IUCN Protected Area Management Categories

Acronyms Areas Countries Marine Terms

Definition

An internationally recognized system for categorising the management approach adopted at individual protected areas.

Description

Protected areas are a fundamental part of global, national and sub-national conservation strategies that are supported and governed by a range of local and national institutions, NGOs and even individuals such as in the case of privately protected areas. Protected areas encompass a huge variation in nomenclature, management objective and management approach for protected areas globally. As a result, to provide some mechanism for global communication IUCN has developed a system of categorising protected areas according to the underlying management objectives, which could be implemented through different management approaches. The categories system was introduced in large part to help standardize descriptions of what constitutes a particular protected area.
These categories are recognised by international bodies such as the United Nations and by many national governments and have become an important global standard for the planning, establishment and management of protected areas. The Convention on Biological Diversity's Programme of Work on Protected Areas (Goal 43, Paragraph 4.3.7) [1] request Parties to the Convention to use the IUCN system of protected area management categories for reporting purpose. The categories are as follows, [2] and are described in further detail on separate factsheets:

- Ia - Strict Nature Reserve
- Ib - Wilderness Area
- II - National Park
- III - Natural Monument or Feature
- IV - Habitat/Species Management Area
- V - Protected Landscape/Seascape
- VI - Protected Area with Sustainable Use of Natural Resources

IUCN management categories are voluntary for countries to apply to their protected areas, and are not currently being used by all countries. Many protected areas across the world do not have an assigned IUCN management category, however this does not imply that they lack protective measures or active management. Broadly speaking, areas in categories I-IV are subject to more restricted management and use giving priority to biodiversity conservation, whereas those in categories V and VI are often under more flexible management regimes that allow multiple sustainable uses of their natural and cultural resources.

Governments can assess whether a site meets the IUCN's definition, and document the characteristics and justification for protected area status. Based on this information, a management category may be assigned by the government (or appropriate national authority). [2] IUCN can advise on assignment and sometimes runs individual advisory missions to countries or even individual protected areas. However, IUCN does not impose IUCN management categories on a protected area. The criteria for designation, management and business implications depend on a number of factors, but can largely be separated based on the management objective and governance type of the area, which are described in the appropriate section below.

The IUCN management categories are predominantly assigned to national-level protected areas and are less frequently used formally to describe the management approach for protected areas designated under international or regional conventions and agreements. However, the actual approach adopted at these sites can vary significantly. For example, Ramsar sites and Natura 2000 sites can have any or no IUCN category. Biosphere reserves usually have a core area with more restricted categories (category I–IV) and a sustainable management zone around (category V/VI or unprotected). IUCN management categories are not assigned to World Heritage sites, however they may be underpinned by a national-level designation of any IUCN category.

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. [2]

Coverage

Global, noting that some countries do not currently assign categories to their protected areas.

Criteria

Guidance on how to choose which management category to apply is provided by IUCN.[2]

Management

Protected areas are established under a range of objectives, all of which broadly encompass the conservation of nature. The following objectives should or can apply to all protected area categories: [2]

- Conserve the composition, structure, function and evolutionary potential of biodiversity;
- Contribute to regional conservation strategies (as core reserves, buffer zones, corridors,

steppingstones for migratory species etc.);
- Maintain diversity of landscape or habitat and of associated species and ecosystems;
- Be of sufficient size to ensure the integrity and long-term maintenance of the specified conservation targets or be capable of being increased to achieve this end;
- Maintain the values for which it was assigned in perpetuity;
- Be operating under the guidance of a management plan, and a monitoring and evaluation programme that supports adaptive management;
- Possess a clear and equitable governance system.

While not their intended purpose, the categories have been used in a limited way to prescribe specific policy instruments which impact on business. For example at the World Conservation Congress in 2000, it was recommended that 'IUCN Members prohibit by law, all exploration and extraction of mineral resources in protected areas corresponding to IUCN protected areas management categories I to IV'. [3] This approach has also been adopted by some companies in their corporate policies, such as Shell, which has a commitment to improve and publically report the way they operate in IUCN Category I-IV protected areas. [4]

It is worth noting that while the IUCN management categories have short descriptions, these do not always correspond the the national-level designation. For example, a government can designate a "National Park" but may not necessarily manage the area according to the guidelines under the IUCN category II (National Parks). It must also be noted that, despite the numbering (I-VI), IUCN categories are not a hierarchy system, which means that category IV is not necessary of higher priority or higher naturalness that category VI.

The main purposes of the IUCN protected area management categories are:

- To facilitate planning of protected areas and protected area systems;
- To improve information management about protected areas;
- To help regulate activities in protected areas.

Business relevance

Not applicable. Please see the relevant section on the individual IUCN categories.

References & website

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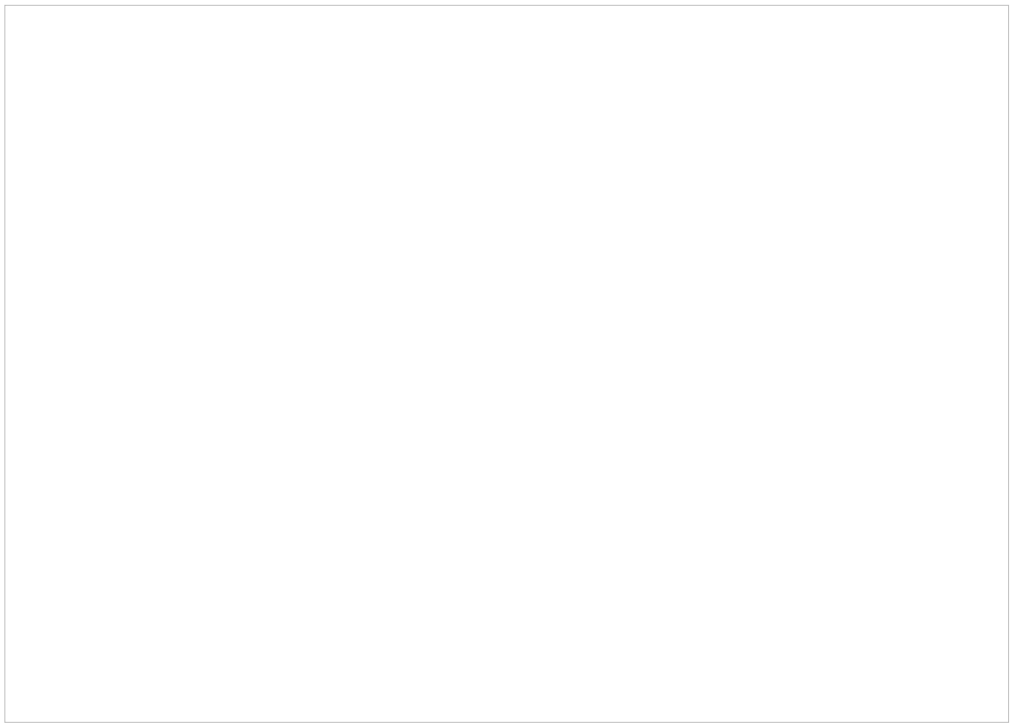

Victoria Falls, Zambia/Zimbabwe. IUCN Management Category III. Przemyslaw Skibinski/Shutterstock.om

Category:

Protected areas

Related pages

- 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 3 May 2024