



50 Years of Working for Protected Areas

A brief history of IUCN World Commission on Protected Areas



IUCN World Commission on Protected Areas



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Preface

There are now well over 100,000 protected areas in the world. Together they cover one-eighth of the land mass of the Earth, an area equivalent to China and India put together. They represent the most important investment that humanity has made in the protection of nature. And they are also vital to human well-being and to our future. As the world faces environmental change at a speed and on a scale not previously experienced in human history, these places provide us with some degree of stability and security.

They act as places of refuge for our biological resources, in some cases even as last resorts for saving them from extinction. They serve as reservoirs of resources and as laboratories for science and research, to establish baselines and to understand the behaviour of natural ecosystems. And they serve as sources of inspiration for what people and nature can really achieve by supporting and nurturing each other, in some cases by maintaining a separateness between them.

Never have people needed protected areas more. Never has the need for international leadership in this area been greater.

IUCN, International Union for Conservation of Nature, has been at the forefront of the creation and management of protected areas since it was founded in 1948. For 50 years, its work in this field has been led by the group of international experts, now known as the IUCN World Commission on Protected Areas – WCPA. This publication gives an excellent summary account of IUCN WCPA's many achievements over the first half century of its existence. Four past and present Commission chairs, who have between them led the Commission for nearly 30 years, have contributed to this account. It has been my privilege to have been closely and actively associated with each one of them.

This account synthesizes and summarizes the vast knowledge and deep insights they and their fellow Commission members accumulated over these years.

I warmly congratulate IUCN WCPA on what it has done to lead international thought and action about protected areas since 1958. I welcome its current important contribution to the cause of conservation. And I wish it good fortune in the years to come, confident that it will continue to provide the highest quality of global leadership in this vitally important area.

Ashok Khosla, IUCN President

I. Protecting nature's irreplaceable treasures

“Over the past 50 years we've created a network of exceptional people in every region and biogeographic realm. This Commission provides information, science and guidance to answer the deceptively simple question ‘Protected areas: What are they and what do you want to do with them?’”

IUCN WCPA Chair Nik Lopoukhine

A. Protected areas

One of the great success stories of conservation is the creation of protected areas. A fundamental challenge is to protect these irreplaceable treasures for the good of people and the planet.

Benefits found nowhere else on earth are offered to people by the wild plants, animals and incomparable scenery in protected areas. Protected areas preserve biodiversity. They offer protection from extinction and climate change. And they support the livelihoods of human communities the world over. Locally, clean water, fresh air, food and medicine are practical benefits. They are important too for the recreation, education, spiritual and cultural benefits that they bring.

Royal decrees protected special areas in India more than 2000 years ago. In Europe, rich and powerful people have protected their hunting grounds for a thousand years. Societies everywhere have protected special places, such as the “tapu” areas of Pacific communities and the sacred groves found in parts of Africa. Truly this is both an ancient and a universal idea.

The modern movement for protected areas originated in the 19th century, with action taken in Australia, New Zealand, North America, South Africa and South America. As protected areas spread around the world in the 20th century, the driving force differed from region to region. North America used protected areas to safeguard dramatic and sublime scenery; South America focused on erosion control and drinking water supply; Africa focused on game parks; Europe looked for landscape protection.

During the 20th century, the number of protected areas grew dramatically. Today nearly 12 per cent of the world's land surface is in some form of protected area, although not all of these are as yet properly implemented or managed. Protected areas exist in an astonishing variety—in terms of their size, the types of habitats they contain, their location, who owns and manages them and what they have been set up to protect. They are found around the world. Nearly every country has adopted protected area legislation, and designated sites for protection. New areas for protection are being created by many public, private, community and voluntary organizations. International networks of protected areas feature in global conventions such as the UNESCO World Heritage Convention and the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands. At the regional level, agreements include the network of Natura 2000 sites in Europe. In all, more than 100,000 sites meet the definition of a protected area established by IUCN, International Union for Conservation of Nature.

Old arguments persist to the present. Debates about park policy, for example, still invoke the so-called Yellowstone model from over a century ago. In this model people are generally excluded from parks so as to leave nature undisturbed. In other models people are seen as environmental stewards and hence essential elements of protected areas. Debates over how to name or define national parks and other types of protected areas also continue. These important issues are being discussed against the background of a harsh reality that faces protected areas everywhere. Rapid changes such as those brought about by population pressure and climate change threaten to roll back progress. And even where protected areas exist, much more must be done to save them.

B. WCPA – A global network in support of protected areas

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.

After the Second World War, IUPN, the International Union for the Protection of Nature, was founded during the same period in which the international community created the United Nations and its agencies. IUPN came into being in 1948 with the support of the newly-formed United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO). At the 1948 meeting in Fontainebleau, 18 governments, seven international organizations and 107 national organizations signed a formal Act constituting IUPN, now IUCN. The Union was founded as the first truly global organization for nature protection. It was envisioned as a meeting ground to create international networks of experts and organizations that would strengthen the nature conservation movement. The roots of this Commission can be traced to its earliest days.

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”. Supporters for this work on protected areas included UNESCO and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO).

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. Meanwhile, the Union struggled to find funds and to settle into new offices in a move from Belgium to Switzerland.

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.

Today the IUCN World Commission on Protected Areas – WCPA is a global resource working to help meet the challenges faced by protected areas and the people, both locally and globally, who value and depend on them. The WCPA 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, the International Union for Conservation of Nature”.

The Commission works with governments and other partners to plan and manage protected areas and integrate them into all sectors. WCPA:

- ▲ Provides strategic advice to policy makers;
- ▲ Strengthens capacity and effectiveness of protected areas managers, through guidance, tools and information and a vehicle for networking;
- ▲ Increases investment in protected areas, by persuading public and corporate donors of their value; and
- ▲ Collaborates with IUCN members and partners.

WCPA is a network of volunteers. Secretariat support is provided by staff of the IUCN Programme on Protected Areas, with whom WCPA implements a shared strategic plan and work plan. The Commission has a Steering Committee, and the Chair is elected every four years at the IUCN World Conservation Congress.

CNPPA / WCPA Chairs	
1960-1966	Harold Jefferson Coolidge (USA)
1966-1972	Jean-Paul Harroy (Belgium)
1972-1975	J.I. Nicol (Australia)
1975-1976	Ted Swem (USA)
1976-1983	Kenton Miller (USA)
1983-1990	Harold Eidsvik (Canada)
1990-1994	P.H.C. (Bing) Lucas (New Zealand)
1994-2000	Adrian Phillips (U.K.)
2000-2004	Kenton Miller (USA)
2004-present	Nik Lopoukhine (Canada)

When the Commission's Name Changed	
The name has changed several times over the past 50 years, reflecting an ever-wider remit	
1958	Founded by IUCN as the provisional Committee on National Parks
1960	International Commission on National Parks is established as a technical advisory body by the IUCN General Assembly
1975	Became the Commission on National Parks and Protected Areas
1996	Became the World Commission on Protected Areas (WCPA with the approval of the IUCN Congress in Montreal)

Note: The current acronym, WCPA, is used throughout this document to simplify references to this IUCN Commission throughout its long history.

II. Convening the global constituency: World Parks Congresses

One of the ‘products’ for which the Commission is best known is the World Parks Congress—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.

A. First World Conference on National Parks, Seattle 1962

The Commission helped to establish the First World Conference on National Parks, held in 1962 in Seattle, USA. Hal Coolidge, the Commission’s chair, was also chair of the event. Commission members along with representatives from UNESCO and FAO played significant roles. A debate about ‘nomenclature’, based on a paper by C. Frank Brockman, was an early example of ongoing concern how to classify or categorize protected areas.

As the first international network for protected areas, the Commission had added another ‘first’ in conservation history with the Seattle Congress. This ground-breaking event was the first international conference to focus exclusively on protected areas. It laid the framework the Commission’s future.

B. Second World Conference on National Parks, Yellowstone 1972

The 1972 conference marked the centenary of the founding of the first modern national park at Yellowstone, USA—and fittingly was held at that park and at nearby Grand Teton national park. The event however was strongly forward looking. A primary example is the work begun at the 1972 conference on developing a system for categorizing protected areas (see Chapter IV). This sought to address the prevailing confusion over the meaning of terms such as “national park” and “nature reserve”. At a time when many more protected areas were being set up, ambiguity over the purposes for which areas were managed, and inconsistency in terminology hindered efforts to protect these places, to collect and analyze information about them, and to provide the scientific community access to better data on conservation. The Commission also helped to raise the profile of issues such as management effectiveness and financial support for protected areas. Commission Chair Jean-Paul Harroy compiled and published “World National Parks—Progress and Opportunities”. In this respect too, the 1972 conference was a landmark: it consolidated world wide experience in park policies and management approaches, and marked a shift towards a more professional form of management.



Yellowstone National Park,
IUCN Photo Library © David Sheppard

C. Third World Congress on National Parks, Bali 1982

The Third World Congress on National Parks in 1982 in Bali, Indonesia, marked a critical turning point. The old view of protected areas as ‘set aside’ was replaced with a new idea: protected areas could be important components of sustainable development. After Bali, protected areas professionals began to give higher priority to people-related aspects of protected area management such as human development, partnerships with other sectors, and working with indigenous groups and local communities. Increasingly protected areas were considered not only in terms of their intrinsic conservation values but also as places that could bring benefits to communities. “Bali is when the connection was forged between protected areas and the development agenda,” Adrian Phillips recalls.

Many aspects of this event marked the departure from the past. While the first two congresses had been organized by the United States National Park Service, FAO and UNESCO, the Commission itself took the lead in organizing this event, in cooperation with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the United States National Park Service, Parks Canada and the Government of Indonesia. The Commission also selected a venue in the developing world. It was called a “congress” to suggest an active coming together of committed professionals in contrast to a traditional “conference” of interested parties.

The Congress differed from past events, according to Kenton Miller. “In Seattle and Yellowstone, we heard papers from the world’s best and came up with recommendations. In Bali, it was a switch to a professional community of park-related people coming together and (1) assessing where we were at that moment in protected areas; (2) examining options and opportunities to move on goals; (3) coming up with strategy on how to get their from here. We didn’t have conference papers. Instead, each realm had a half day to present their system of protected areas—what’s good, bad, needs to be done. It enhanced accountability.”

He also recalls bold visuals: “We unfurled from the ceiling down a map of the world that must have been 10 feet by 15 feet. On it was painted all of known protected areas, with symbols showing size and category, whether national park or nature reserve.” The map illustrated the world’s biogeographic realms, which clearly illuminated the gaps in the global system of protect areas.

The Bali Action Plan and recommendations of the Congress opened new avenues of communication and a wider role for the Commission. Publications expanded beyond inventories to included management advice. The Commission produced workshop publications on tropical and marine and coastal protected areas, and a very comprehensive volume of Congress proceedings. It was also at Bali that the Commission deliberately introduced the term “protected area” instead of “national park” to convey a more all-inclusive idea of what the Commission was about.

D. Fourth World Congress on National Parks and Protected Areas, Caracas 1992

A record number of people attended the Fourth World Congress on National Parks and Protected Areas in 1992 in Caracas, Venezuela. By this time, conservation had become a mainstream priority. Just a few months later, tens of thousands of people would attend the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in Rio de Janeiro, also called the Earth Summit. Leaders there adopted a global plan to achieve sustainable development in the 21st century, Agenda 21, and signed the Convention on Biological Diversity. Other important strategic plans emerged at this time, too. IUCN, UNEP and World Wildlife Fund (WWF) published “Caring for the Earth: A Strategy for Sustainable Living”, a 1991 update and extension of the influential 1980 World Conservation Strategy. The Brundtland Commission report “Our Common Future” also had been recently published.

“Parks for Life” was the theme of the World Parks Congress, which covered more topics than ever before: climate change, regionalization, colonialism, politics, sustainable development, rural communities, conflict management, non-traditional interest groups and the emancipation of women in the conservation labour force. The



Martin Holdgate (IUCN Director General 1988-1994), Enrique Colmenares and Kenton Miller (IUCN Director General 1982 1988) at the 4th World Congress on National Parks and Protected Areas, Caracas, Venezuela, 10-21 February 1992 IUCN Photo Library © IUCN

Commission Chair during the Caracas Congress was P.H.C. (Bing) Lucas, who served from 1990-1994, though the event itself was chaired by IUCN Director General Sir Martin Holdgate.

The action plan adopted by IUCN at Caracas called for measures to integrate protected areas into larger planning frameworks; improve management through expanded support and training to improve management; and enhance cooperation for the financing, development and management of protected areas. It emphasized the regional level of action and it was followed by numerous regional meetings convened by the Commission, as well as national and international events. It also inspired an expanding programme of publications. Specifically, the Commission initiated a series of guidelines to capture and broadcast current knowledge. The guidelines were spear-headed by Adrian Phillips, Commission Chair from 1994-2000. Caracas was also followed by increased attention given to protected areas by IUCN members. IUCN's 1996 Congress in Montreal featured protected areas in a dozen resolutions.

E. Fifth World Parks Congress, Durban 2003

In 2002, the World Summit on Sustainable Development took place in Johannesburg, requiring the South Africa government to delay by one year the Fifth World Parks Congress in Durban.

Nearly 3,000 participants from 160 countries attended the Congress. WCPA took the lead in planning and organizing the event with the cooperation of many governments, working closely with the IUCN Programme on Protected Areas. The Durban Action Plan spelled out some major challenges for the Commission and all of its associates for the years to come. The Congress was critical in preparing the ground for the adoption (a year later) of a work programme on protected areas by the Conference of the Parties of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). The Parks Congress also pressed for all sites whose biodiversity values are of "outstanding universal value" to be inscribed on the World Heritage List.



Nelson Mandela, WPC 5 Congress Patron and Achim Steiner, IUCN Director General, 5th IUCN World Parks Congress, Durban South Africa, IUCN Photo Library © IUCN 2003

Some of the liveliest debate and most innovative ideas at this Congress came from linkages between IUCN's core concerns with protected areas and topics such as community, equity, governance, sustainable finance, capacity development and management effectiveness. In particular, the focus on governance—with the direct involvement of local people, including indigenous communities—resonated with WCPA's experience. Thus the agenda for Durban was not only challenging, but entirely consistent with the new paradigm of protected areas thinking, which takes an expanded view of conservation along with social, economic, scientific and cultural reasons for protecting special places. There had been a fundamental paradigm shift that positioned conservation as part of a political process linked to human development and poverty reduction. A particular focus of the Congress, which reflected WCPA's own experience, was on the need for a more all-embracing view of protected areas governance. In this view many partners, including indigenous communities, are recognized as having an interest, sometimes the central interest, in how protected areas are planned and managed.

The Five World Parks Congresses				
Title	Date	Place	Attendance	From # countries
First World Conference on National Parks	1962	Seattle, USA	262	63
Second World Conference on National Parks	1972	Yellowstone/Grand Teton National Parks, USA	1,200	80
Third World Congress on National Parks	1982	Bali, Indonesia	353	68
Fourth World Congress on National Parks and Protected Areas	1992	Caracas, Venezuela	1,840	133
Fifth World Parks Congress	2003	Durban, South Africa	2,897	160

III. Working at the global level

The 'world' in World Commission on Protected Areas is a way of working reinforced every day by more than 1,200 members from 140 countries. Global challenges such as climate change demand cooperation as never before. International agreements are looking to protected areas for solutions to vast global challenges such as the loss of biodiversity and threats to places of natural and cultural value. Seas, mountains and grasslands are of particular concern.

A. The Convention on Biological Diversity

The significance of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) for WCPA's work cannot be overstated. Until 2003, however, there was relatively little engagement on the part of the Commission with the work of the Convention. Things changed dramatically after the Durban World Parks Congress called upon the CBD to address protected areas as a central theme of its work, and to do so with the assistance of WCPA. The Conference of the Parties to the CBD responded by adopting a detailed Programme of Work on Protected Areas one year later, largely based on the recommendations from Durban. It supports the establishment and maintenance by 2010 for terrestrial and by 2012 for marine areas of comprehensive, effectively managed, and ecologically representative national and regional systems of protected areas. The target for this to be achieved was set as 2010 for terrestrial protected areas and by 2012 for marine protected areas.

B. World Heritage Convention

The World Heritage Convention of 1972 protects the world's natural and cultural heritage considered to be of "outstanding universal value". Under this convention, IUCN is the official Advisory Body to the World Heritage Committee on natural heritage. The Union's contribution to this work is managed by the IUCN Programme on Protected Areas, which draws on expertise in the WCPA network, other Commissions and partners. IUCN's role is 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.

In the course of many years working with the Convention, WCPA has been involved in detailed studies of the Galápagos Islands, the Great Barrier Reef, Serengeti National Park and hundreds more. Proceedings from the 1982 Bali Congress included a special chapter on World Heritage. The 1992 Congress in Caracas featured a major session on the Convention. Jim Thorsell, WCPA Executive Officer, led the Commission's activities in the 1990's, becoming the IUCN spokesperson on World Heritage. The work is among the most politically exposed of any activities



Children in Coto Brus Anthropological reserve, Costa Rica IUCN Photo Library © Julián Orozco Badilla

undertaken by IUCN. IUCN, through its Programme on Protected Areas and WCPA, has earned a reputation for adopting consistently high and rigorous standards in its evaluations of nominations and frank, even fearless, assessments of threats to World Heritage. To assist the World Heritage Committee in its work, IUCN has produced a number of publications on World Heritage matters, such as: guidance on global priorities; global ecosystem reviews, such those on World Heritage and tropical forests, the marine environment and cave and karst systems; and regional World Heritage thematic studies.

C. Other global conventions and programmes

WCPA supports other global agreements that have implications for protected areas. For example, it has worked with the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands (Ramsar, Iran, 1971), the Man and the Biosphere (MAB) Programme of UNESCO and international activities related to climate change, forests and the marine environment.

D. Biomes of importance in protected areas

Marine biome

Marine protected areas are a relatively new approach in marine conservation and cover less than 1 per cent of the seas. WCPA has long argued that many more are needed to preserve biodiversity, restore fish stocks to sustainable yields, and reduce the decline in the quality of all oceans and seas.

An International Conference on Marine Parks and Reserves was held in Tokyo in 1975. Marine areas also took the spotlight at the 1978 IUCN General Assembly in Ashkhabad, USSR, where Commission members presented an exhibit that illustrated protected areas located as overlays on top of maps, including the marine realm. In parallel with WCPA efforts, WWF's Save the Seas meeting in San Francisco started marine conservation at the global level. During these early years, the focus shifted from providing a global review of marine protected areas to working on distinct projects related to defining and testing the application of global best practice guidance, or in support of regional initiatives. Such projects have been implemented in Samoa, Tanzania and Vietnam.

Milestone opportunities to review progress and set new agendas have occurred at World Parks Congresses, numerous regional conferences and the First International Marine Protected Area Congress in Australia in 2005. WCPA has worked to ensure continuity between major meetings, helped to plan new events, and advocated for a focus on marine protected areas in key conservation events. Globally agreed goals for 2012 include the establishment of a global network of marine protected areas, and WCPA has strengthened its marine membership and enhanced global and regional communication systems in anticipation of the increasing scale and pace of action to meet these goals.



A Sally lightfoot crab on Bartolome Island, Galapagos, Ecuador IUCN Photo Library © Imène Meliane

In recent years, a global plan of action was developed to further action that would make a significant difference in the scale and perception of Marine Protected Areas, and the declaration of such areas worldwide. This work has been led by WCPA member Dan Laffoley. Recently, several interactive online technologies have spurred action around High Seas and marine World Heritage. This has been supported by a global network of Regional Coordinators from within the membership of WCPA – Marine, which represents every ocean on the planet. For those engaged in marine issues, a major effort is directed towards 2012, the deadline for countries to better protect their oceans and seas stemming from the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development.

Mountains biome

Mountains are home to an astonishing variety of plants and animals stacked life zone above life zone as the altitude climbs higher. Their towering form suggests another vital function as the world's water towers, from frozen glaciers to rushing streams. Many peoples revere them as sacred or imbued with special cultural value. Their high biodiversity is matched by their high cultural diversity, and many of these cultures are among the world's most unique and endangered. Mountains and mountain ranges have a lot in common no matter where they are found on a map. Only a global approach to their use and management can respond effectively to modern-day threats to these ancient marvels. These threats include inappropriate use of development techniques from the lowlands, lawlessness and armed conflict, accelerated erosion, long-distance air pollution, and climate change. Protected areas are the best way of preserving delicate mountain environments and safeguarding water supplies.

In the late 1980s a small group of activists pressed for the inclusion of mountains as a 'biome of concern' on the international conservation agenda. The group included WCPA member Larry Hamilton, who would later become the Commission's Vice-Chair for Mountains. They called themselves

"Mountain Agenda" in reference to the emerging Mountain Agenda in Chapter 13 of Agenda 21, which was successfully adopted at the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), or the Earth Summit. In the process leading up to the Earth Summit, WCPA had worked to ensure that protected areas featured strongly in Agenda 21.

Other events at this time included "Parks, Peaks and People Conference", an international consultation organized by Larry and IUCN's Jim Thorsell in 1991. The event inspired a new network for professionals working on the challenges facing mountain protected areas, and a newsletter was launched in 1993. In 1995, WCPA hosted a workshop in the Austrian Alps on the topic of transborder cooperation in mountain protected areas. The workshop marked the start of IUCN activity in transboundary conservation areas and peace parks. Another major area of activity focused on "conservation corridors", a concept that uses protected areas as building blocks to be connected along ranges and/or within altitudes on single mountains.

WCPA contributed to the creation of the International Years of Mountains, which was celebrated in 2002 following UN General Assembly Resolution 53/24. The Year raised international awareness about the importance and fragility of mountains and the need for sustainable approaches to mountain development. In 2005, Graeme Worboys became the Commission's Vice-Chair for Mountains. And, reflecting WCPA's growing global membership, the simple newsletter of 1993 quickly expanded into a printed publication distributed to 55 countries and, in 2007, became an electronic update with global reach to managers, scientists and key users of mountain protected areas. The WCPA Mountains Theme has led IUCN's global work on mountain protected areas since its creation.



Maligne Lake in Jasper National Park, Canadian Rockies IUCN Photo Library © Jim Thorsell

Temperate grasslands

WCPA created the Grasslands Protected Area Task Force in 1996 to raise the level of protection for grassland ecosystems, placing immediate priority on temperate grasslands. Temperate grasslands are one of the most altered ecosystems on the planet. They have been changed so much by human activity, mostly food production, that little remains today in a natural state. Wildlife in tremendous numbers once called these grasslands home but in most cases only remnants survive. In the decade since the creation of the Task Force, there has been a significant rise in the level of interest in the conservation and protection of grasslands. In 2008, the Temperate Grasslands Conservation Initiative was launched, with a focus on communication and cooperation at the global level to increase their protection and sustainable use and to reverse biodiversity loss.



Wolf in Emas National Park, Brazil © Pedro Rosabal

IV. Working at the regional level

Partnership and cooperation can extend the reach of conservation efforts beyond a single intervention to create networks connected across regions. In effect, the whole is greater than the sum of the parts. For WCPA, as for IUCN as a whole, groups working at the regional and national levels contribute to the Union's global goals.

A. Why regions?

A regional approach is relevant to protected areas for two reasons: protected areas in the geographical area often share common challenges of ecology, geography and politics; and because in many regions political circumstances favour a regional approach, for example where there are regional political structures which deal with aspects of protected area policy.

The first idea is reflected in the Commission's work on biogeographical realms. This helped to define the Commission's approach with a focus on distinct ecological areas such as marine areas, grasslands or mountains, inspired by Miklos Udvardy's classification. Minutes of Commission meetings from the late 1970's to 1983 track the findings of realm-by-realm research. Data sheets shared the information globally. Jeff McNeely, at that time Executive Officer of the Commission, joined Kenton Miller in leading the research. Every six months they produced new lists of possible additions, including World Heritage sites and biosphere reserves. Jeremy Harrison (then at PADU) backed up this work with maps and data management. It was supported with funds from WWF, UNEP and UNESCO.

"This phase was about bringing science and biogeography into the picture," Kenton Miller explains. "It was a very pro-active methodology. We met every six months in different biogeographical realm. In three years we went clear around the world. We sat down with people from each realm—professionals in science and management, heads of park and NGOs. We reviewed every protected area in each realm. We'd ask questions like 'Do you have any candidates for World Heritage Status? Do you have any candidates for biosphere reserve status?'"

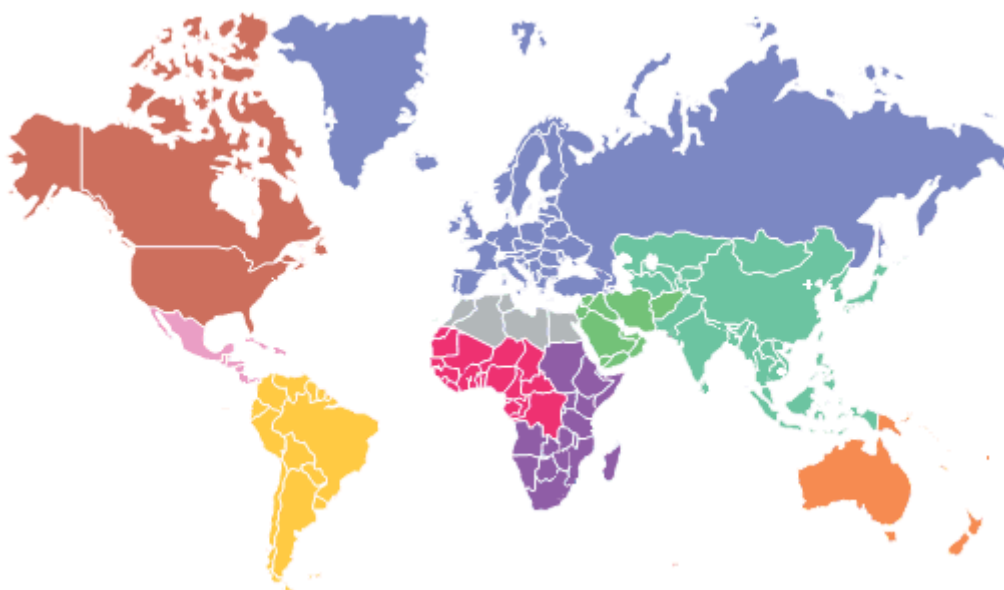
The political reason for working regionally is more apparent in some parts of the world (e.g. Europe, South East Asia or the Pacific) than in others. This is because some regions have established international bodies with a strong protected areas role. In Europe, the European Union has led in the development of a regional system of protection, Natura 2000. In South East Asia, the ASEAN group of countries has developed programmes for regional protection. The African Union has developed an international treaty to encourage the establishment of protected areas. In these and other cases, WCPA has been able to exert influence at a regional level through its partnership with such bodies.

B. How WCPA is organized geographically

The regional structures of WCPA have changed over time. After the Caracas Congress, for example, the Commission expanded the number of terrestrial regions to 17 in order to carry forward a number of regional initiatives and complemented this with marine regions as part of the WCPA marine programme. A major simplification was recently undertaken under the chairmanship of Nik Lopoukhine, who has reduced the number to nine terrestrial regions, to correspond to IUCN's statutory and operational regional structure:

- Asia
- Central America
- East and Southern Africa
- Europe
- North Africa / Middle East / West Asia
- North America & the Caribbean
- Oceania
- South America
- West and Central Africa

To help strengthen regional-level action by WCPA, many regions have set up their own steering committees, developed Regional Action Plans for Protected Areas, and implement their own regional programmes. WCPA has endeavoured to work in partnership between its regions and IUCN Regional and Country Offices.



Map of IUCN WCPA Regions © IUCN

C. Regional overview

Africa

The Commission focused attention on Africa in the early years. As African countries moved to independence, often through a turbulent period of struggle, conservationists around the world urged action to protect Africa's outstanding wildlife: a classic example was Serengeti National Park, Tanzania. In response, and working principally through UNESCO and FAO, the Commission helped to undertake national protected area assessments and provide assistance to the newly independent countries in their efforts to retain networks of protected areas inherited from the colonial era. This work was led by Commission Chair Jean-Paul Harroy, who travelled extensively in Africa as part of the IUCN Africa Special Project, which was undertaken by IUCN in cooperation with Sir Julian Huxley, evolutionary biologist and first Director General of UNESCO. The Commission produced the report "Conserving Africa's Natural Heritage".

Asia

Starting in 1994, WCPA engaged in an extensive process of consultations feeding into a Regional Action Plan. The Commission initiated a dialogue in the region that generated considerable technical and political support for protected areas. The process set the stage for cooperation around the Plan, which was published in 1996 and implemented via a special project of The Nature Conservation Agency of the Ministry of the Environment of Japan with IUCN and WCPA. The project provided a number of training opportunities, enhanced networking among experts and practitioners, and developed regionally-tailored guidelines about protected areas. Published in Chinese, Japanese and Korean, these guidelines on tourism and on sustainable financing were widely distributed. Currently, this ongoing project provides assistance to countries in the region to implement the CBD's Programme of Work on Protected Areas.

Latin America and the Caribbean

In 1978, the Commission's interest in this fostering a regional approach to protected areas manifested in an exhibit on Beringia and Caribbean Ecosystems at the IUCN General Assembly in Ashkabad. A report issued by the Commission in 1981, "Conserving the Natural Heritage of Latin America and the Caribbean," articulated

this regional view.” WCPA also developed a Caribbean Action Plan for Protected Areas and presented and promoted the plan during the 1992 World Parks Congress in Caracas. The Commission played a key role in the organization of that global Congress, as well as in regional events such as the First Latin American Congress on Parks and other Protected Areas (Santa Marta, Colombia, 1997) and the Second Latin American Congress on Protected Areas (Bariloche, Argentina, 2007). The two regional congresses were the results of a cooperative effort between WCPA, IUCN Programme on Protected Areas, IUCN Regional Office for South America (SUR), FAO and UNEP. These landmark events mobilized action to enhance protected areas conservation and management in the region.

Europe

The Commission’s work in Europe gained momentum after the 1992 Caracas Congress, which called for the preparation of protected areas action plans for every region. In a region only recently united after 45 years of profound division and where the influence of the European Union was growing, the stage was set for the Commission’s European protected areas initiative. Working with the Europarc Federation and other partners, the Commission drew up a European Action Plan for protected areas, also called Parks for Life, which was published in French, German and Spanish in 1994 (the summary was published in over a dozen other languages of the region). This collaboration led to a new collaborative network with the active involvement of Commission members in Europe.

Other regions

Other regions, such as North Africa and the Middle East region and the North Eurasia region, prepared action plans as directed at the Caracas Congress. Their implementation was supported by governments as well as national and international NGOs. The plans spurred action by these groups and by WCPA members and raised awareness of the importance of protected areas to sustainable development. IUCN’s Pedro Rosabal notes also that WCPA has led the Union’s work in Antarctica and the Arctic for more than 20 years, and has produced a number of technical reports on priorities for conservation in those regions.



Ancient Juniper, Nyika National Park, Malawi © Nigel Dudley

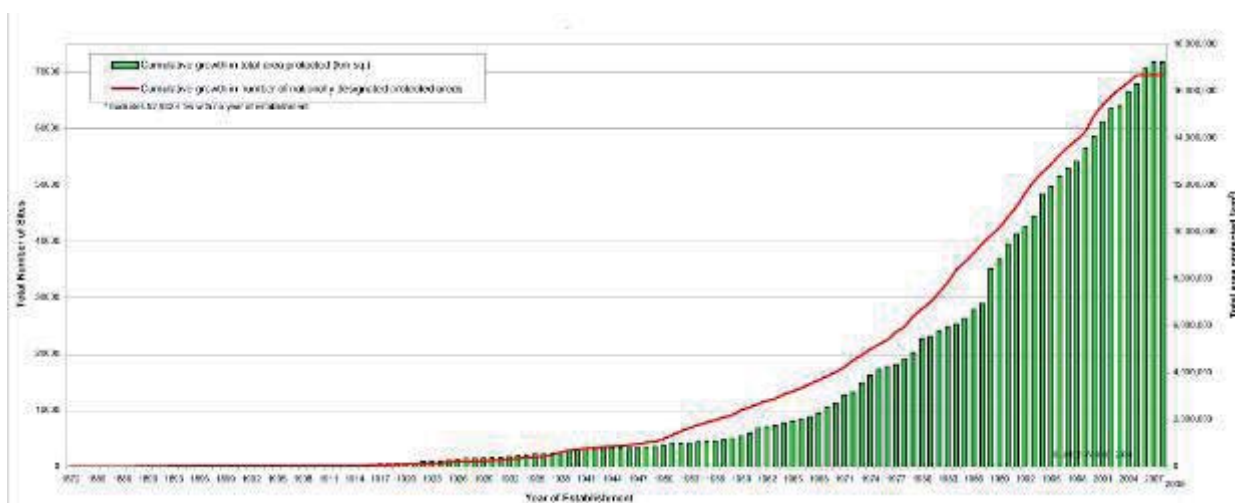
D. Regional networks of parks people

Following the Bali Congress in 1982, WCPA initiated an effort to ensure that membership covered all biogeographic realms. The Commission invited contact with its 258 members by organizing meetings in Argentina, India, Niger, Western Samoa and Zimbabwe.

Through the mid-1990's, WCPA actively worked to strengthen regional networking base. IUCN as a whole was growing very quickly at this time, and the Commission took steps to expand membership by building contacts through regional networks. A number of Regional Vice-Chairs were appointed, who in turn created regional steering committees. The aim was to expand influence, increase participation in events, and draw on large reservoirs of untapped knowledge, expertise and talent in the field of protected areas. The Commission made an effort to engage new members through mailings and meetings and more, reaching out to directors of major parks systems and leading academics within each region. As a result, membership expanded from 400 members in 1994 to 1400 members by 2000. Servicing this large membership placed a burden on IUCN staff but was facilitated by the vastly improved communications offered by the Internet.

E. Working at the national level

Growth in Nationally Designated Protected Areas (1872-2008)



This chart shows cumulative growth in total number of sites and total area protected (km²), both marine and terrestrial, from 1872 to 2008. Source: World Database on Protected Areas, a joint venture of UNEP and IUCN with UNEP WCMC, January 2009

The successful development of regional-level action plans for protected areas promoted the leadership role of IUCN and WCPA. Soon a number of governments requested the Commission's support at the national level. In 1997, for example, the Government of Colombia approached IUCN seeking advice regarding its national system of protected areas. Regional WCPA experts assisted in the system's review and enhancement.

In Argentina, Brazil and Russia, WCPA members have provided technical guidance on protected areas planning and on the implementation of the World Heritage Convention. More recently, Kenya, Madagascar and Tanzania have welcomed advice from WCPA members on the application of the IUCN System of Protected Areas Management Categories. Also, WCPA members have been working in partnership with governmental institutions and NGOs to carry out management effectiveness assessments in Costa Rica, Venezuela, Ecuador, Finland, Honduras, Tanzania and Venezuela.

V. Setting standards, improving data, developing categories

The process of producing standard nomenclature, categories, objectives and criteria for protected areas is about creating a common language so that all engaged in protected areas work can communicate better. Over the years, the Commission has developed a system for categorizing protected areas and capturing facts and figures about protected areas. The results have been published in the form of data sheets on individual protected areas, the United Nations List of Protected Areas, and increasingly detailed guidance on how to use the categories system. Harold Eidsvik notes the need to keep pace with new approaches: “One hundred years ago the decision-making process was different. We have many new tools related to biodiversity, gap analysis, systems planning, management categories and more. Change has been a part of the Commission since day one”.

A. The world's first list of parks

The United Nations Secretary-General asked IUCN to organize the preparation and publication of a United Nations list of national parks and equivalent reserves, following the adoption of Resolution 246 by the UN Economic and Social Council. The Council recognized that “national parks and equivalent reserves are important factors in the wise use of natural resources”.

Hal Coolidge, then Commission Chair, played a key role in securing this assignment, and WCPA took the lead in compiling the list. Work began on the world's first comprehensive list of parks around the globe. This major activity set the stage for years to come. The list lent early credibility to the work of the Commission and made it known to park organizations in many countries. Subsequently, the Commission helped IUCN to produce numerous editions of the United Nations List of National Parks and Equivalent Reserves, now the United Nations List of Protected Areas, working with what is now the United Nations Environment Programme's World Conservation Monitoring Centre (UNEP–WCMC).

B. Protected Areas Category System

Leadership by the Commission is behind the success of a system used in many countries to manage protected areas by assigning categories. “Many different terms are used at the national level to describe protected areas. For example, there are about 50 used in Australia alone. At the international level, there's been a great debate that continues to the present,” Adrian Phillips explains. The process of defining ‘categories’ has been challenging from the outset.

In 1975, WCPA decided to tackle the challenge of developing a categories system for protected areas. Kenton Miller led the work as Chair of the Commission's committee on criteria and nomenclature, with funding from the Rockefeller Foundation. Previously, Kenton had developed a matrix in Costa Rica, Cuba and Chile that illustrates how to classify protected areas by the purpose for which



Women from the Uros people on their reed islands on Lake Titicaca IUCN Photo Library © Sarah Johnson

they were being managed. With that matrix as its starting point, the committee presented a discussion paper in August 1978. At the time, there were at least 100 names given to protected areas types and “we cooked it all down to a 10-category system,” Kenton recalls. This was the original 10-category system of 1978.

The Commission established a task force to consider updating the categories system in 1984. Led by WCPA Chair Hal Eidsvik, it addressed concerns about the 1978 system in addition to subsequent IUCN General Assembly resolutions on topics such as wilderness areas, indigenous peoples, and protected landscapes and seascapes. After extensive consultation, the task force advised in 1990 that the system be changed and in 1992 a new six-category system was agreed to by the Fourth World Parks Congress in Caracas, Venezuela. It retained the first five categories of the 1978 system, plus a new category to recognize places designated for the sustainable use of natural resources.

The IUCN General Assembly approved the new system in 1994, commended it to governments and asked the Commission to help explain it. Guidelines were published, with an introduction by WCPA Chair Bing Lucas. “These guidelines have a special significance as they are intended for everyone involved in protected areas, providing a common language by which managers, planners, researchers, politicians and citizens groups in all countries can exchange information and views,” he wrote.



Lushan National Park, China
IUCN Photo Library © Jim Thorsell

IUCN and WCPA have actively promoted the use of the categories system. Workshops, expert advice and additional publications have been offered at the local, national, regional and global levels. The categories have served as the cornerstone of the WCPA position statement on mining and protected areas, and they were used in compiling the 1997 and 2003 versions of the United Nations List of Protected Areas. In 2004, the Seventh Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) endorsed the category system. David Sheppard, former head of the IUCN Programme on Protected Areas, notes the wide application of the guidance: “The categories system is a tool for improving the management of protected areas, and it’s a key product for IUCN through WCPA. As a tool, this is not binding but it’s useful. It’s being picked up and applied by the environmental agencies of many countries to use in their policies and frameworks for protected areas.”

After a decade of use, WCPA evaluated the effectiveness of the categories system through a research project with Cardiff University and other partners. The evaluation was reviewed at the Durban World Parks Congress in 2003, and its results were published in the 2004 report “Speaking a Common Language”. The six categories were confirmed by the 2004 IUCN World Conservation Congress in Bangkok, Thailand. Clearly, however, there was a need for new and better guidance on how to use the system. So, building on this research, WCPA set up a categories task force to undertake a wide-ranging review of the 1994 guidelines, including a high-level meeting in 2007 in Almeria, Spain. The four-year review process culminated in a revised version of the guidelines, published in time for the 2008 IUCN World Conservation Congress in Barcelona, Spain.

While the six categories are retained, a new definition of a protected area is given, along with more detailed explanations of each category, and advice on how to use the system as a whole. This will make it easier to compare protected areas, support countries in setting protected area objectives, and measure the effectiveness of protected areas. Significantly, the new system 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.

C. Data collection and management

IUCN published its first “World Directory of National Parks” in 1975. It contained loose-leaf pages with comprehensive data on each national park. Data sheets were an early Commission product. The directory was conceived as a publication to complement the United Nations List of National Parks with more comprehensive data.

The computerization of records in 1981 enabled the Commission’s data collection and management to be more effective and efficient. IUCN established the Protected Areas Data Unit (PADU) to process information on national parks and major protected areas. Data on protected areas was collected in Africa, Asia, the Neotropical region and Oceania, among others. It was directed to PADU for review, and then published in data sheets. A number of published editions of the UN List of Protected Areas were issued, notably in 1993, 1997 and 2003. Data sheets and the UN List were merged into a single protected areas database in the 1980s, which became accessible online in 1994.

In 2008, the World Database on Protected Areas (WDPA) was re-launched online following a complete redevelopment of the database and the incorporation of maps and visualization tools. It is the most comprehensive global data set on marine and terrestrial protected areas available, providing information on more than 120,000 national and international protected areas. Increasingly, the WDPA also holds information on private, community and co-managed reserves. In addition to use by protected areas professionals, it is an important resource for scientists, managers and policymakers for tracking progress towards the United Nations Millennium Development Goals. The WDPA is a joint project of UNEP and IUCN, produced by the UNEP World Conservation Monitoring Centre (UNEP–WCMC) and the IUCN World Commission on Protected Areas, working with governments and NGOs.



Kaziranga National Park, Assam, India © Sue Stolton

VI. Promoting effective management

The management of protected areas emerged as a priority issue for WCPA in the 1980's. It has since become even clearer that the future of protected areas depends upon a wider understanding of how to assess, record and measure and—above all—improve the effectiveness of their management. “About 12 percent of the earth's surface is protected on paper,” David Sheppard notes, “but what's actually happening on the ground?”

Merely to create protected areas is never enough, as Kenton Miller explains: “Put a fence around it and keep the people out. That's the old view of parks and protected areas. Today we are moving forward into more complicated questions of how to manage nature. We must actively manage what we've got, either as finite islands or, if possible, try to link and connect them.” He offers an anecdote about the status of a particular park, from a conversation with Jean-Paul Harroy: “Harroy said, ‘But look there are cattle.’ I replied, ‘Yes, but there are fewer than there were last year.’ Creating a national park is a process. You never arrive at an end point; you are constantly moving towards a goal.”

A number of new issues and new forces are at work. Conservation science demonstrates that many protected areas are too small to do the job asked of them. In many countries, power and responsibility are being devolved from the centre, and with it power and responsibility for protected areas. Growing recognition of the rights of indigenous peoples is leading to a new understanding of the relationship between such groups and protected areas. And the view of what the task of protected area management entails has been affected by the management approaches of the corporate sector. All in all, it is now a far more complex world in which to try to run protected areas, and the nature of their management has to reflect this. WCPA has developed initiatives to lead the development of management approaches that reflect this new reality.

A. Sharing information to build capacity

Since its early days, the Commission has had an active publication programme, adding to and disseminating knowledge about protected areas. As well congress reports, the UN List and others already mentioned, there have been numerous technical and advisory publications that encourage best practice.

The Commission launched “Parks Magazine” in 1976 as an international journal. Jack Nicol, then Chair of the Commission, initiated the magazine with support from Parks Canada, and the United States National Parks Service and UNESCO. Its editors included Bob Standish and Jean Packard. After a period of financial difficulties, “Parks” was revived in 1985, and since the mid-1990s has been produced regularly, focusing on a theme of importance to the protected areas world. “Parks” is edited by Paul Goriup of the Nature Bureau Limited, UK, and individual volume editors are selected in light of their knowledge of the chosen topic.

In 1983, Jim Thorsell re-started the Commission's newsletter which was produced by IUCN and WCPA until 2007 in cooperation with the Nature Bureau Limited in the United Kingdom and since then has been produced and distributed electronically from the IUCN Programme on Protected Areas in Gland.

In 1998, the Commission published the first in an ongoing reference series, its widely-recognized “Best Practice Guidelines”.



The project was initiated by WCPA Chair Adrian Phillips. Drawing on the Commission's expertise, each volume addressed topical issues facing protected areas, and helped make the Commission an authoritative voice on protected areas management. An agreement negotiated between the University of Cardiff, UK, and IUCN has supported the task forces, individuals and working groups who developed the individual guidelines. Adrian edited numbers 1 to 12. In 2004, he handed over the reins to WCPA member Peter Valentine and the academic lead passed to the James Cook University in Australia (see box).

WCPA and the IUCN Programme on Protected Areas embraced the Internet with the launch of the Protected Areas Learning Network (PALNet). PALNet is an online knowledge-sharing platform for people working in protected areas, such as field workers, scientists and managers. PALNet is a tool that encourages discussions on protected area policies, strategies and best practices.

B. Training for professional development

Training schools for protected area field staff and managers were established with international funding and Commission support in Mweka in English-speaking Tanzania, and also in Garoua in French-speaking Cameroon. Later similar institutions were developed elsewhere in the world. All were supported by WCPA and many individuals who worked at these training centres played a key role in the Commission's work. One of the most successful international training opportunities in the field of protected areas was the International Seminar on National Parks and Equivalent Reserves, which started in the mid-1960's and ran annually through the 1980's. Hundreds of international parks professionals participated in the seminar, including many of the most influential people in the Commission's history.

C. Assessing the management of protected areas

Declaring an area 'protected' is one step; good management to ensure this protection is another. WCPA set out in the mid-1990s to help to provide managers of protected areas with tools and methods to assess and improve the effectiveness of their management, as called for at the 1992 World Parks Congress. A global management effectiveness indicator would provide a big-picture look at how well protected areas were being managed around the world. By the time of the IUCN World Conservation Congress in 2000, a WCPA Task Force led by WCPA member Marc Hockings had developed and pilot-tested a best practice guideline on management effectiveness evaluation. A second edition was published in 2006, "Evaluating Effectiveness: A framework for assessing management effectiveness of protected areas."

The issue of management effectiveness has been picked up by many national governments, NGOs and international conventions such as the Convention on Biological Diversity and World Heritage. The CBD Programme of Work on Protected Areas has defined goals and targets on management effectiveness evaluation. The Global Environmental Facility (GEF) and World Bank have adopted one of the assessment systems developed from the WCPA Framework as a standard tool for all protected areas projects. A global study by WCPA, UNEP-WCMC and the University of Queensland has identified evaluations of management effectiveness in over 100 countries and in more than 7,000 protected areas.

Best Practice Guidelines: A global reference series produced by WCPA

- ▲ National System Planning for Protected Areas
- ▲ Economic Value of Protected Areas
- ▲ Guidelines for Marine Protected Areas
- ▲ Indigenous and Traditional Peoples and Protected Areas
- ▲ Financing Protected Areas
- ▲ Evaluating Effectiveness: A Framework for assessing the management of protected areas
- ▲ Transboundary Protected Areas for Peace and Cooperation
- ▲ Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas
- ▲ Management Guidelines for IUCN Category V Protected Areas
- ▲ Guidelines for Management Planning for Protected Areas
- ▲ Indigenous and Local Communities and Protected Areas towards Equity and Enhanced Conservation
- ▲ Forests and Protected Area Guidance on the use of the IUCN Protected Area Management Categories
- ▲ Sustainable Financing of Protected Areas
- ▲ Evaluating Effectiveness: A framework for assessing management effectiveness of protected areas (2nd Edition)
- ▲ Identification and Gap Analysis of Key Biodiversity Areas: Targets for comprehensive protected area systems
- ▲ Sacred Natural Sites - Guidelines for protected area managers

VII. WCPA Membership

WCPA is about ideas—setting standards, pushing concepts around, and influencing meetings. All efforts are meant to impact on the ground. All members are volunteers.

WCPA membership is by invitation, on the basis of individual experience in relation to protected areas as well as a willingness to assist in a voluntary capacity with the work of WCPA. In general, five types of people are members of the Commission:

- ▲ managers of protected areas, typically senior officials of protected areas agencies, but also field practitioners;
- ▲ experts in relation to the fields of WCPA interests;
- ▲ academic specialists in areas relating to protected areas, resource economics, biogeography wildlife management, marine conservation and other related fields;
- ▲ officials from relevant non-government organizations involved with protected areas;
- ▲ ex-officio members from key partner organizations.

“We’ve seen a big jump in the number of members, and also in diversity,” says David Sheppard, who has worked with four chairs of the Commission. “Membership has changed from senior people in national parks and protected areas agencies. Since the 1990s, the Commission has expanded to include local community representatives involved in protected areas, academics and young people.”

Membership

1958	15 original members
1972	29 members
1975	100 members
1982	400 members
1996	800 members
2004	1,500 members
2009	1,200 members from 140 countries

If interested in becoming involved in protected areas, send an email to wcpa@iucn.org. Also consider contacting the nearest WCPA Regional Vice-Chair. A contact list is available at the WCPA Steering Committee page on the IUCN WCPA website: www.iucn.org/wcpa