Technical Note

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IUCN WCPA Technical Note Series No. 6
RECOGNISING AND REPORTING OTHER EFFECTIVE AREA-BASED CONSERVATION MEASURES

This Technical Note provides a summary of the following Technical Report, which can be downloaded from the IUCN library by clicking on the following link:

Recognising and reporting other effective area-based conservation measures

'**Other effective area-based conservation measures**' (OECMs) are areas outside protected areas that deliver the effective and long-term *in situ* conservation of biodiversity. OECMs complement protected areas in landscapes and seascapes and help promote equitable governance and effective conservation, including through enhancing ecological representation and connectivity. OECMs should be provided appropriate recognition and support, and can be reported internationally to the World Database on OECMs.

INTRODUCTION

'Other effective area-based conservation measures' (OECMs) are areas under different governance and management regimes that deliver the long-term *in-situ* conservation of biodiversity. Although first mentioned under Aichi Target 11 in 2010, it was not until 2018 that Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity adopted the following definition for an '**other effective area-based conservation measure**' (OECM): **"***A geographically defined area other than a Protected Area, which is governed and managed in ways that achieve positive and sustained long-term outcomes for the in situ conservation of biodiversity, with associated ecosystem functions and services and where applicable, cultural, spiritual, socio–economic, and other locally relevant values"* (CBD Decision 14/8).

Decision 14/8 also defines the CBD criteria for OECMs. IUCN/WCPA published guidelines explaining these criteria and a simple screening tool in 2019 – see https://portals.iucn.org/library/node/48773 – and has subsequently prepared training materials for identifying OECMs. At the 15th meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the CBD, Parties are expected to adopt more ambitious conservation targets of at least 30% of land, sea and freshwater to be included in effective networks of protected areas and OECMs (often referred to as 'protected and conserved areas') by 2030. Recognising and supporting OECMs will be critical to achieving these targets.

While a protected area has a primary conservation objective (i.e., is dedicated towards the conservation of biodiversity), an OECM is an area that delivers effective and long term *in-situ* conservation of biodiversity *regardless of its management objectives*. Like protected areas, OECMs occur under diverse forms of governance: by government agencies, private actors, Indigenous peoples and/or local communities, or in shared arrangements. Protected areas and OECMs complement each other to protect and conserve important biodiversity through well-connected conservation networks.

Protecting important biodiversity

- OECMs will effectively protect one or more of the following:
- Rare, threatened or endangered species and habitats, and the ecosystems that support them, including species and sites identified on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species, Red List of Ecosystems, or national equivalents.
- Representative natural ecosystems.
- Areas with high level of ecological integrity or ecological intactness, which are characterised by the occurrence of the full range of native species and supporting ecological processes.
- Range-restricted species and ecosystems in natural settings.
- Important species aggregations, including during migration or spawning.
- Ecosystems especially important for species' life stages, feeding, resting, moulting and breeding.
- Areas of importance for ecological connectivity or that are important to complete a conservation network within a landscape or seascape.
- Areas that provide critical ecosystem services, such as clean water and carbon storage, in addition to *in-situ* biodiversity conservation.
- Species and habitats that are important for traditional human uses, such as native medicinal plants.

Characteristics of OECMs

All potential OECMs should achieve the long term *in-situ* conservation of important biodiversity. Identification and recognition of OECMs should be rights-based and done with full consultation and consent of the governing agency; this is especially important in relation to areas and territories of Indigenous peoples and local communities.

OECMs fall into three categories:

Ancillary conservation. Areas that deliver *in-situ* conservation as a by-product of management activities, even though biodiversity conservation is not a management objective. Examples may include sacred natural sites, shipwrecks, or industrial and military areas that conserve important biodiversity long-term.

Secondary conservation. Areas where biodiversity conservation may be a secondary objective. For example, protection and management of watersheds or wetlands to protect biodiversity in addition to protection of water resources. Sites managed to provide ecological connectivity between protected areas or other areas of high biodiversity, thereby contributing to their viability, may also qualify as OECMs.

Primary conservation. Areas governed by government agencies, private actors or Indigenous peoples and local communities that conform to the IUCN definition of a protected area, but which are not currently designated and reported as protected areas. Some of these areas may later be recognised as protected areas if the governance body agrees.

NB: For a site in any of these categories to be considered as an OECM, it should be fully assessed at the local level, in consultation with local stakeholders and with the free, prior and informed consent of the relevant governance authority.

IDENTIFYING OECMs

The identification of OECMs offers a significant opportunity to recognise *de facto,* effective and long-term conservation that is taking place outside currently designated protected areas, under a range of governance and management regimes. OECMs may be managed, by a diverse set of actors including Indigenous peoples and local communities, private sector actors and government agencies not normally associated with area-based conservation.

Identifying OECMs can promote more equitable governance, effective management, and can lead to enhanced conservation outcomes, including:

- Increased protection and coverage of ecologically representative areas of particular importance for biodiversity and ecosystem services.
- Enhanced connectivity between protected and conserved areas and across landscapes and seascapes.
- Engagement with a diverse range of rights-holders and stakeholders who contribute to area-based conservation outside of protected areas.
- Improved spatial planning to mainstream biodiversity considerations in sectoral policies and development programmes.
- Climate change mitigation and adaptation, contributing to net-zero climate targets and building resilience to the physical impacts of climate change through nature-based solutions.

Key questions

Is there important biodiversity in the area?
Is the area already a protected area?
Do those responsible for governance and management want the area to be assessed as an OECM?
How is the area legally recognised and what kinds of support are needed to help maintain the biodiversity outcomes in the long-term?

AREAS LIKELY TO QUALIFY AS POTENTIAL OECMs

Areas likely to qualify as potential OECMs include:

- Territories and areas on land and sea managed by Indigenous peoples and/or local communities (territories of life/ICCAs), to maintain natural or near-natural ecosystems, with low levels of sustainable use of natural resources, in ways that maintain the area's biodiversity.
- Sacred natural sites with high biodiversity values that are protected and conserved long-term for their associations with one or more faith groups.

- Privately conserved areas, managed with a specific conservation objective, but which are not recognised as protected areas under national legislation.
- Military lands and waters that are managed for the purpose of defence, but also achieve the long-term conservation of natural ecosystems and important biodiversity.
- Coastal and marine areas protected for reasons other than conservation, but that nonetheless achieve the *in-situ* conservation of biodiversity (e.g., historic shipwrecks, etc.).
- Permanent or long-term fisheries closure areas designed to protect complete ecosystems for stock recruitment or to protect specialised ecosystems and their full complement of species.
- Freshwater and coastal wetlands restored for flood protection, but which protect important habitats, species and ecosystem services.
- Watersheds or other areas managed primarily for water resource management that also result in the *in-situ* conservation of important biodiversity.
- Some permanently set-aside areas of managed forest, such as old-growth, primary, or other high-biodiversity value forests, which are protected from both forestry and non-forestry threats.
- Urban parks managed primarily for public recreation, but which include large areas of natural habitats (e.g., native grassland, wetlands) and are managed to maintain these biodiversity values.
- Hunting reserves that maintain natural habitats and other flora and fauna as well as viable populations of hunted and non-hunted native species.

AREAS THAT ARE UNLIKELY TO QUALIFY AS OECMs

Areas and management regimes that are unlikely to qualify as OECMs include:

- Small, semi-natural areas within an intensively managed landscape with limited biodiversity conservation value.
- Forests that are managed commercially for timber supply and are intended for logging, even though they may support some species of interest.
- Fishery closures, and other fisheries management tools, including, but not limited to, temporary set asides or gear restriction areas with a single species, species group, or habitat focus, that may be subject to periodic exploitation and/or be defined for stock management purposes, and that do not deliver *in-situ* conservation of the associated ecosystems, habitats and species with which target species are associated.
- Agricultural lands which are managed in a manner that provide some limited benefits for the *in-situ* conservation of biodiversity, including temporary agricultural set asides, summer fallow and grant-maintained changes to agricultural practice that may benefit biodiversity.
- Conservation measures that apply to a single species or group of species, over a wide geographical range such as hunting regulations or whale-watching rules; these are better considered as being part of wider species conservation measures.

RECOGNISING AND SUPPORTING OECMs

Identification of OECMs should be followed up by processes to determine appropriate kinds of recognition for the site (including legal, policy or institutional forms of recognition) as well as support (monetary and/or non-monetary) and development of effective monitoring systems. This recognition and support should aim to enhance the governance capacity of their legitimate authorities and secure positive and sustained outcomes for biodiversity. While national circumstances will differ, any related

recognition or support should reinforce existing governance systems and not seek to supplant or unnecessarily alter those local arrangements that are effective.

REPORTING OECMs

Most OECMs will likely be reported by national governments, but other stakeholders can also submit data on OECMs to the World Database on OECMs managed by the UNEP World Conservation Monitoring Centre. Any reporting of OECMs should be done with the free, prior and informed consent of the relevant governance authorities.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- CBD Decision 14/8 on protected areas and OECMs
- IUCN OECM Specialist Group
- Training materials on OECMs
- Animated videos: Introduction to OECMs and Reporting OECMs
- Film series: Nature Stewardship Beyond Protected Areas
- Protected Planet: World Database on OECMs
- *PARKS* Special Issue on OECMs
- IUCN WCPA Technical Note Series No. 1: Privately protected areas: international reporting and their relationship with OECMs
- IUCN WCPA Technical Note Series No. 3: Guidelines for conserving connectivity through ecological networks and corridors.

CONTACT

Kathy MacKinnon and Harry Jonas are co-chairs of the IUCN WCPA Specialist Group on OECMs and can be contacted at oecm@wcpa.iucn.org.

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