to outside evaluation could undermine or antagonise staff, particularly if they thought that assessors paying a brief visit failed to understand the complexity of issues found in protected areas
Certification could help major funding agencies to determine whether grants and donations were being correctly and effectively used	Certification could create a “two-tier” system, with secure, well-funded protected areas in politically stable countries opting for certification (and thus getting additional support) and those in more difficult situations ignoring certification and being further marginalized
Certification could provide local communities and others with a voice in protected areas that is currently missing in many countries	The certification process could simply open up old disputes and give anti-conservation elements a chance to make trouble
Any certification scheme is almost certain to be voluntary so that governments and protected areas that did not like the idea could simply not take part	A certification scheme could create enough momentum that governments would feel forced to take part but might do so reluctantly
Certification could well happen anyway, so WCPA should act now to make sure that it has a role in shaping and controlling the process	Certification could well happen anyway, so WCPA should ignore it for now and wait to see what develops

**Table 2: Arguments for and against certification of protected areas**

Certification might offer options for specific protected area types; for example as a way of monitoring the increasing number of private protected areas or as a way of guaranteeing protected areas managed by indigenous or local communities. Certification systems are being considered and in some cases developed and IUCN needs to at least develop a clear policy towards these. Some examples are given below.

- ***Use of existing certification systems:*** Certification systems – such as those associated with organic agriculture, forest management, fisheries and ecotourism – are already helping to monitor the effectiveness of protected areas. Three main roles exist: (1) certification of operations within protected areas (particularly in Category V areas related to operations such as organic farms, management for non-timber forest products and ecotourism and in marine protected areas); (2) certification of land uses within the buffer zones of protected areas or in the corridors of protected area networks; (3) creation of additional protected areas as a result of certification, such as the requirement to protect a

proportion of forest in Forest Stewardship Council certification schemes (Dudley *et al*, 2000). In Europe organic farming is increasingly being adopted within protected areas. Promotional work by the Associazione Italiana Agricoltura Biologica within regional parks in Italy encouraged 113 farms within protected areas to apply for certification between 1996 and 1997 (Compagnoni, 2000). In Mediterranean Europe, the development of non-timber forest product certification is being used to encourage traditional forest management systems in cultural landscapes (Moussouris and Regatto, 1999). Use of certification could help encourage best practice, gather information and provide assurance for governments, donors and public. A disadvantage is that such schemes are only likely to apply to small parts of the protected area or to certain actions within the area.

- **Pan Parks:** The Pan Parks initiative offers an approach where protected areas are certified specifically for their tourism potential although within a more general assessment of management effectiveness. Currently operating in Europe, it aims to create a network of outstanding, internationally recognised protected areas offering unique, high quality nature-based tourism. It is hoped that Pan Parks will become widely known as the natural capitals of the continent and the concept is based on partnership between all actors involved. Pan Parks has developed standards (Kun, 2000) and a star rating system (van de Vlasakker, 2000) and has carried out some early assessments, for example of Oulanka National Park in Finland (Väisänen and Tapaninen, 2003).
- **Certification of IUCN management categories:** IUCN classifies protected areas into six different categories, depending on management aim: ranging from strictly protected areas with access only for scientific research (Category Ia) to extractive reserves (Category VI). In a development related to, but separate from, discussions about certification of management effectiveness, WCPA in Europe is developing proposals for a certification scheme to assure that the correct category has been assigned. This issue has come to prominence because some countries, particularly Austria, have linked funding levels to the category, creating an incentive for protected areas to be classified in particular ways. Proposals for such a system will be presented at the World Parks Congress.

- **Accreditation of assessment systems**

An essential prerequisite of certification, but also a separate option for increasing the professionalism and standardisation of assessment is *accreditation* of new and existing assessment systems by some independent body to ensure that they meet minimum standards. The concept is that some body (possibly WCPA) could accredit the *approach*, *quality* and *range* of assessment systems to determine their suitability in meeting objectives; applicability in a particular protected area; matching of indicators to criteria; and aptness of process. Although not carried out for protected areas, the process of accrediting assessment is well established from existing bodies like the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC). Incentives include international recognition of assessments, which might help governments to fulfil reporting requirements under the World Heritage Convention and the CBD. Groups such as WWF are already looking for advice from WCPA about the quality of assessment systems. The WCPA framework provides an initial basis for accreditation of a suite of assessment systems adapted to local needs. For managers, accreditation of their assessment system would offer clarity in and recognition for reporting, while donors and governments would be assured that assessments meet required standards. An accreditation system would also be relatively cheap to set up, as compared to some system for certification. However, accreditation also creates an additional layer of bureaucracy and its advantages remain unproven.

## Issues for consideration

*Danger lists and systems of self reporting against standards are already in operation in protected areas, although there is considerable scope for expanding, modifying and adapting these. However, the new issue for IUCN to discuss is whether or not some form of certification system offers anything worth investing time in either investigating further or developing. Below, some initial thoughts on possible costs and benefits of certification are summarised.*

### Implications of developing a protected area certification system

IUCN has requested that a task force look at the implications of developing some form of certification system for protected areas. Experience from development of other certification schemes around the world suggests that this would be an extremely large and expensive undertaking. Exactly what would be involved?

- **Identification of an institution:** would a new certification body be needed or could an existing body like ISO take a lead? Could WCPA take on this role and if so what would be the implications? How much would it cost to house and staff such an initiative?
- **Development of standards:** experience from other sectors suggests that this would probably be a time-consuming exercise, requiring workshops, consultations and many drafts. Who would carry this out? What mandate would be required?
- **Development of a management structure:** whatever body takes on certification, they would need to develop a tailored management structure with representation of different interests on a management board, identification of protocols and guidelines, patrons, etc. Would the time needed for this be available without hampering other equally or more important conservation efforts?
- **Fund raising:** a full certification scheme would need a large cash injection to be established and regular funding to maintain: research would be needed to find out if protected areas themselves were able or willing to meet some of these costs.
- **Getting political buy-in:** concurrently with development of a scheme, a large amount of outreach and advocacy would be required to ensure that the scheme was taken up by a viable number of protected areas. What kind of protected areas would this be expected to appeal to? Could certification end up as a “club” for well-managed protected areas in rich countries and add little to the problems facing protected areas in poorer countries?
- **Launch costs:** a high profile political launch would be a major event. Who would be expected to sponsor this?

### Implications of not taking the idea of a protected area certification system any further

Development of a certification scheme would be a major undertaking with little certainty of a result. Yet there would also be certain costs in doing nothing – in terms of lost opportunities and the possibility that IUCN be sidelined as other organisations take up this role. Threats to protected areas also remain and the desire for guarantees of protection will not go away, so some other form of verification will be required. Some key issues are outlined below.

- ***An alternative system of highlighting threats to protected areas will be needed:*** proposals might include, for example, a general “danger list”, more high-profile campaigns on threats, ad hoc missions to assess protected areas, more general promotion of effectiveness, regionally-driven assessment systems, etc. Questions about certification should not be considered in isolation but compared with other likely responses.
- ***Someone else is likely to do the same thing:*** it is possible, perhaps likely that some organisation will launch a certification scheme for protected areas; least two are in preparation (both focusing on ecotourism). A decision not to go ahead will itself require a strategy for how to react to any alternative scheme that emerges. How would IUCN react to a separate certification scheme?
- ***Dangers of losing control:*** one element in this strategy should address the implications of alternative schemes in terms of the influence that WCPA has over protected area policy. For example, an independent scheme to monitor use of categories could and probably would end up disputing the UNEP-WCMC list of protected areas.

### **Next steps**

*For IUCN, certification represents both an opportunity (global leadership, fundraising potential, product branding) and a potential liability, particularly if it fails. IUCN has therefore established a small task force, which will produce the following outputs in time for the World Parks Congress.*

- A survey of institutional options for certification, verification and accreditation, including possible sources of funding
- A survey of attitudes to certification schemes amongst key people in governments, protected area agencies, donors, intergovernmental agencies (e.g. the CBD) and NGOs, including current and proposed future reporting needs
- A workshop to discuss options and possible presentation of options at existing initiatives, such as CBD, UNFF, WWF advisory groups etc to develop consensus on ways forward
- One or more proposed options, with funding possibilities, draft business plans etc, for presentation at the WPC, as part of the workshop activities being run by the management effectiveness theme

The task force will include WCPA members, other relevant practitioners and people involved in existing certification schemes outside protected areas to provide perspective. Development will take place in close collaboration with the Programme on Protected Areas at IUCN and the World Commission on Protected Areas.

If you would like to contribute to the debate about guarantees of protected area management effectiveness, please contact Nigel Dudley at [equilibrium@compuserve.com](mailto:equilibrium@compuserve.com) and check for updates and papers on [www.equilibriumconsultants.com](http://www.equilibriumconsultants.com) under the section on protected area publications

If you would like to contribute to the debate about certification of protected area categories (particularly in Europe), please contact Marija Zupancic-Vicar at [m.z.vicar@g-kabel.si](mailto:m.z.vicar@g-kabel.si)

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