Introduction

The IUCN WCPA Mountains (*1) Specialist Group (MtnsSG) deals with mountainous protected areas that cover 17% of the terrestrial area of Earth (outside of Antarctica) and potentially represent up to 88% of the Earth’s ecoregions. These are special protected areas given the frequency of Key Biodiversity Areas in mountains; their importance for biodiversity conservation; the significance of their ecosystem services; their significance to people and their cultures; and, importantly, their fragility. The Mountains Specialist Group includes over 400 WCPA members that include protected area managers, mountain specialists, researchers, recreation groups and others committed to the conservation and protection of mountain protected areas. For 25 years, the Specialist Group has most effectively disseminated information about the very latest trends in mountain protected area management; facilitated and encouraged the Mountains network to meet and work together; encouraged the establishment of new protected areas in mountain environments and generated best practice guidance for IUCN WCPA.

Background


Mountain areas cover 26.5% of the world’s total land surface and they are especially important for their water provision, air purification, agricultural diversity, minimisation of natural hazards, supply of natural resources, cultural diversity, leisure, landscape and spiritual values, income sources for local populations, research and early warning systems and Biodiversity. Mountain areas hold a vast variety of life forms due to their local breadth of physical conditions related to altitude and slope. They include astonishing biodiversity in terms of number of taxa and endemcity and make up half of the world’s biodiversity hotspots. Mountains occur in 88% of the World’s 821 terrestrial ecoregions. In 2009, mountain protected areas occupied 16.9% of the global mountain area outside of Antarctica and this represented 32.4% of the extent of the world’s terrestrial protected area network outside of Antarctica. Of the world’s 237 countries, 197 included some mountains, and on average, 19% of these country’s mountains were protected. This is a good average figure, but protection of mountains is largely deficient (less than 17%) when considered at country, biogeographic realm, biome and ecoregion scales. In 2011, the key Biodiversity areas, Important Bird Areas and Alliance for Zero Extinction areas were inadequately protected in mountain areas. Poor protection of mountains at the site and ecoregion scale is of concern given their importance for biodiversity, the other ecosystem services they provide and their vulnerability to global change.

The rich cultural diversity of mountains is well known. Isolation by rugged topographic barriers is responsible for some of this and remoteness has kept many cultures relatively intact. Many mountains are sacred or of great cultural significance requiring sensitive management and total involvement of local people in planning, decision making and interpretation.

The special importance of mountain protected areas, their biodiversity and special cultural heritage is a particular focus of the WCPA Mountains Specialist Group.

The Mountains Specialist Group’s purpose is to facilitate the enhanced conservation, management and protection of mountain protected areas and their values in one of the Earth’s important biomes.

The principal functions of the Specialist Group are:

1. To foster WCPA membership and active participation in the IUCN WCPA Mountain Protected Area Specialist Group for the effective management of mountain protected areas through the sharing of knowledge, skills and expertise and collaborative partnerships and action;

2. To facilitate the establishment of new mountain protected areas in Key Biodiversity Areas and other significant mountain areas;

3. To communicate the biodiversity conservation importance of mountains and mountain protected areas and their natural values;

4. To disseminate information about the effective management of mountain protected areas;

5. To promote global awareness of the importance of mountain protected areas and their role in helping to conserve biodiversity and cultural diversity in an environment of climate change;

6. To co-operatively facilitate with the WCPA Connectivity Conservation Specialist Group, as appropriate, the development of large scale connectivity conservation areas along mountain chains of Earth and from coast to mountain peaks;

7. To facilitate effective protected area management for the Outstanding Universal Values for inscribed mountain World Heritage Properties of the World (in partnership with the WCPA World Heritage Specialist Group);

8. To facilitate transboundary protected area management (in partnership with the WCPA Transboundary Specialist Group) in mountains given the high frequency of international boundaries along the crest of mountain ranges;

9. To work closely with the WCPA Geoheritage Specialist Group in response to the special technical and diagnostic needs of mountain areas for protected area management including matters such as karst management, volcanicity, earthquakes, glacial meltwater dam bursts and vegetation linked to rare geological rock types such as serpentine;

10. To facilitate key partnerships and active collaboration (as appropriate) with organisations working in Mountains such as the UN FAO, the Mountain Partnership and the Mountains research Institute as a basis for enhanced biodiversity conservation and promoting the importance of mountain protected areas; and

11. To facilitate collaboration and networking with researchers working in mountain protected areas as a basis for improving the management of these areas.
**Message from Sydney**

The WCPA Mountains Specialist Group activities have been integrated with IUCN’s forward programmes and priorities.

**IUCN PROGRAMME AREA – VALUING AND CONSERVING BIODIVERSITY**

**Conserving nature:**

*Objective:* To facilitate the effective management of mountain protected areas.

*Objective:* To facilitate the establishment new mountain protected areas with special reference to protecting Key Biodiversity Areas of Earth.

**Developing Capacity**

*Objective:* To facilitate the development of information materials that facilitate the improved management of mountain protected areas.

*Objective:* To facilitate the organisation of WCPA sponsored forums, events, conferences, launches and other activities that promote mountain protected areas and their effective management.

**Priority Area 3: Protected Areas – Achieving Quality**

*Objective:* To facilitate the evaluation of mountain protected areas relative to biodiversity conservation outcomes and management effectiveness.

**IUCN PROGRAMME AREA – GOVERNING NATURES USE AND SHARING ITS BENEFITS EQUITABLY**

**Priority Area 4: Protected Areas - Respecting People**

*Objective:* To help facilitate the active involvement of people in the stewardship and management of mountain protected areas including managing for cultural and spiritual values.

**IUCN PROGRAMME AREA – DEPLOYING NATURE-BASED SOLUTIONS TO GLOBAL CHALLENGES**

**Priority Area 5: Protected Areas – Offering Solutions**

*Objective:* To facilitate the establishment of a strategic connectivity conservation areas that interconnect mountain protected areas and that especially contribute to biodiversity conservation for Key Biodiversity Areas and World Heritage Properties.

**IUCN WCPA Mountains Specialist Group**

**ACTIONS**

1. In collaboration with UNEP WCMC and other WCPA technical experts, prepare a specialist report that identifies priority biodiversity conservation mountain areas (with special emphasis on Key Biodiversity Areas) that are currently unprotected.

2. Select priority countries for WCPA MtnsSG facilitation action to encourage the establishment of new mountain protected areas.

3. Determine actions around challenges of the 21st Century by hosting events such as workshops and knowledge cafes on Mountain Protected Areas at relevant meetings and congresses.
4. In collaboration with UNEP WCMC and other WCPA technical experts, prepare a specialist report that identifies priority biodiversity conservation mountain areas (with special emphasis on Key Biodiversity Areas) that are currently unprotected.

5. Select priority countries for WCPA MtnsSG facilitation action to encourage the establishment of new mountain protected areas.

6. Determine actions around challenges of the 21st Century by hosting events such as workshops and knowledge cafes on Mountain Protected Areas at relevant meetings and congresses.

7. Manage and grow the MtnsSG network. Promote participation and interactive involvement of the group.

8. Revitalise and upgrade the WCPA MtnsSG website.

9. Communicate the highest standards of mountain protected area management and the very latest news about what is happening in mountain protected areas globally.

10. Identify exemplars of best practice mountain protected area management in collaboration with IUCN WCPA’s Green List programme and promote their achievements.

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**IUCN WCPA Mountains Specialist Group: Governance**

**Chairperson**
Peter Jacobs

**MtnsSG Executive**
Gill Anderson, Linda McMillan, Patrizia Rossi, Fausto Sarmiento, Mike Tollefson,

**MtnsSG Update Editor**
Gill Anderson

**MtnsSG Web Site Manager**
Linda McMillan

**Senior Advisors**
Larry Hamilton, Graeme Worboys

**MtnsSG**
400+ WCPA Members in 60+ Countries