IUCN Category III - Natural Monument or Feature

Acronyms Areas Countries Marine Terms

Definition

Areas set aside to protect a specific natural monument, which can be a landform, sea mount, submarine cavern, geological feature such as a cave or even a living feature such as an ancient grove.

Description

IUCN Management Category III (Natural Monument or Feature) refers to small-sites that focus on one or more prominent natural features and the associated ecology, rather than on a broader ecosystem. They are defined by IUCN as *“areas set aside to protect a specific natural monument, which can be a landform, sea mount, submarine cavern, geological feature such as a cave or even a living feature such as an ancient grove They are generally quite small protected areas and often have high visitor value”.* [1] The primary objective of protected areas in this category is to protect specific outstanding natural features and their associated biodiversity and habitats. Other objectives include to provide biodiversity protection in landscapes or seascapes that have otherwise undergone major changes and to conserve traditional spiritual and cultural values of the site.

Supported by

Developed by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) with support of the World Commission on Protected Areas (WCPA) and other international institutions such as the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), and assigned by national governments.

Year of creation

The current IUCN Categories were approved in 1994, and revised guidelines were published in 2008. [1]

Coverage

Globally applicable.

Criteria

Category III protected areas are usually relatively small sites that focus on one or more

prominent natural features and the associated ecology, rather than on a broader ecosystem. Category III protected areas could include: [1]

- Natural geological and geomorphological features: such as waterfalls, cliffs, craters, caves, fossil beds, sand dunes, rock forms, valleys and marine features such as sea mounts or coral formations;
- Culturally-influenced natural features: such as cave dwellings and ancient tracks;
- Natural-cultural sites: such as the many forms of sacred natural sites (sacred groves, springs, waterfalls, mountains, sea coves etc.) of importance to one or more faith groups;
- Cultural sites with associated ecology: where protection of a cultural site also protects significant and important biodiversity, such as archaeological/historical sites that are inextricably linked to a natural area.

The term “natural” as used here can refer to both wholly natural features (the commonest use) but also sometimes features that have been influenced by humans.

Management

These areas are managed to maintain certain natural features, and this can be carried out by a range of actors depending on the governance type of the area (see Protected Areas for information on governance types). These areas are generally managed in much the same way as a category II area but at a smaller-scale. Visitation and recreation is often encouraged, as well as environmental education.

Business relevance

Legal and compliance – The classification of a Category III protected area requires that such areas are managed for conservation by legal or other effective means, and therefore legal recognition and protection at the national or sub-national level is likely to be present in these sites. The level of legal protection will however vary between countries, and will depend on the governance type of the area, as they receive differing levels of recognition by government in different countries. Nonetheless a number of national laws are likely to apply to these sites that deter large-scale economic activities in order to maintain the conservation values of these areas.

As designated protected areas, these sites receive international attention and have been incorporated into a number of environmental safeguard standards. These include those of multilateral financial institutions such as but not limited to the World Bank [2] and the International Finance Corporation [3]. For details on environmental safeguard standards which are applicable to all protected areas, please see the Protected Areas page.

In addition, a number of sector specific safeguard standards refer to protected areas, many of which are related to certification programs, including the Roundtable on Sustainable Biomaterials (RSB) that declares categories I to IV as ‘no-go’ areas. [4] For details on certification programmes which are applicable to all protected areas, please see the Protected Areas page.

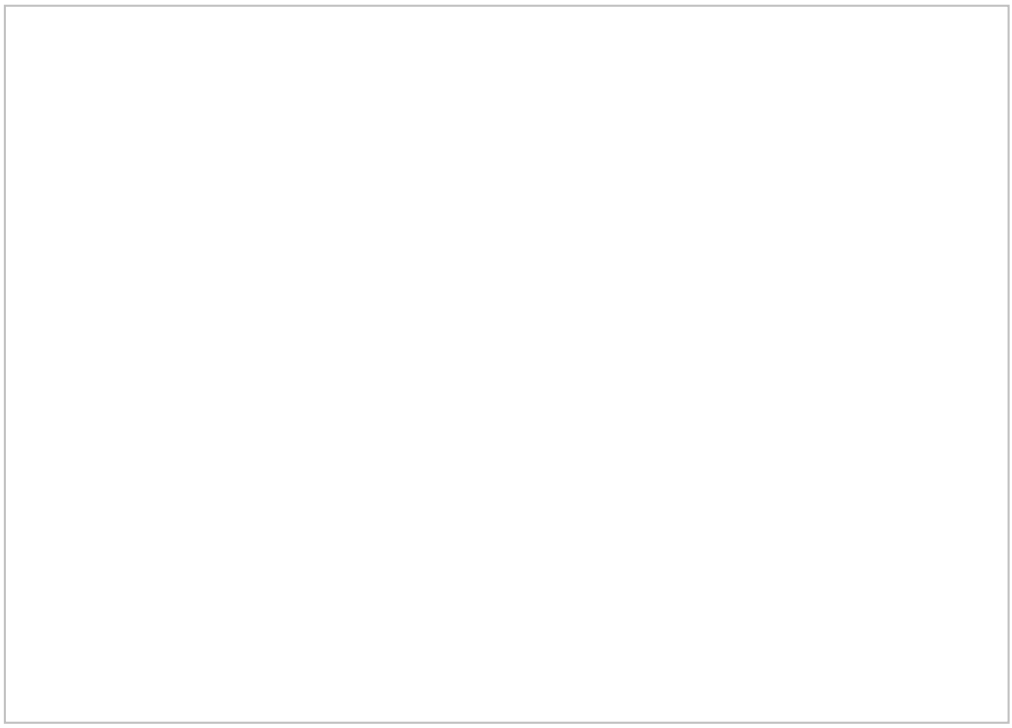
Biodiversity importance – The main emphasis of protection in category III areas is on the natural features found in these sites. Their role in the conservation of species and habitats, hence, varies. In some cases their contribution to biodiversity conservation may be indirect

result of protection of natural features. In other cases (e.g. natural cave system) they may play a key role in the wider conservation strategy of an area. Category III is similar to category II and managed in much the same way but at a rather smaller-scale and with less complexity of management.

Socio-cultural values – Category III areas are likely to hold socio-cultural values as they may have features such as sacred groves, springs, waterfalls, mountains, sea coves etc. of importance to one or more faith groups. These areas are often of significant tourism value and can be managed with the objective of promoting sustainable tourism.

References & website

Back to top



The Blue Hole, Belize (IUCN Management Category III). Tami Reed/Shutterstock.com

Category:

Protected areas

Related pages

- IUCN Protected Area Management Categories (Areas)
- IUCN Category Ia - Strict Nature Reserve (Areas)
- IUCN Category Ib - Wilderness Area (Areas)
- IUCN Category II - National Park (Areas)
- IUCN Category III - Natural Monument or Feature (Areas)
- IUCN Category IV - Habitat / Species Management Area (Areas)
- IUCN Category V - Protected Landscape / Seascape (Areas)

- IUCN Category VI - Protected Area with Sustainable Use of Natural Resources (Areas)

Tools

- Protected Planet a tool for visualizing information on protected areas at the site level, country level, regional level and global level. This includes information on the IUCN category where known. Protected Planet brings together spatial data, descriptive information and images from the World Database on Protected Areas, WikipediaTM and PanaramioTM.
- The Integrated Biodiversity Assessment Tool (IBAT) provides a visualisation and GIS download tool for protected areas, including the IUCN category where known.

Page last updated 24 December 2020