



# The IUCN Protected Area Management Categories

## Introduction

Twenty years ago, IUCN developed a preliminary system of protected area management categories. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the IUCN Commission on National Parks and Protected Areas (now known as the World Commission on Protected Areas - WCPA), reviewed these, the IVth World Parks Congress in Caracas confirmed a number of changes, and the IUCN General Assembly approved them in 1994. They were published as IUCN Guidelines in the same year.

The WCPA definition of a protected area, and of the six associated management categories of protected areas, are given below:

## Definition

An area of land and/or sea especially dedicated to the protection and maintenance of biological diversity, and of natural and associated cultural resources, and managed through legal or other effective means.

- **Category Ia: Strict nature reserve/wilderness protection area managed mainly for science or wilderness protection** – an area of land and/or sea possessing some outstanding or representative ecosystems, geological or physiological features and/or species, available primarily for scientific research and/or environmental monitoring.
- **Category Ib: Wilderness area: protected area managed mainly for wilderness protection** – large area of unmodified or slightly modified land and/or sea, retaining its natural characteristics and influence, without permanent or significant habitation, which is protected and managed to preserve its natural condition.
- **Category II: National park: protected area managed mainly for ecosystem protection and recreation** – natural area of land and/or sea designated to (a) protect the ecological integrity of one or more ecosystems for present and future generations, (b) exclude exploitation or occupation inimical to the purposes of designation of the area and (c) provide a foundation for spiritual, scientific, educational, recreational and visitor opportunities, all of which must be environmentally and culturally compatible.
- **Category III: Natural monument: protected area managed mainly for conservation of specific natural features** – area containing specific natural or natural/cultural feature(s) of outstanding or unique value because of their inherent rarity, representativeness or aesthetic qualities or cultural significance.
- **Category IV: Habitat/Species Management Area: protected area managed mainly for conservation through management intervention** – area of land and/or sea subject to active intervention for management purposes so as to ensure the maintenance of habitats to meet the requirements of specific species.
- **Category V: Protected Landscape/Seascape: protected area managed mainly for landscape/seascape conservation or recreation** – area of land, with coast or sea as appropriate, where the interaction of people and nature over time has produced an area of distinct character with significant aesthetic, ecological and/or cultural value, and often with high biological diversity. Safeguarding the integrity of this traditional interaction is vital to the protection, maintenance and evolution of such an area.
- **Category VI: Managed Resource Protected Area: protected area managed mainly for the sustainable use of natural resources** – area containing predominantly unmodified natural systems, managed to ensure long-term protection and maintenance of biological diversity, while also providing a sustainable flow of natural products and services to meet community needs.

**The IUCN definition of protected area and the six associated categories of protected area provide a classification system based on management objective**

## Speaking a common language

*A progress review, with recommendations on the IUCN system of protected area management categories*

## Information sheet number 3

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[www.cardiff.ac.uk/cplan/sacl](http://www.cardiff.ac.uk/cplan/sacl)

### **Categorisation by Management Objective**

Protected areas are categorised according to their primary management objective.

**Further explanation:** This type of classification system serves a number of valuable purposes as it:

- Emphasises the importance of protected areas;
  - Demonstrates the range of purposes protected areas serve;
  - Promotes the idea of protected areas as systems rather than units in isolation;
  - Reduces confusion of terminology;
  - Provides an agreed set of international standards;
  - Facilitates international comparison and accounting; and
  - Improves communication and understanding.
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- Assignment to a category is not a comment on management effectiveness. This distinction is often overlooked. For instance, where Category II areas are poorly managed, there is a temptation to re-classify them as Category V areas. This is not the intent of the IUCN guidelines, which categorise by management objective. There are, in fact, two questions
    - “What is the aim of management?” leading to assignment of a category
    - “How well is the area managed?” leading to an assessment of management effectiveness.
  - The IUCN categories system has been designed for global use. The guidance is therefore broad and general rather than being prescriptive and specific. The system should be interpreted flexibly. Because it is based on broad guidelines, regions or countries should interpret them for their own applications.
  - There are hundreds of different national names for protected areas. The IUCN guidelines are not intended to result in the re-naming of these reserves.
  - All categories are equally important and equally relevant to conservation. It should be noted, however, that some countries may not contain the potential for using all categories.
  - The categories imply a gradation of human intervention, ranging from effectively none at all in the case of some Category I areas, to quite high levels of intervention in Category V areas. Since Category VI was added to the system later it does not fit neatly into the general pattern, but lies conceptually between III and IV.
  - As the system is based on management objective, it is essentially neutral about the managing agency or landowner. More particularly, there is no presumption that any category will be owned or managed by the State

Categories represent a compromise between the needs and situations of different countries. They are not a perfect fit for all areas, but serve as a guide for interpretation and application at the regional and national levels. Further, no classification system is perfect, and its value really depends not so much on whether each protected area can be 'allocated' to one of the six categories without doubt or difficulty, but on whether the objectives of categorisation are met. Experience since the publication of the 1994 guidelines suggests that this process has certainly led to increased assessment of the roles of protected areas, and better informed debate about how protected areas with different roles and objects relate one to another.

The current project – **Speaking a Common Language** – seeks to provide an analysis of the way in which the categories have been applied and suggestions for further guidance on their application in the future.

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<sup>i</sup> Anon (1994); *Guidelines for Protected Area Management Categories*, IUCN and the World Conservation Monitoring Centre, Gland, Switzerland and Cambridge, UK