



For Life's Sake

How protected areas enrich our lives
and secure the web of life

IUCN World Commission on Protected Areas





Protected areas
are strongholds for
the survival of unique
plant and animals

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For life's wondrous diversity

Protected areas are irreplaceable strands in the web of life

Protected areas are home to giant pandas in China, yellow-eared parrots in Colombia, corroboree frogs in Australia, monk seals in mid-Pacific coral reefs, gorillas in African rainforests, and also plants such as Kazakhstan's wild apricot and Yemen's pomegranate tree. They are key tools in protecting the "web of life"—the Earth's diverse ecosystems and species.

This diversity creates strength and biological resilience.

Without these special strongholds, species loss will continue unabated, exterminating plants and animals that have developed their unique qualities over the entire history of Earth's existence. Such unprecedented losses will weaken the critical bonds of interdependent ecosystems, and the ultimate impact on the planet's web of life could be devastating.

As our least modified, most natural places, protected areas hold many species as yet unknown to science, which may prove of immense value to us as resources for new medicines or foods. This richness alone is a practical reason to protect these places. But regardless of their utility to us, people increasingly acknowledge the right of other living creatures to exist. We have a moral and ethical duty to ensure this

right, and to pass on our planet's biological diversity to future generations. Protected areas help us meet our obligations to the rest of life.

For life's essentials

Protected areas are good for people and the planet

The world's protected areas—parks, nature reserves, protected landscapes, and many others—help protect Earth's ecosystems upon which our own health ultimately depends.

We need...

- Clean water to drink: protected areas deliver it by safeguarding the sources where that water comes from.
- Fresh air to breathe: protected areas provide it by being a home to forests and other plant communities that cleanse pollutants from the air.
- Healthy soil to grow food: protected areas ensure it by keeping vegetation intact and preventing erosion.
- Medicine to heal disease: protected areas are a major reservoir of natural animal and plant diversity from which modern pharmaceuticals are derived.
- A stable climate for our daily lives: protected areas help offset our carbon emissions by preserving forests that re-absorb carbon from the atmosphere.

- Happiness for our mental well-being: protected areas are special places where millions go to find tranquillity in a high-stress world. Protected areas are an integral part of the Earth's health care system.

Although these goods and services are worth an immense amount of money, protected areas provide all this for a minimal outlay in acquisition and management. No other investment could provide so much for so little.

For the climate that sustains us

Protected areas buffer us against climate change

Global climate change is no longer some abstract possibility to be dealt with down the road: it is here, now. And it is already changing the way people live and how we view our own futures.

Of all the proposed approaches to ameliorate climate change, establishing new and expanded networks of ecologically diverse protected areas is one of the most cost-effective. Protected areas can greatly reduce the risk of extinction faced by species that help sustain us. Protecting intact ecosystems is a proven method of buffering human settlements and the resources we depend upon from tsunamis, hurricanes, landslides, drought and flooding. Such extreme events can be caused or worsened by climate change.

Protected areas give the best chance of survival to our richest and most unique

Protected areas safeguard many of Earth's most beautiful and awe-inspiring places.

Establishing new and expanded networks of ecologically diverse protected areas is a cost-effective approach to mitigating climate change.

natural systems and species, and provide the core lands and waters around which to develop a resilient overall landscape that includes places where people live and earn their livelihoods. They are the foundation on which we can build a new world able to meet the challenges of a changing climate.

For the beauty of the Earth

Protected areas connect us to the world's grandeur

Since the dawn of human existence, the beauty of nature has filled us with feelings of awe, humility and timelessness, and inspired works of art that reflect those feelings. Soaring mountains, rugged coastline, sprawling canyons, vast forests—such superlative scenery we rightly associate with the world's most famous national parks. But protected areas are much more than this. As our understanding of Earth's environment deepens, our idea of beauty expands to include stark deserts, immense grasslands and wetlands teeming with life...each in its own way magnificent.

Protected areas safeguard many of the most beautiful and awe-inspiring places on Earth.

Protected areas have been the inspiration for poems, novels, paintings, sculpture, photographs, music—for every kind of art form we can imagine. Each artist is inspired as an individual and yet, no matter what culture we come from, there is a

universal need to connect to places of surpassing splendour. We can do this in other places, of course. But when we go to protected areas, they awaken an appreciation of beauty and help us better develop our aesthetic sensibility. We find ourselves better able to see the beauty that exists in "everyday landscapes" close to home—beauty that we may have overlooked before.

The world's premier destinations

Protected areas are a vital part of national economies

Some of the fastest-growing sectors of the tourism industry are centred on protected areas. Nature-based tourism is travel in order to enjoy unspoiled locations. Wildlife tourism is undertaken to see wildlife in its natural habitat. Adventure tourism is travel to remote places to engage in activities that require skill and endurance such as climbing, kayaking or diving.

The emergence of a global tourism industry, with annual expenditures now in excess of US\$600 billion, is one of the major economic developments of our time. The Internet has made it easier than ever for travellers to chart a destination on the other side the world, and international travel has grown rapidly, nearing 700 million visits per year. Many of these trips are built around visiting protected natural areas and cultural sites.

Ecotourism is another sector that depends mainly on protected areas.

This is travel that attempts to respect nature by keeping impacts to a minimum and to respect the local culture of the destination by not overwhelming it or degrading its authenticity. Even conventional tourism, such as cruises and motorized touring, often features stops at one or more protected areas. Protected-area tourism earns strong revenue for many developing countries, provides employment in regional and remote locations, sustains a large outdoor recreation equipment industry, and generates economic value and jobs through the production of films, documentaries and books.

The potential effects of tourism on the resources of protected areas are complex, and tourism can easily become a double-edged sword. It is essential that tourism to protected areas be planned and managed with care. Moreover, the rising costs and carbon impacts of air travel cast doubt on the continued fast growth of international tourism. But it seems clear that we have developed a taste for travel, and that those sectors of the tourism business which depend on protected areas will further gain in importance.

Learning never ends

Protected areas are classrooms without walls

Protected areas are ideal venues for life-long learning. They combine the power of place with the last, best remnants of nature least dominated by our kind. For



most of us, personal experience is the most effective and enduring way for most of us to learn. Protected areas—each unique in what it offers—provide countless opportunities to learn from personal experience and hands-on doing, rather than through books or lectures. This kind of learning brings abstract ideas to life and gives them a context so we can understand their importance. Whether it's holding a frog, taking measurements of water quality, or exploring a pathway, protected areas offer us the chance to experience reality on many levels and by using all of our senses.

Place-based learning in protected areas helps us cement new insights within our minds, and is an antidote to the rapid-fire presentations of images and ideas offered by commercial media. Protected areas are more flexible than situations where learners are treated as passive recipients of information, accommodating people who thrive on a different style of learning. But universally, as one group of scientists has noted, protected areas generate a “passion for learning, with deep, personal, emotional connections born out of experience, and stimulate the curiosity that is the bedrock foundation of science”—and other ways of knowing, too.

In touch with what matters most

Protected areas help us find our place in the universe

When we walk in a forest filled with birdsong, or watch the sun set behind a mountain, or taste the salty tang of an

FOR LIFE'S SAKE



ocean breeze at the shore, we are touched by a sense of awe and respect, and even moved to reverence. When we experience these things with the knowledge that the forest and the mountain and the shore are being cared for in perpetuity, then our appreciation becomes deeper still. For many of us, protected areas are the most tangible places where we can experience the fullness of Creation—however we believe it to have come about.

Such spiritual values of protected areas fit closely with other values, too, including values that situate us within a particular culture. For example, many indigenous people align their identities with sacred places that are protected by cultural traditions, or which contain the legacy of past human civilizations. These traditions

and heritage are central to how they understand their own existence. In a not-so-different way, people from many diverse backgrounds view protected areas themselves as sacred places—symbols of commitment in a world of change, of devotion to ideals that lift us out of everyday experience and put us in touch with ultimate concerns.

Whether a sacred spring or a national park, for many people protected areas are places to go and reflect upon our place in the universe.

The healing power of nature

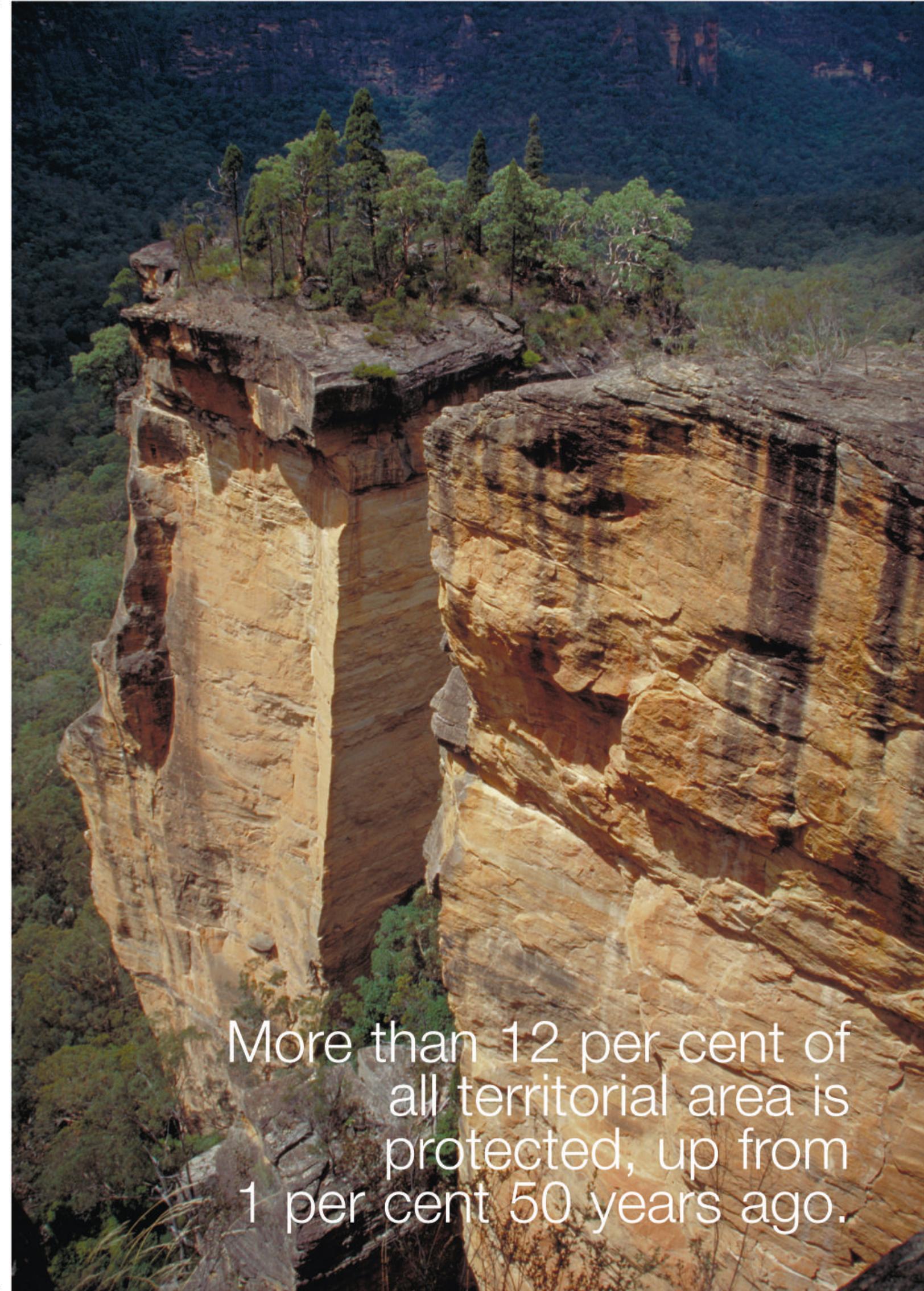
Protected areas help us recover our balance

One of the simplest reasons protected areas have become such popular travel

destinations is this: they are great places to enjoy ourselves. They provide us with a variety of low-cost spaces in which we can build physical fitness and well-being. They provide families with unique opportunities to do healthful, vigorous activities together. They allow us opportunities for adventurous and challenging outdoor activities like camping, hiking, cycling, canoeing, swimming, snorkelling and mountaineering. They are perfect venues for contemplative and creative activities, from wildlife watching, painting or journaling to just sitting and listening to the sound of a babbling brook or the wind in the trees.

All of these activities are vital, not just to our physical health, but to our full development as human beings. Protected areas are where we can clear our minds, challenge our stamina and self-reliance, and nurture our spirit. Protected areas inspire us to reach our potential.

Protected areas also help us recover our balance. Why are parks therapeutic? When we visit, we take ourselves out of our normal routine, allowing us to focus on our problems without distraction. The activities we do there—hiking, camping and so on—demand that we take initiative and responsibility for our actions. The results of those actions are immediate, and success usually requires cooperation with others. All these qualities help produce positive behaviours. Increasingly, they are seen as places where people can engage in healing activities.



More than 12 per cent of
all territorial area is
protected, up from
1 per cent 50 years ago.

WCPA promotes new kinds of thinking for new ways of protecting what we value

Indigenous and local communities manage places of high natural and cultural value. This creates mutual benefits for these communities and the natural environment.



Numerous protected areas now host outdoor behavioural health care programmes, such as self-discovery expeditions, addiction recovery regimes, and reflection/meditation sessions. These programmes are often aimed at troubled adolescents, but can target adults as well. Other programmes aim to connect parks with everyday health choices of the general public.

WCPA and equity

New kinds of thinking for new ways of protecting what we value

Protected areas support the best of human values, from art and aesthetics to mental and physical well-being, from family togetherness to medicines that heal disease. But historically, creation of protected areas often had negative impacts. Creating a park or reserve is not as simple as drawing lines on a map. People often live within those lines. Or they may use the area for culturally important activities or to obtain food. Establishment of a protected area usually has meant that at least some people were forced to leave their homes, forgo valuable traditional resources, or even surrender aspects of their cultural identity such as travelling to sacred sites.

WCPA is leading the way in promoting new models of protected areas management that emphasize close involvement of indigenous and other local communities, creating mutual benefits for people and protection of the natural



environment. The IUCN management categories system encourages governments to create many kinds of protected areas, each with a different level of resource protection and accommodation of human livelihood needs. Categories range from more strictly protected areas to newer designations that safeguard a host of cultural and natural resource values while allowing people to live and work in the protected area. The six categories include scientific/wilderness area, national park, natural monument, habitat/species management area, protected landscape/seascape, and managed resource protected area.

Not every protected area needs to exclude people—indeed many are the product of a human-nature interaction

and so depend on a resident human population to protect their values. Nor must they always be run by an official government agency. Effective protected areas are being created and run entirely by non-governmental organizations, private companies and by local communities themselves. Community-conserved areas are places with significant natural and cultural values that are voluntarily conserved by indigenous and local communities through customary restrictions. These alternative types of protected areas range from traditional indigenous territories to small areas such as nesting sites for culturally significant species or sacred groves. All of these places—some new, some age-old—can make direct contributions to the well-being of local communities that have too often borne

more than their fair share of the cost of conservation.

WCPA plays an important role in recognizing the validity and usefulness of all kinds of governance models. When combined with the six categories, variety in governance provides a rich set of possibilities for creating comprehensive systems of protected areas that minimize disruptions to existing communities.

WCPA takes seriously the moral responsibilities of our work. We acknowledge the injustices that have occurred in the name of protected area conservation, while remaining convinced of its immense benefits. We are committed to addressing past wrongs—for example, creating new co-management arrangements with displaced indigenous peoples—and to reducing future hardships brought about by the creation of protected areas.

Just knowing they exist

Protected areas—our legacy to the future of life

It is a remarkable fact that we do not have to visit protected areas in order to value them highly. In survey after survey, people say they are glad protected natural areas exist—even the ones that they will never have the chance to go to. This is known as existence value, and it has been documented among people from all walks of life, including urban dwellers. We place a value on the mere existence of protected areas



Protected areas
will be our legacy
to the future.

for two reasons: First, because we understand and support how protected areas are delivering, today and every day, so many valuable benefits. Second, because we are concerned about quality of life for our children and our children's children. We want them to enjoy the benefits provided by protected areas, including the opportunity to visit them if they so choose.

We have seen that protected areas provide a host of benefits that enrich our lives here and now. But perhaps the most powerful argument for creating and supporting protected areas is that they are solid investments in hope—which is to say, in life itself. The human spirit will be extinguished if we ever lose hope for a better future. Protected areas are our legacy, our commitment to making sure that the majesty of life on planet Earth never dies.

WCPA in action

Promoting the values of protected areas via a global volunteer network

WCPA, the World Commission on Protected Areas, is the world's premier network of protected area expertise. We are one of six commissions within IUCN, the International Union for Conservation of Nature. Our global volunteer network has more than 1,500 members from 148 countries. Many are senior-level professionals in park administration, scientific research, resource management, and similar occupations. WCPA works jointly with the IUCN Programme on Protected Areas.



Our mission is to promote the establishment and effective management of a worldwide representative network of terrestrial and marine protected areas. For 50 years, we have provided leadership by:

- Convening the global constituency for protected areas, mainly through the World Parks Congresses, held every 10 years to address global issues
- Developing capacity for working at the regional and national level
- Working with global conventions, especially the World Heritage Convention and the Convention on Biological Diversity

- Setting standards, improving data and developing the protected areas management categories system
- Promoting effective management of protected areas

More than 12 per cent of the world's territorial area is under some form of protection, although barely 1 per cent of the sea. And not all these are as yet properly implemented or managed. Protected areas exist in an astonishing variety—in terms of their size, the types of habitats they contain, their location, who owns and manages them and what they have been set up to protect.

For more information on protected areas go to www.iucn.org/wcpa

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