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Presentation of the commission

IUCN World Commission on Protected Areas

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About us

The IUCN World Commission on Protected Areas (WCPA) is the world's premier network of protected area expertise. It has over 1,600 members, spanning 140 countries. WCPA works by helping governments and others plan protected areas and integrate them into all sectors; by providing strategic advice to policy makers; by strengthening capacity and investment in protected areas; and by convening the diverse constituency of protected area stakeholders to address challenging issues. For more than 50 years, IUCN and WCPA have been at the forefront of global action on protected areas.

BACKGROUND AND MISSION

The origins of this Commission can be traced back to the early years of the 20th century. As the number of protected areas increased, conservationists recognized a growing need to address some parks issues internationally. In 1910, Paul Sarasin, a Swiss medical doctor, proposed a "Committee to establish an International or World Commission for the Protection of Nature". Related action at the international level included conferences on wild fauna and flora held in 1905, 1909, 1913, 1923 and 1928. Political turmoil prevented these early conferences from generating the organizational structure needed for effective international conservation.

IUCN established a provisional Committee on National Parks during its 1958 General Assembly at Athens and Delphi, Greece. Harold (Hal) Coolidge headed the Committee, and would later become the first Chair of the full Commission. The Committee included five members representing Africa, three for Asia, and one each for North America, Latin America and Europe. Its purpose was to "strengthen international cooperation in matters relating to national parks and equivalent reserves in all countries throughout the world".

In 1960, IUCN raised the status of the Committee to that of a permanent Commission, with the creation of the Commission on National Parks. IUCN had been asked by the international community to take responsibility for preparing a world list of national parks, in keeping with its role as a network to share the world's knowledge on nature conservation.

The history of this Commission is inextricably linked to that of IUCN, and the work of its staff. From the outset Commission activities have been closely aligned with protected area activities throughout IUCN, carried out in support of the broader IUCN mission. The Commission and the IUCN Programme on Protected Areas have carried out an integrated work programme for the past 15 years, which is recognized as a model in line with the IUCN One Programme approach.

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WCPA's Mission is to promote the establishment and effective management of a world-wide representative network of terrestrial and marine protected areas as an integral contribution to IUCN's mission. The Commission has a Steering Committee, and the Chair is elected every four years at the IUCN World Conservation Congress. The principal objectives of WCPA are to:

- help governments and others plan protected areas and integrate them into all sectors, through provision of strategic advice to policy makers.
- strengthen capacity and effectiveness of protected areas managers, through provision of guidance, tools and information and a vehicle for networking;
- increase investment in protected areas, by persuading public and corporate donors of their value; and
- enhance WCPA's capacity to implement its programme, including through co-operation with IUCN members and partners.

ACHIEVEMENTS TO DATE

One of the 'products' for which the Commission is best known is the World Parks Congress (WPC) —a major event held every 10 years. Congresses provide an important opportunity for protected areas experts and policymakers worldwide to meet, review the current global situation and chart the path forward for protected areas. They are defining moments. They capture new concepts and in retrospect reveal paradigm shifts in thinking, policy and action towards protected areas. Views on what constitutes a protected area, the purpose of such areas, and how they should be run have all changed fundamentally since the first conference in 1962. Five have been held so far with the latest held in Durban, South Africa in 2003.

Durban's legacy led to the adoption (a year later) of a programme of work on protected areas (PoWPA) by the Conference of the Parties (COP) of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). Since then, WCPA has been repeatedly recognized through COP decisions as a source of expertise in the guidance to the signatories to the CBD in the implementation of the PoWPA.

Between 2004 and 2010, at the CBD's request, IUCN:

- Compiled information on financial incentives for protected areas (Sustainable Financing of Protected Areas, 2006) and set up a task force on costs and benefits
- Developed guidance on: protected area selection (Identification and Gap Analysis of Key Biodiversity Areas, 2007); working with faith groups (Guidelines on the Management of Sacred Natural Sites, 2008); climate change (Natural Solutions, 2009); and connectivity (Connectivity Conservation Management, 2010)
- Published a major text book (Managing Protected Areas; 2006),
- Developed a database of protected area courses and established an online teaching module for national PoWPA focal points with the CBD and partners
- Started development of a Green List as a voluntary standard for best practice in protected area management
- Published a new edition of technical guidance on management effectiveness assessment; analysed global assessment results; and provided capacity support in World Heritage sites, West Africa, ASEAN countries, Finland, South Korea, Australia and Colombia
- Produced new guidance on protected area management categories and worked with UNEPWCMC to improve the World Database on Protected Areas, to standardize data on the extent and coverage of protected areas.

The 2010 COP adopted a decision that invites WCPA to provide technical advice to parties in the following areas; ecological restoration, monitoring and evaluation of the status of biodiversity in protected areas, governance of protected areas, connectivity, representation with a regional approach, management effectiveness, conservation corridors, and adaptation to and mitigation of climate change (COP 10 Decision X/31 clause 8).

WCPA is a critical element to the Union's role to evaluate individual nominations, monitor the conservation status of existing World Heritage sites, provide training and support for site managers, and advise on related strategy by preparing overviews. WCPA members are called upon to undertake the reviews and assure quality while also addressing the capacity building needs of these premiere global sites.

WCPA is also recognized for setting global standards: The IUCN Management Categories classify protected areas according to their management objectives. The use of Categories makes it easier to compare protected areas, support countries in setting objectives, and measure the effectiveness of protected areas. These categories are recognised by international bodies and many national governments as the global standard for defining and recording protected areas and as such are increasingly being incorporated into government legislation. Countries such as Austria, South Korea and Germany have sought out IUCN experts to certify that certain of their protected areas meet specific category standards.

A categories task force undertook a wide-ranging review of the IUCN Management Categories. The four-year review process culminated in a revised version of the guidelines, published for the 2008 IUCN World Conservation Congress in Barcelona, Spain. A new definition of a protected area was adopted then as well, which is the first test in the process of assignment of Categories to a protected area. Significantly, the revision introduces a governance dimension to the categories system that includes options for the management of all categories of protected areas by indigenous and local communities.



In 1998, the Commission published the first of an ongoing reference series, "Best Practice Guidelines". Drawing on the Commission's expertise, each volume addresses topical issues facing protected areas, and helped make the Commission an authoritative voice on protected areas management. Seventeen guidelines have been issued to date[1].

CURRENT INITIATIVES

NATURAL SOLUTIONS

Protected Areas have a principal function of safeguarding nature. Yet, to date, a systematic analysis of their effectiveness in this regard has not been carried out. With SSC, a study is now under way to analyse biodiversity outcomes in protected areas. The approach includes a meta-study on the effectiveness of different IUCN categories and governance types in delivering biodiversity outcomes, drawing on available long-term data from protected areas around the world (and comparable data from outside protected areas where available).

WCPA is focused on strengthening the management of existing protected areas as a contribution to addressing climate change issues. Protected areas store at least 15 per cent of terrestrial carbon and supply ecosystem services for disaster reduction, water supply, food and public health, all of which enable community-based adaptation. Without protected areas, the challenges would be even greater.

STANDARDS AND GUIDANCE

Ecological restoration is an important protected area management tool for halting and reversing ecosystem degradation. It contributes to global conservation objectives by reducing biodiversity loss, enhancing natural capital and ecosystem services, enhancing landscape connectivity, facilitating mitigation and adaptation to the adverse effects of climate change, and contributing to the improvement of human well-being. A Best Practice Guideline on Restoration will be launched at the 2012 World Conservation Congress (WCC) in Jeju, South Korea.

Another contribution to the Best Practice Guideline Series, on urban protected areas – protected natural areas within and adjoining cities – is planned to be launched at the 2012 WCC. These urban protected areas are important not only for the well-being of the people who live in those cities; they are also ambassadors for nature conservation generally. A generous contribution from the Korean Parks Service is making this publication possible by the Urban Specialist Group.

CAPACITY BUILDING

WCPA is committed to developing the curricula and supporting mechanisms to build up the level of professionalism of personnel associated with the management of protected areas. The capacity to manage is the product of willingness, competence, skills, capability, and adequate resources. A Task Force on Education has launched the development of standard curricula, with the intent to make information, tools and publication readily available as well as to strengthen a broader understanding of the values of protected areas and the need to invest in these critical areas of the world.

RECOGNIZING GOOD MANAGEMENT

Using pilot studies in a number of countries, work is under way to determine the feasibility of putting in place a PA quality standard, based in the assessment of management effectiveness of protected areas. The World Conservation Congress in Jeju in 2012 will provide an excellent opportunity to review the advances of the pilot and a venue for launching the Green List. The resulting IUCN Green List of well-managed protected areas will recognize the attainment of standards of management effectiveness across a range of criteria (e.g. biodiversity conservation, threat abatement, equitable governance, sustainable financing, visitor satisfaction, science and education).

CHALLENGES FOR THE FUTURE

The specific objectives of the IUCN WCPA for the next four years are to:

- enhance the capacity to effectively manage protected area systems to achieve the Aichi Targets for halting biodiversity loss, in particular through meeting Aichi Target 11[2];
- mainstream protected areas as natural solutions to global challenges, such as climate change, land degradation, food security, health and well-being;
- foster equitable governance of protected area systems;
- make the case for sustainable financing of protected area systems;
- communicate and advocate the value of protected area systems.

WCPA recognizes that to achieve the full potential of protected areas, and to meet the goals of the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity, and particularly Aichi Target 11, the capacity for protected area management must be upgraded. Accordingly, WCPA will work with the Global Protected Areas Programme (GPAP) and other partners to build institutional capacity and practitioners' skills to enhance protected area system design, management and governance, to conduct biodiversity monitoring, and to implement sound business planning. Good practice guidance will be generated, knowledge disseminated and competence built.

WCPA will work towards mainstreaming protected areas as "natural solutions" in addressing climate change, land degradation, food security, health and well-being. WCPA will continue

1 See www.iucn.org/about/union/commissions/wcpa/wcpa_puball/wcpa_bpg/

2 Aichi Target 11: By 2020, at least 17 per cent of terrestrial and inland water, and 10 per cent of coastal and marine areas, especially areas of particular importance for biodiversity and ecosystem services, are conserved through effectively and equitably managed, ecologically representative and well connected systems of protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures, and integrated into the wider landscapes and seascapes." Strategic Plan of the Convention on Biological Diversity or the *"Aichi Target"* see http://www.cbd.int/sp/targets/

to work with the Rio Conventions to position protected areas as a fundamental contribution in the objective of all three conventions.

WCPA will promote:

- the full range of governance types for protected areas;
- the increased participation of indigenous peoples and local communities;
- the values of protected areas to human well-being and livelihoods.

Working with partners and communication experts (such as the IUCN CEC) WCPA will advocate the value of well-managed systems of protected areas with the purpose of building awareness and the enhancement of the level of investment in protected areas, expansion and management effectiveness.

FACTS AND FIGURES

WCPA is led by the Commission Chair, supported by a Steering Committee and an operational structure including Task Forces and Specialist Groups that contribute to the realization of its mandate. The Commission is supported by the GPAP from the IUCN Secretariat and work with Regional Offices and IUCN Members to realize IUCN's "One Programme" Charter. An Organigramme showing the structure of the Steering Committee is shown in Figure 1.

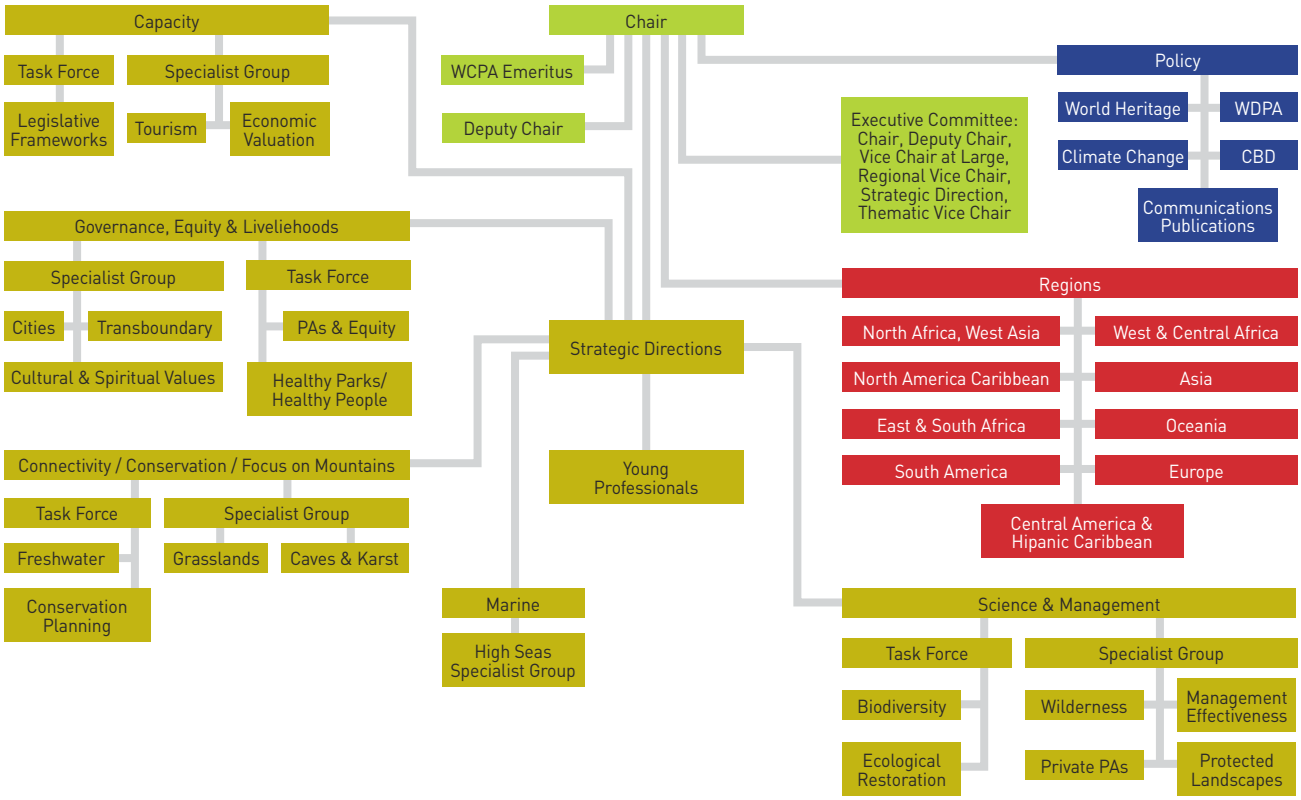


Figure 1. Structure of the WCPA Steering Committee. The names of individuals associated with each of the boxes may be found at http://cmsdata.iucn.org/downloads/steeringcommittee.pdf. Currently, WCPA has over 1400 members in the Commission.