

**An International Legal Regime for Protected Areas**

**Section 3: *Protected Areas and Certification***

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## International Environmental Governance

### Section 3: Certification and Protected Areas

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Current discussions about the certification of protected areas have raised considerable debate and a fair amount of resistance within the protected area community. Yet certification schemes are already being used in protected areas and are likely to increase in the future. This section looks at why certification has been raised as an option, at different approaches to certification (including with respect to both type of certification and to what is certified) and at some of the pros and cons of any certification scheme. It ends with some proposals for how the issue might be progressed over the next few years.

#### **Introduction: why protected area effectiveness has become an issue**

Following the rush to create protected areas during the latter part of the twentieth century, there is now increasing recognition of the importance of managing and maintaining such areas in perpetuity. Although governments and non-governmental conservation organisations continue to devote a major part of their attention to the issue of creating new protected areas and the “completion” of protected area networks, the question of management effectiveness is already central to the debate about protected areas, and is now a major theme for the IUCN World Commission on Protected Areas (WCPA).

The whole concept of protected areas is based on the assumption that protection continues in perpetuity. In part, development of interest in management effectiveness has come through recognition that this is not always happening in practice and of the extent to which many protected areas are protected in name only. A number of reports stretching back almost twenty years have identified *threats* to particular protected areas or to protected areas in a specific geographical location<sup>1</sup>. Two different issues have been recognised: first the existence of protected areas that have been announced by governments but not yet implemented – so-called *paper parks* – and second the fact that even when protected areas are managed, the pressures facing them in some situations are so intense that they continue to lose some of their values.

The issue of paper parks, although serious, is in many cases a transitional problem; the rate of protected area creation may have temporarily outstripped the capacity of a particular government to implement protection, leaving a gap before protection is fully implemented in fact as well as in theory. Several commentators have pointed out that even “paper protection” often stops a proportion of pressures on natural systems, for example by deterring companies from seeking logging permits or starting mining operations: indeed the announcement by a government that an area will be protected has practical implications even before the legal process of protection is

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<sup>1</sup> See for example: The Commission on National Parks and Protected Areas (1984): *Threatened Protected Areas of the World*, IUCN, Gland; Machlis, Gary E and David L Tichnell (1985); *The State of the World's Parks: International Assessment for Resource Management, Policy and Research*, Westview Press; MacKinnon, John and Kathy MacKinnon (1986); *Review of the Protected Areas System of the Indo-Malayan Realm*, IUCN, Gland; MacKinnon, John and Kathy MacKinnon (1986); *Review of the Protected Areas System of the Afro-Tropical Realm*, IUCN, Gland; Thorsell, Jim (1990); *The IUCN Register of Threatened Protected Areas of the World*, IUCN, Gland; McNeely, Jeff, Jerry Harrison and P Dingwall [editors] (1994): *Protecting Nature – Regional Reviews of Protected Areas*, IUCN, Gland; Thorsell, Jim and Todd Sigaty (1997) *A Global Overview of Forest Protected Areas on the World Heritage List*, IUCN, Gland;

underway. Situations where management is insufficient to ensure protection are more serious because this problem is often more difficult to address. Threats range from immediate pressures such as poaching or encroachment to others that are beyond the control of individual managers, such as the impacts on long-range pollution: for example many of the protected areas in Europe receive levels of air pollution in excess of the critical loads of many plant species<sup>2</sup>, and there are both immediate and underlying causes of such problems. Ministries of Environment, or their equivalents, are often politically weak within government structures and funding for conservation is usually in short supply. New emphasis on poverty alleviation amongst many in the donor community has further reduced the funds available for protection and the increasing number of protected areas being created means that available resources are spread more thinly. As economic and social pressures mount, even governments with a strong commitment to conservation may find it difficult to maintain good management in their protected areas.

### **Identification of threats – an increasingly standardised approach**

A review published in 2000 concluded that few protected areas were fully secure and that although there were regional differences in degree of threat (with for example African protected areas being particularly at risk), there were stresses in the richest countries as well. Furthermore, many protected areas are currently only protected by their isolation and will come under increasing pressure as the development frontier progresses further into “wilderness” areas<sup>3</sup>. Recognition of these problems led, amongst other reactions, to a call for better information about the status of and threats to protected areas.

Although identification of protected areas under threat started on an ad hoc basis, with studies by academics and advocacy groups and with surveys carried out under the auspices of conservation NGOs, more standardised approaches were soon introduced. Two institutions have led the way: the UNESCO World Heritage Convention through its *World Heritage in Danger* listing and the Ramsar Convention by highlighting Ramsar-listed sites under threat in the so-called *Montreux List*.

World Heritage sites are nominated by countries and approved by the UNESCO World Heritage Committee. They cover both cultural sites such as cities and monuments and an increasing number of natural sites. Natural World Heritage Sites can be listed under a number of criteria, such as their importance to biodiversity, and include both existing protected areas and large landscapes with smaller protected areas contained within them. The fact that governments themselves apply for World Heritage listing implies a commitment to their conservation and World Heritage status is usually backed up by laws within a country. 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. However, criteria for inclusion remain fairly vague; some countries ask for protected areas to be added to gain political support for improvement while in others enormous efforts are made to avoid a listing. The most recent example of the latter reaction was with respect to the issue of uranium mining in an area contained within but excised from Kakadu National Park in Australia. The current listing is highly political and probably not even-handed. In recognition of this the Convention also requires periodic reporting on the status of sites by region and the World Heritage Committee is moving to a more structured and rigorous method of regional reporting through development of a monitoring system in cooperation with the United Nations Foundation.

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<sup>2</sup> Tickle, A with M Fergusson and G Drucker (1995); *Acid Rain and Nature Conservation in Europe: A preliminary study of protected areas at risk from acidification*, WWF International, Gland

<sup>3</sup> Carey, Christine, Nigel Dudley and Sue Stolton (2000); *Squandering Paradise? The Importance and Vulnerability of the World's Protected Areas*, WWF International, Gland

In a similar development, 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. This is a much longer list and probably as a result carries less political weight: as of February 1999 for example, 380 sites were listed on the Montreux Record; the commonest criteria were drainage, pollution and eutrophication<sup>4</sup>.

There have also been some NGO efforts to list threats. For example, in the USA the National Parks Conservation Association publishes an annual list of the ten most threatened parks and the Wilderness Society publishes a report on fifteen most endangered wildlands, many of which are protected areas.

All of these approaches have their limitations. Criteria for inclusion usually remain fairly vague and hard to use across national boundaries and danger lists also have the disadvantage of only stressing the negative rather than reflecting or rewarding good performance.

### **The issue of management effectiveness**

At the same time, protected area managers were recognising the complexity of management, particularly with respect to local communities, growing calls for greater transparency and participation in management and a collection of immediate and underlying pressures. They were therefore looking for information on status and threats from a slightly different perspective – as information for agreeing adaptive management.

One result was an increasing emphasis on *management effectiveness*, including development of methodologies for assessment and a range of existing assessment methods have now been developed by a range of institutions, for example:

- Queensland National Park Service, Australia<sup>5</sup>
- Indian Institute for Public Administration<sup>6</sup>
- The Nature Conservancy<sup>7</sup>
- Conservation International<sup>8</sup>
- CATIE University with WWF in Central America<sup>9</sup>
- WWF Brazil<sup>10</sup>
- WWF International<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Stone, D and B Gujja (1999); *The Ramsar Convention: A Reflection on 27 years*, WWF International, Gland

<sup>5</sup> Hockings, Marc and Rod Hobson (1999 draft); *Fraser Island World Heritage Area: Monitoring and Management Effectiveness Project Report*, The University of Queensland, Brisbane

<sup>6</sup> Singh, Shekhar (2000); Assessing management effectiveness of national parks in India, *Parks* 9 (2), 34-49; and Kothari, A., Pande, P., Singh, S. and Variava, D. 1989. *Management of National Parks and Sanctuaries in India, A Status Report*, Environmental Studies Division, Indian Institute of Public Administration, New Delhi., India

<sup>7</sup> Brandon, Katrina, Kent H Redford and Steven E Sanderson [editors] (1998); *Parks in Peril: People, politics and protected areas*, Island Press, Washington DC and Covelo California

<sup>8</sup> Bruner, Aaron G, Raymond E Gullison, Richard E Rice and Gustavo A B da Fonseca (2001); Effectiveness of parks in protecting tropical biodiversity, *Science* 291, 125-128

<sup>9</sup> Cifuentes, Miguel A, Arturo Izurieta V and Helder Henrique De Faria (1999); *Medición de la Efectividad del Manejo de Areas Protegidas*, Forest Innovations Project, WWF, IUCN and GTZ, Turrialba, Costa Rica

<sup>10</sup> See for example Ferreira, Leandro V, Rosa M. Lemos de Sá, Robert Buschbacher, Garo Batmanian, Nurit R. Bensusan and Kátia Lemos Costa [edited by] Ana Claudia Barbosa and Ulisses Lacava (1999); *Protected Areas or Endangered Spaces? WWF Report on the Degree of Implementation and the Vulnerability of Brazilian Federal Conservation Areas*, WWF Brazil, Brasilia (available in English and Portuguese)

The numerous different attempts at assessment were reviewed in 2000<sup>12</sup>; more have emerged since then and more experience has been built up with the existing approaches. A review of around twenty approaches took place in Melbourne, Australia in February 2003, in preparation for the V IUCN World Parks Congress. To develop some coherence and standards for such assessments, WCPA developed technical guidance on assessment. It proposed that all assessments should as much as possible include consideration of the full elements in the management cycle including: (1) **context** (importance, threats); (2) **planning** (design and planning); (3) **inputs** (resources needed); (4) **process** (how management is conducted); (5) **outputs** (meeting targets); and (6) **outcomes** (meeting overall objectives)<sup>13</sup>. Significantly, WCPA stressed the need to look beyond management itself to whether management was working – such “outcome” assessments are inevitably more difficult to perform. This framework has since has been amplified by development of a number of different assessment “toolkits”, ranging from rapid site-level scorecards to detailed assessment systems that require research, stakeholder meetings and the development of monitoring systems. The key elements in the WCPA framework are given in Table 1 below.

Elements of evaluation	Context	Planning	Input	Process	Output	Outcome
<b>Explanation</b>	<b>Where are we now?</b>	<b>Where do we want to be?</b>	<b>What do we need?</b>	<b>How do we go about it?</b>	<b>What were the results?</b>	<b>What did we achieve?</b>
What is being assessed	Importance, threats and policy environment	Protected area design and planning	Resources needed to carry out management	The way in which management is conducted.	The quantity of achievement	The quality of achievement
<b>Criteria that are assessed</b>	Significance Threats Vulnerability	Legislation and policy Site and system design	Resources of agency Resources of site	Suitability of management processes	Results of management actions Services and products	Impacts: effects of management in relation to objectives
<b>Focus of evaluation</b>	Status	Management planning	Partners	Efficiency	Effectiveness	Effectiveness Appropriateness

**Table 1: WCPA framework for assessing management effectiveness**

To date, such assessments have been voluntary. They have usually been implemented on a site-by-site basis; one exception to this approach is the Rapid Assessment system developed by WWF, which addresses system-wide assessments and has been implemented by a number of countries and regions including Bhutan and the Cape Province of South Africa<sup>14</sup>.

There are clear limitations to the voluntary approach, in terms of accuracy, extent of cover, the degree in which different stakeholders groups get to participate and to voice their opinions, and comparability between sites. This has led to calls for some more standardised way of reporting management effectiveness and of providing some assurance of a **guarantee of good**

<sup>11</sup> See for example Ervin, Jamison (2003); *A Rapid Assessment of Protected Area Management* and Stolton, Sue, Marc Hockings, Nigel Dudley, Kathy MacKinnon and Tony Whitten (2003); *A Tracking Tool for Protected Area Management Effectiveness*, World Bank-WWF Alliance

<sup>12</sup> Hockings, M (2000); *Evaluating Protected Area Management: A review of systems for assessing management effectiveness of protected areas*, University of Queensland with the IUCN/WWF Forest Innovations project

<sup>13</sup> Hockings, Marc with Sue Stolton and Nigel Dudley (2000); *Evaluating Effectiveness: A framework for Assessing Management of Protected Areas*, IUCN and the University of Cardiff

<sup>14</sup> Need reference to the case studies

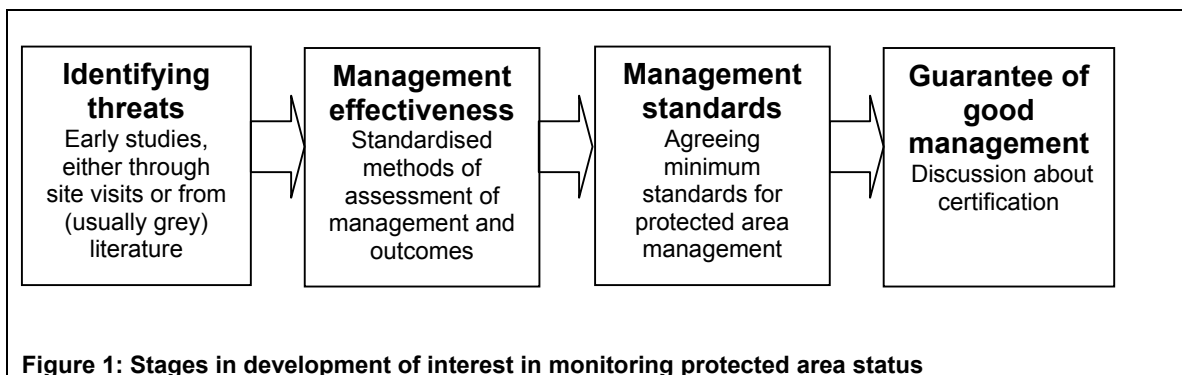
**management**, including suggestions that protected areas should be the subject of a kind of certification system.

### Identifying standards for management

However, before any kind of system of guarantee can be considered, another step is needed, to agree on what we should be aiming for; in other words what constitutes good management. While the WCPA framework identifies the issues that should be addressed by management it only gives general guidance about what standards are required: in other words it sets the criteria and indicators but not the benchmarks. Whether or not this can be achieved on a general basis, across countries and ecosystems, is a matter for debate. To test this, and to strengthen the tools for good management, 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<sup>15</sup>.

Workshops have been held in Latin America, Africa and Asia to examine different needs of managers and other stakeholders and the range of perspectives on protected areas. The standards for management, once agreed, could create a basis for other forms of 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.

We can therefore trace a development from interest in standard ways of reporting threats, through agreement on the steps needed for management effectiveness to standard-setting for what management should aim to achieve. This transition is illustrated in Figure 1 below.



It would be disingenuous to claim that this progression has been methodical or even particularly sequential: to some extent all the elements listed above are still under development. Nor is the logic joining the various stages intact, as good management alone does not guarantee that a protected area is effective. An excellently managed park can still lose values if pressures (such as poaching or encroachment) are too powerful for managers to control or if threats beyond the capacity of an individual protected area, such as pollution and climate change, undermine management efforts. Assessment of risk and protected area effectiveness therefore both need to look beyond management at the overall status of the park, as identified by the WCPA framework. (Until recently most assessment systems focused on management capacity, which is relatively

<sup>15</sup> Carabias J, J De la Maza and R Cadena (draft, 2003); Developing capacity to manage protected areas, draft chapter for a report arising from the World Parks Congress

easy to measure, and left out the trickier question of whether or not long-term biodiversity and cultural values were being maintained.)

### Different interest groups

One additional problem in considering management effectiveness is the existence of different stakeholders interested in the performance of protected areas, all with their own, sometimes opposing, viewpoints. Because of the strong emotions that protected areas create, many stakeholders feel a degree of ownership or at least user rights towards these areas of land or sea and therefore that they have a particular right to have their voices heard in any debate. Some of these will be local stakeholders; others will live a long way away and may never have visited the site itself. This means that any assessment will have to address a wide range of interests and points of view. For instance, protected area managers and authorities are sometimes, although not invariably, antipathetic towards assessment unless it is something that they control themselves; other stakeholders are often specifically calling for assessment that is outside the control of the management authority. From this it follows that different stakeholders also have different reasons for being interested in protected area assessment.

In Table 2, an attempt is made to identify some of these different groups and assign them with issues that are likely to be of particular importance: the general nature of any such assessment should be stressed.

Stakeholders	Likely key areas of interest
Protected area managers	Information to help plan adaptive management; local communication and improved relationship with neighbours
Protected area authorities	Identification of strengths and weaknesses in the protected area networks decisions with respect to funding; reporting to ministers; publicity
Governments	International reporting (e.g. to the World Heritage Convention and the Convention on Biological Diversity); information for donors; assessment of use of state funds
Local communities	A voice in management; a grievance procedure; interest in progress of areas of local significance
Donor community	Value of investments; report-back to their own governments, electorate or (for private foundations) boards of trustees
Non-governmental organisations and civil society	Accountability; information to help advocacy; reassurance that protection strategies are working
Corporations	Reassurance that controls on commercial activity are justified; interest in use of commercial donations

**Table 2: Different stakeholders interested in management effectiveness of protected areas**

### Could we certify protected areas?

In the last two decades, certification schemes have increasingly been seen as a way of ensuring good environmental management. They existed long before this in other contexts and there is for example a large worldwide business in certification of product worthiness and management efficiency.

The use of certification, on a voluntary basis, to provide environmental and social guarantees is more recent and includes for instance certification of farming through organic standards grouped under the auspices of the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM), certification of forest management through such schemes as the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) and Pan European Forest Certification Scheme (PEFC) and guarantees of good fisheries management through the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC). These examples provide for standards relating to a wide range of social and environmental issues (including for example



worker safety, relationships with local communities and ecological footprint). Other labelling schemes are far more specific, such as ones for tuna caught in ways that do not kill dolphins, or fair trade labels that address workers rights. Certification schemes have been further boosted by the requirements of ethical investment schemes, where investors are demanding assurances that their money is invested in socially and environmentally acceptable businesses.

These schemes have a rather tenuous connection to legal standards. They are voluntary and have thus far survived examination by the World Trade Organisation, although their status as potential trade barriers is occasionally raised and dolphin-friendly tuna was the subject of a long dispute. However, as claims and descriptors, certification schemes carry legal weight in many countries. For example it is illegal in European Community countries to sell food labelled as “organic” if it has not gone through an organic certification scheme approved by the EC and false claims can be prosecuted by trading standard officers. Certification therefore provides a voluntary scheme with legal backing. In most cases, commercial interest in certification is either stimulated or at least helped by a perception that certified products will give increased market access and/or product value. Certification of forest products was boosted enormously by the decision of some major European and North American retailers to give precedence to certified timber products and organic food markets increased quickly when a few major retailers started stocking organic lines.

Various commentators have suggested that certification could also provide one way of providing a guarantee of management effectiveness and minimum standards for protected areas. Others have reacted with howls of outrage, both because of the implied loss of control by management agencies and because they fear that a certification scheme would provide little value but cost a great deal of time and money.

### **What would certification mean?**

A certification scheme is a way of measuring conformity against existing criteria and standards, with assessment carried out by an independent assessor. Certification schemes can either be pass/fail or have a rating system. Certification of this sort is known as “third party” assessment to distinguish it from two other approaches:

- First party assessment – assessment by the individual or management authority concerned
- Second party assessment – assessment by interested parties
- Third party assessment – assessment by disinterested or independent parties

Examples of the other two assessments already exist for protected areas. The World Bank, Global Environmental Facility and WWF have all been using a tracking tool scorecard for managers to assess protected area management effectiveness on a regular basis<sup>16</sup>. This provides a simple means for both managers and others to chart progress towards improved management, but is clearly open to misinterpretation, bias or even outright fraud if an individual manager is either dishonest or self-deluding. The International Organisation for Standardisation (ISO) has also provided an important forum for developing international standards, although here there are greater controls in place in that any assessor (including a self-assessor) needs to have passed a test by a recognised accreditation agency: most governments have such agencies. Second party assessment, where interested parties work together to measure progress, has also occurred with more detailed assessment schemes in protected areas, for example one being developed for UNESCO World Heritage Convention Natural World Heritage Sites, where managers, staff and local stakeholders all collaborate on assessing the status of the protected area.

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<sup>16</sup> Stolton, Sue, Nigel Dudley, Marc Hockings, Kathy MacKinnon and Tony Whitten (2003); op cit

All of these approaches have their strengths and weaknesses. From the perspective of managers, first or second party assessments probably in most cases offer good enough information for the purposes of adaptive management. Third party certification offers two additional advantages: a *fresh perspective* by bringing in an outside consultant and an *independent guarantee* that assessment is fair and accurate. However, it is also costly and potentially divisive; its net value therefore depends on whether the advantages outweigh the costs. This issue will be returned to in more detail below.

### **What kind of certification?**

A related question refers to exactly what is being certified. Certification schemes do not have to apply to all operations in every protected area in a national network: in fact existing examples have generally rejected this approach. Five different approaches can be distinguished and are listed below, then discussed in more detail.

- Certification of all protected areas in a region or country
- Certification of particular management types of protected areas (e.g. private protected areas or community-managed protected areas)
- Certification of protected areas for particular purposes (e.g. tourism)
- Certification of activities that occur predominantly in protected areas (e.g. certification of ecotourism operators)
- Certification of activities that may occur in protected areas but also commonly occur outside (e.g. good forest management or organic farming)

***National systems:*** To date, there is no scheme for certifying a country's entire protected area network (yet this is often assumed to be what certification would imply, and generates most of the debate). Several countries have carried out analysis of all the protected areas in their country.

***Particular types of protected areas:*** Nor are there schemes for certifying particular types of protected areas, although here the demand is stronger. In countries where private protected area networks contribute an increasingly important proportion of a protected area network, state protection agencies and others are wrestling with the task of seeing if and how these can be reflected within networks, reported in the *UN List of Protected Areas* and reflected in other official statistics. While some private protected areas are established with a set of trust rules that make their tenure and security as strong as those of the state, others are far less firmly established and for example use can change through sale or inheritance. These latter, while providing short term benefits, are clearly not suitable for inclusion in longer term protected area networks. It has therefore been suggested that these areas might be a particular case worthy of certification (and where owners might also be willing to take the time and money needed to see certification through).

Indigenous self-declared protected areas are similar cases, where indigenous people have declared part or all of their traditional lands as protected areas. In these cases some independent assurance might release state funds for management, help in raising other forms of support and provide strong endorsement of tenure status.

***Certification for particular purposes:*** There has recently been growing interest in development of protected area certification schemes to address particular uses – predominantly at the moment tourism although there is no theoretical reason why such schemes should not look at other values such as biodiversity conservation, environmental services and so on.

In Europe for instance 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. The initiative 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<sup>17</sup> and a star rating system<sup>18</sup> and has carried out some early assessments, for example of Oulanka National Park in Finland<sup>19</sup>. The Pan Parks initiative specifically does not aim to certify all parks in a region, but to select, promote and provide guarantees for a few outstanding protected areas, which will be developed specifically with nature tourism and education in mind. The certification system is lengthy and expensive and would therefore not be suitable or practical for a whole protected area network, and would also be focused too specifically on tourism issues to be applicable everywhere.

***Certification of activities that occur predominantly in protected areas:*** This category forms a bridge between the certifying of specific activities in protected areas and other forms of certification that overlap with protected areas, by being a general environmental certification system that is likely to have particular relevance to protected areas. It also focuses mainly on tourism or ecotourism.

For example, the Green Globe system provides certification for tourism companies and operations relating to environment and sustainable development, based around the principles of *Agenda 21*, published after the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro. It has four types of standard, relating to companies, communities, international ecotourism awards and design and construction, and also endorses the World Tourism Organisation's *Code of Ethics for Tourism* and the Pacific Asia Travel Association's *Travellers' Code*. As such it can provide clear advice to protected area authorities, managers and others about the standards of tourism companies operating in and around protected areas, although will not necessarily be focused particularly on the parks themselves.

***Certification of activities that may occur in protected areas:*** The loosest link between certification and protection, although paradoxically perhaps the commonest in practice, is the use of existing certification schemes inside protected areas, particularly those with less highly protected management policies (such as those in IUCN category V and VI: protected landscapes/seascapes and extractive reserves). Certification systems are already helping to monitor the effectiveness of protected areas. Three main roles exist:

- 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)
- Certification of land uses within the buffer zones of protected areas or in the corridors of protected area networks
- Creation of additional protected areas as a result of certification

All of these roles are already being played out, particularly in Europe where the common type of landscape or seascape national parks provides an ideal site for such approaches. For instance organic farming is increasingly being adopted within Category V protected landscape areas in southern and central Europe, where traditional livelihoods take place alongside conservation. Promotional work by the Associazione Italiana Agricoltura Biologica within regional parks in

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<sup>17</sup> Kun, Z (2000); Pan Parks Verification – a discussion paper (draft), WWF, Budapest

<sup>18</sup> van de Vlasakker, J (2000); *Pan Parks Star Rating*, consultants report to WWF

<sup>19</sup> Väisänen, R and M Tapaninen (2003); case study on Oulanka National Park, Finland, prepared for the *Managing Effectively in the Face of Change: Lessons Learned* workshop, Melbourne, Victoria

Italy encouraged 113 farms within protected areas to apply for certification between 1996 and 1997<sup>20</sup>; conversion has given farmers access to new markets and organic agriculture has proven advantages over conventional farming in terms of protecting on-farm biodiversity. Similar efforts are being made in buffer zones within the MesoAmerican Biological Corridor, stretching from Mexico to Colombia. In Mediterranean Europe, the development of non-timber forest product certification under the Forest Stewardship Council is being used to encourage traditional forest management systems in cultural landscapes in and around protected areas, for example to maintain groves of walnut trees and fruits<sup>21</sup>. The Marine Stewardship Council is involved in several certification schemes within various categories of marine protected area to help maintain local fisheries.

The requirement to protect a proportion of forest in Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) certification schemes has also created additional protected areas in some countries, from set asides on commercial forests: these areas had often in effect been left out of production before but certification standardised and helped maintain this management choice<sup>22</sup>. FSC requirements were extended further into a recent guarantee by the giant Swedish company Sveaskog that 20 per cent of its forest land will be managed predominantly for biodiversity conservation.

In these cases certification offers clear advantages to managers, in giving assurances that livelihood or commercial operations within protected areas meet the best standards possible<sup>23</sup>, and has the advantage of already utilising well-recognised systems. However, such certification only covers small parts of a protected area is only likely to apply to those IUCN protected area management categories that are less intensely protected, predominantly category V and VI. There are also often poorly developed links between certifiers and protected area agencies. For example none of the forest certification schemes have specific policies about certification within protected areas, leading to confusion and sometimes to the certification of forest management in places within protected areas where the managers would generally oppose forestry – here certification could be giving a “green approval” to land use that is incompatible with wider protected area aims.

### **Arguments for and against certification**

People who argue against the whole concept of certification are avoiding the fact that it is happening already. Currently the three more specialised uses – certification of particular operations in protected areas and other certification schemes (e.g. tourism, forestry and agriculture) that spill over, predominantly or occasionally, into protected areas – are in operation in many protected areas around the world and all the signs are that they will continue and probably increase. The real debate at present is therefore whether or not there is a justification for more general application of certification to protected areas, either for particular types of protected areas or for entire systems.

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<sup>20</sup> Compagnoni, A (2000); Organic agriculture and agroecology in regional parks, in Stolton, Sue, Bernward Geier and Jeffrey A McNeely, *The Relationship Between Nature Conservation, Biodiversity and Organic Agriculture: Proceedings of an international workshop held in Vignola, Italy 1999*, IFOAM, IUCN and WWF, Tholey-Theley Germany and Gland Switzerland

<sup>21</sup> Moussoris, Y and P Regatto (1999); *Forest Harvest: Mediterranean woodlands and the importance of non-timber forest products to forest conservation*, arborvitae supplement, October 1999, WWF and IUCN, Gland, Switzerland

<sup>22</sup> Dudley, N, S Stolton and K Beland-Lindahl (2000); The role of large companies in forest protection in Sweden, in *Partnerships for Protection*, edited by S Stolton, N Dudley, B Gujja, W J Jackson, J-P Jeanrenaud, G Oviedo, P Rosabal, A Phillips and S Wells, Earthscan, London

<sup>23</sup> Stolton, Sue and Nigel Dudley (2000); The use of certification of sustainable management systems and their possible application to protected area management, in *Beyond the Trees* edited by Devendra Rana and Liz Edelman, WWF International, Gland, Switzerland

A WCPA task force has been looking at options for protected area certification and collecting reactions to these proposals. It would be fair to say that reaction from protected area agencies has been mainly, although not entirely, opposed, in some cases dramatically so. Arguments for and against have been collected and a summary is given in Table 3 below, which is an expanded form of one appearing in a recent WCPA background paper<sup>24</sup>.

<b>For certification</b>	<b>Against certification</b>
It could create an important focus on management effectiveness of protected areas, additional national pride in good protected areas and a focus for publicity and debate	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 or for regional monitoring systems such as the Ministerial Conference for the Protection of Forests in Europe	Resistance to certification amongst governments could conversely undermine their willingness to report on the CBD and other monitoring systems
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 – an independent assessor would need to be a protected area specialist and would therefore also be a source of advice regarding 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 – particularly if these are connected with powerful interests or other parts of the government	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 – this has frequently been the case even for assessments that result in no label or externally-available report
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 and without entering into the spirit of good management
Certification could well happen anyway, so the conservation movement should act now to make sure that it has a role in shaping and controlling the process	Certification could well happen anyway, so the conservation movement should ignore it for now and wait to see what develops

**Table 3: Arguments for and against certification of protected areas**

<sup>24</sup> Dudley, Nigel, Marc Hockings and Sue Stolton (2003); *Protection Assured: Guaranteeing the effective management of the world’s protected areas – a review of options*, World Commission on Protected Areas, Gland, Switzerland

Key issues relate to the incentives and costs. Critics point out that other environmental certification schemes have commercial incentives, whereas protected area certification would offer few benefits. Developing such a scheme would be expensive and existing, cheaper options might offer more – such as use of ISO standards. Certification would only appeal to those protected areas that would be likely to succeed in their application and would be avoided by paper parks or those parks that are struggling to maintain their values, thus increasing the gap between the well-funded, successful protected areas and the rest. Detractors point out that although forest certification was established mainly to help improve management in tropical forests, it has almost entirely occurred in temperate and boreal forests that were already managed fairly sustainably. Proponents argue conversely that self assessment has proven flaws and that the people who pay for protected areas – tax-payers, donors and other sponsors – have the right to see a small proportion of their investment being set aside to ensure that the rest is used wisely. Certification would give governments a set of data for reporting to institutions such as the Convention on Biological Diversity and would give a framework for improving management. All similar certification schemes have initially been resisted by those being certified, for a range of practical and emotional reasons.

### **What would certification entail?**

There is no doubt that developing a comprehensive certification scheme capable of certifying protected areas in general, would be a very large undertaking. It would involve, for example:

- ***An institutional home:*** either an existing institution such as WCPA, IUCN, ISO or UNEP, or some body set up specifically to manage protected area certification.
- ***Development of principles and standards:*** itself a time-consuming business but particularly so as it would have to work out the relationship between any certification system with existing initiatives, including WCPA's work on management effectiveness and protected area standards, ISO's standards and separate initiatives like Pan Park.
- ***Agreement on the role of the certification body:*** for example deciding whether it would be an organisation that carried out certifications itself or an accreditation agency that would provide standards and accreditation for a range of certification schemes, which are the ones who would actually send people around the world judging protected areas.
- ***Development of a management structure:*** whatever the intent, a management structure will need to be worked out, including representation of different interests on a management board, identification of protocols and guidelines, patrons, etc.
- ***Sustainable forms of funding:*** either through some way of persuading protected areas to pay for their own certification (highly unlikely) or some long-term support, perhaps through donors, governments or others.

There would also be a long-term process of developing political buy-in to the concept, including working out relationships with potentially competing interests. For example, most governments have their own accreditation procedures, and there are at least two existing international accreditation agencies, all of which might resent or oppose a “new” attempt at accreditation. Issues of mutual recognition between certification schemes and technical equivalence have hampered some other efforts at certification for environmental and social reasons; getting them mired in arcane technical debates rather than in addressing the issues they were established to tackle. The legal implications of certification would need to be addressed even for a voluntary scheme.

### **Some possible ways forward**

There currently seems to be little stomach for developing an all-singing, all-dancing certification system for any or all protected areas, even on a voluntary basis. To some extent this may be simply because the time is still too early for many protected areas, which have recently been created or are about to be created and are fully engaged in attempts to build capacity and establish goals: bringing in outside assessors might add little to their efforts at the moment. However as protected areas become more established and long-term funding needs better identified, the situation may change and many people will be watching current certification schemes, such as Pan Parks, with considerable interest.

This does not mean that certification currently has nothing more to offer protected areas in the immediate term. WCPA and IUCN in general could develop a series of initiatives to build on existing work and use certification options to improve management. Three stepping stones to a full certification scheme might be of interest (and might have value whether or not a full scheme ever emerged):

- Better coordination with existing certification efforts to ensure that they maximise benefits for protected areas.
- Use of existing expertise to ensure that assessment systems, including certification systems, reach minimum standards.
- Further investigation of certification schemes for specific types of protected areas, such as private protected areas or indigenous peoples' protected areas.

***Better coordination:*** one of the early aims of any broader certification initiative should be to make sure that existing schemes, and particularly those with only occasional links to protected areas, include specific consideration of protected area needs in their principles, standards and operating procedures. This could start with development of general guidance about protected areas for certification schemes, perhaps in the form of a simple leaflet from WCPA explaining the role of protected areas, the different categories and the implications for management. More specific guidance might be applicable for different schemes, such as previous efforts made by IFOAM to ensure that organic standards maximise biodiversity potential on farms. In the case of forest management, such guidance could include recommendations on the type of protection acceptable in forest management unit areas set aside for protection under certification standards and the circumstances in which certified forest management is and is not an acceptable component within protected areas (and possibly some additional guidance for certification within Category IV, V and VI protected areas).

***Minimum standards:*** most quality assurance schemes need a system for accrediting component certification systems: e.g. several different schemes are accredited by the Forest Stewardship Council as meeting agreed principles. The WCPA management effectiveness theme is already being asked for advice about which assessment systems meet the WCPA framework requirements and this is currently provided on an ad hoc basis. Formalising this into ***accreditation*** (or a simpler form of recognition) by agreement of minimum standards of assessment and appointment of an accreditation committee would have the immediate benefit of giving organisations, governments or agencies assurance that particular assessment schemes are adequate and the political benefit that if protected area *assessment* ever developed into protected area *certification*, WCPA would already be playing an integral role in this process.

***Certification of specific types of protected areas:*** there appears to be far more enthusiasm for exploring the possibility of some form of certification for specific types of privately-run protected areas to: (1) give guarantees that these are meeting minimum standards to be included in national protected area networks and (2) to access funding and support in the case of community or

indigenous-run protected areas. These are both cases where management authorities are actively looking for some kind of certification and where there are clear livelihood and governance implications. Developing certification or verification schemes addressing these particular areas would be a larger exercise than accreditation but would be far more limited in its extent than a full certification system, and also far less liable to run into questions of national sovereignty and legal structures.