High Conservation Value Areas (HCVA)

DEFINITION

An area designated on the basis of High Conservation Values (HCVs) which are biological, ecological, social or cultural values considered outstandingly significant at the national, regional or global level.

DESCRIPTION

High Conservation Value Areas (HCVAs) are natural habitats, which are of outstanding significance or critical importance due to their high biological, ecological, social or cultural values. These areas need to be appropriately managed in order to maintain or enhance those identified values. The High Conservation Value (HCV) concept was originally developed by the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) in 1999 for use in forest management certification. [1] In 2005 the HCV Resource Network was established and the scope was widened from “HCV Forest” to “HCV Area” (HCVA). [1] It is now a keystone principle of sustainability standards for palm oil, soy, sugar, biofuels and carbon, as well as being widely used for landscape mapping, conservation and natural resource planning and advocacy. The HCV approach consists of six Values, which cover environmental and social priorities shared by a wide range of stakeholder groups. [2] As a result of the diverse nature of Values, HCVAs may be part of larger habitats or may be an entire habitat.

SUPPORTED BY

The High Conservation Value Resource Network (HCVRN) which is a network of members, including representatives from producer companies, NGOs and other practitioners. As of 2014, the HCVRN is governed by its Secretariat (hosted by the UK-based NGO Proforest) and it’s Management Committee (composed exclusively by Members of the HCVRN). [1] Several other governing bodies advise the Secretariat and the Management Committee. The main purposes of the HCVRN are to promote the HCV approach as a resource management tool, to achieve consistent implementation of HCV, and to bring HCV stakeholders together.

YEAR OF CREATION

2005

COVERAGE

Global in extent. HCVAs are identified in site-scale assessments, often as part of the certification process for a number of international standards (e.g. the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil certification).

CRITERIA

There are six main types of Values used to define HCVAs. These are outlined in the HCVRN Charter, which all Members, Advisors and Supporters are required to sign and abide by. The six HCVs are: [3]

- **HCV 1 Species diversity:** Concentrations of biological diversity including endemic species, and rare, threatened or endangered species, that are significant at global, regional or national levels.
- **HCV 2 Landscape-level ecosystems and mosaics:** Large landscape-level ecosystems and ecosystem mosaics that are significant at global, regional or national levels, and that contain viable populations of the great majority of the naturally occurring species in natural patterns of distribution and abundance.
- **HCV 3 Ecosystems and habitats:** Rare, threatened, or endangered ecosystems, habitats or refugia.
- **HCV 4 Ecosystem services:** Basic ecosystem services in critical situations, including protection of water catchments and control of erosion of vulnerable soils and slopes.
- **HCV 5 Community needs:** Sites and resources fundamental for satisfying the basic necessities of local communities or indigenous peoples (for livelihoods, health, nutrition, water, etc...), identified through engagement with these communities or indigenous peoples.
- **HCV 6 Cultural values:** Sites, resources, habitats and landscapes of global or national cultural, archaeological or historical significance, and/or of critical cultural, ecological, economic or religious/sacred importance for the traditional cultures of local communities or indigenous peoples, identified through engagement with these local communities or indigenous peoples.

Further explanation of each Value is available on the HCVRN website. [1] A common guidance on HCV identification was developed by the HCVRN in 2013 [3], along with general guidance for HCV National Interpretation processes [4]. National HCV Toolkits have been developed for a number of countries. [5]

MANAGEMENT

The HCV approach was developed as a tool for managing critical values within a production landscape, and is most commonly used by industry committed to certification of timber, pulp or agricultural products. The core of the HCV approach is the identification and maintenance of critical environmental and social values. In practice, many HCVAs are managed by companies or communities outside protected area networks and approaches to maintain values vary. HCV management may range from complete protection to extractive uses such as selective logging or harvesting of natural products. Any extractive use needs to be managed to an agreed standard, and monitored for any negative effects on HCVs. HCVAs may not be converted to other land uses. National and sectoral guidelines to interpret and identify the values, management options and monitoring of HCVAs, case studies and training materials are available from the HCV Resource Network. [1]

BUSINESS RELEVANCE

Legal and compliance – Legal recognition and protection is not a criterion for identification of HCVAs. Most of the HCVAs typically lie outside the legal protected area network (except where they are based on protected area values), although some categories of locally protected land may also be HCVAs (e.g. steep slopes, important watersheds, riparian protection areas, community owned lands). Therefore legal protection will be present for some HCVAs (especially watershed protection), depending on the context.

Assessing and maintaining HCVAs is central to compliance with a number of key voluntary sustainability standards. The HCV approach forms an integral part of a number of certification standards including FSC standard [2], the Roundtable on Sustainable Biomaterials (RSB) [6], the Climate and Community and Biodiversity Alliance (CCBA) [7], The Round Table on Responsible Soy (RTRS) [8] and the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO) [9]. These standards all require that HCVAs are maintained or enhanced and have specific restrictions preventing the expansion of cultivation of crops and aquaculture farms into these areas. A list of all organisations and businesses that use the HCV approach can be found on the HCVRN website. [10]

Biodiversity importance – HCVAs are frequently (although not always) designated for their importance to biodiversity, as sites with global, regional or national significance. Their identification criteria include both high vulnerability and high irreplaceability of species and habitats. These areas are identified at the site-scale and are therefore of significant relevance for business in terms of mitigating and avoiding risk from biodiversity loss and identifying opportunities associated with biodiversity conservation.

Socio-cultural value -The recognition of socio-cultural values of sites is an important criterion of some HCVAs. HCVAs of social importance are identified as sites with critical significance for the livelihoods, wellbeing or cultural identity of local communities to be managed in consultation with such communities. Such HCVA sites provide opportunities to build trust between companies and communities, train and build local capacity, and provide multiple benefits for local people.

REFERENCES & WEBSITE

1. Website of the High Conservation Value Network
2. Forest Stewardship Council. FSC ® International Standard: FSC Principles and Criteria for Forest Stewardship (version 5). 001, 1–37 (2012).
3. Brown, E. et al. Common Guidance for the Identification of High Conservation Values. HCV Resource Network (High Conservation Value Resource Network, 2013).
4. High Conservation Value Resource Network. National Interpretations of HCVs. 1–4 (2013).
5. High Conservation Value Resource Network. National Interpretations.
6. Roundtable on Sustainable Biomaterials. RSB Conservation Impact Assessment Guidelines, version 2.0. version 2., 1–23 (2011).
7. Climate, Community and Biodiversity Alliance. Climate , Community & Biodiversity Standards. Third Edition. (2013).
8. Roundtable on Responsible Soy. RTRS Standard for Responsible Soy Production (version 2.0). (2013).
9. Roundtable on Sustainable Palm oil Production. RSPO Principles & Criteria for Sustainable Palm Oil Production. (2013)
10. High Conservation Value Resource Network. Uses of HCV.

HCVAs include habitats of endangered species, such as the Sumatran orangutan (Pongo abelii). Sergey Uryadnikov/Shutterstock.com

Category:

Biodiversity designations

Tools

The HCV Network provides information about the HCV approach, access to the common guidance on HCV identification and the general guidance on National Interpretation processes.

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