

The 5th World Parks Congress, Durban

Every 10 years the global conservation community gathers at an international Parks Congress, organized by the IUCN World Commission on Protected Areas, to assess the status of the global network of protected areas. The 5th such meeting was held in September 2003 in Durban, South Africa, the first time on the African continent. Over 2,500 delegates from around the world worked for 10 days on a range of themes related to the location, establishment, management, financing and benefits of protected areas. The theme of the congress was *Benefits Beyond Boundaries*, aiming to capture the dual roles of protected areas in conserving biodiversity and ecosystem processes within their borders, and interacting both ecologically and economically with the surrounding landscape. The congress emphasized the importance of both these roles to broader societal goals such as equity, good governance and poverty alleviation.

Staff from conservation and development NGOs, governments and national protected area agencies were joined for the first time by a significant number of local communities, indigenous peoples, representatives of extractive industries, and pro- and anti-park lobbying groups. This mixture of expertise and agendas provided what was probably the most balanced review ever of protected areas and their place in modern society. A number of key issues emerged from the Congress that are likely to form the basis of programmes for conservation and development organizations over the coming decade.

Building a comprehensive global network of protected areas

The congress showed that governments, communities and private interests have established over 100,000 protected areas (all sites, not just those in IUCN Management categories I–VI), covering 18.8 million km² (UNEP-WCMC, 2003a). These data show that one of the key goals of the 4th Parks Congress in 1992 – that of conserving 10% of the land area of the globe – has been achieved, a cause for celebration. However, analyses presented at the congress also showed that the current protected area network is still far from complete. Significant gaps remain, for species (Rodrigues *et al.*, 2003), for habitats and, less well studied, for underlying biological processes essential for the maintenance of biodiversity. The congress concluded that filling these gaps must be a major conservation priority over the coming decade. Different kinds of protected areas can contribute toward

this goal, ranging from strict reserves to community or private land-ownership models.

The Congress placed greater emphasis than its predecessors on the marine realm. It was acknowledged that the global oceans are facing a conservation crisis, in particular through overfishing. It was agreed that Marine Protected Areas represent a useful mechanism to both conserve marine biodiversity and safeguard fisheries, and that the current 1% of the ocean found within such Areas is inadequate. Marine Protected Area networks covering 20–30% of the ocean were advocated as the only means to prevent a catastrophe for fish productivity.

Given that 2003 was the UN Year of Freshwater, the congress had surprisingly little emphasis on freshwater protected areas. Several sessions, however, included elements on the role of protected areas in conservation of freshwater systems, and a freshwater recommendation was added to the final outputs of the Congress, recommending that a representative system of protected inland water ecosystems is established.

The global protected area data are captured in GIS format within the newly updated World Database on Protected Areas, which was for the first time made publicly available at this congress (UNEP-WCMC, 2003b). The world conservation community, both governmental and private, were urged at the congress to assist UNEP-WCMC and IUCN to complete this database, as a measure of the response of humans to the task of protection of the world's biodiversity. Many of the world's largest conservation NGOs committed themselves to this task, forming a protected areas consortium (IUCN WCPA, 2003a).

Management and Finance

Making the global protected area network effective poses several major challenges. Firstly, management is often ineffective within current protected areas. These so-called paper parks have little or no management capacity, and therefore tend to inflate the apparent level of protection – in turn distorting gap analyses of the extent of additional conservation effort still needed. Measuring and improving the management effectiveness of protected areas was identified as a priority theme for the coming decade.

The funding available for protected area management is also grossly inadequate. The congress estimated that around \$20 billion US would be required annually

to manage a globally effective and comprehensive terrestrial protected area network, with a further \$10 billion needed for marine areas. Currently there is an estimated funding shortfall of \$20 billion per annum. Developing novel systems of financing through combinations of private business partnerships, trust funds, and eco-tourism operations should improve both the level and stability of funding. Sustainably financing the global network of protected areas is perhaps the largest challenge facing the global conservation community.

Bringing protected areas into national development planning

The Congress reviewed the last 15 years of efforts to broaden protected area management and integrate it with the needs and aspirations of local communities. The strong presence of indigenous peoples, mobile peoples and local communities provided new perspectives, and it was recognized that the full value of parks included cultural and sacred elements. Practical examples were cited where rights have been reinstated and community and indigenous groups have taken on the management of national protected areas or established their own.

The critical role of protected areas in both biodiversity conservation and sustainable development led to calls for protected areas to play a more central role in national planning. At the same time poverty eradication was widely discussed as a societal goal, in which the role of protected areas needs to be better understood, particularly in the context of expanding the coverage. Poverty was seen as a cause of environmental degradation yet many of the costs of conservation remain at the local level. Documenting the costs and benefits of protected areas at all levels, and across a geographically, socially and biologically broad suite of reserves, was identified as an urgently needed step in addressing this issue of equity. However, it is already clear that national and international communities need to provide greater support to local communities as stewards of critical resources. The congress examined innovative market mechanisms to achieve this, such as water payments, biodiversity markets and carbon sequestration, as well as more usual tourism and revenue-sharing approaches. Integrating parks in broader landscapes and capturing national and international benefits to help offset local opportunity costs constitutes a very significant challenge for the decade ahead.

Major announcements from the congress

Some of the nations present at the congress announced the establishment of new protected areas. Most spectacularly, Madagascar announced its intention to triple the area of its protected areas, including terrestrial, freshwater and marine habitats. In other examples, Brazil announced an expansion of the protected areas in Amazonas by 3.8 million ha of forest. In the marine

realm, Senegal declared four new Marine Protected Areas totalling 75,000 ha, Mozambique announced its intention to create new Marine Protected Areas to fill key gaps in protection along its coastline, and Tanzania indicated its intention to increase its marine area under management to 10% by 2010 and 20% by 2025.

Further information on the outputs of the Congress is available (IUCN WCPA, 2003b), including the recommendations, the *Durban Accord* and *Action Plan*, and a formal message to the next Conference of the Parties of the Convention on Biological Diversity. These documents represent the tangible outputs of a productive and important meeting that should serve to galvanize attention and support for protecting global natural heritage. If the goals laid out in Durban are met, the next World Parks Congress in a decade from now will be able to show that global biodiversity is well represented within a network of protected areas that, as an accepted component of global land use, contribute meaningfully to the economic and societal well-being of the world's people. This is perhaps the last decade we have in which to build an effective and fully representative protected area network; as conservationists it is vital that we do not squander the opportunity.

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