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CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES: PROGRESS REPORTS ON IMPLEMENTATION

Assessing the status of the world's protected areas

Note by the Executive Secretary

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The present note, which is being circulated for the information of participants at the sixth meeting of the Conference of the Parties), is intended to supplement the Executive Secretary's progress report on identification, monitoring, indicators and assessments, contained in document UNEP/CBD/COP/6/12. This note, which describes a planned assessment of the status of the world's protected areas, is prepared in response to decision V/20 of the Conference of the Parties and recommendation VI/5 of the Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice (SBSTTA) on the issue of scientific assessments.

2. The note has also been prepared in the knowledge that the Conference of Parties will consider protected areas in depth at its seventh meeting in 2004 (decision IV/16 of the Conference of Parties) and is expected to recommend that protected areas be taken as the main theme at the ninth meeting of SBSTTA. The proposed assessment project described in this note will provide important input for the preparatory process for considering the issue of protected areas at the seventh meeting of the Conference of the Parties, as indicated in section III of the note by the Executive Secretary on preparations for the seventh meeting of the Conference of the Parties (UNEP/CBD/COP/6/2).

II. BACKGROUND

3. The contribution that protected areas make to the conservation of the world's natural and cultural resources is well recognized. Values range from the protection of representative samples of natural ecosystems and the preservation of biological diversity, to the maintenance of environmental services. Protected areas can also provide opportunities for rural development and effective use of marginal lands,

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research and monitoring, environmental education, and for recreation and tourism. As a result, most countries have developed systems of protected areas.

4. Supporting these national initiatives are a series of international conventions and programmes that designate or recognize specific sites for a range of purposes, and others which identify in general terms the importance of protected areas and promote their establishment and management. These conventions and programmes provide an international mandate for protected areas that is significant in ensuring the continued effectiveness of national efforts in protected areas establishment and management.

5. Recognizing the importance of protected areas as a conservation tool, protected area professionals meet every ten years to assess progress, to share experiences and to identify future needs. The Fifth World Parks Congress will take place in Durban, South Africa, in 2003, and a review of the status of the world's national and international protected area networks is a major item on the agenda. This congress, and the preparation for it, will provide significant input to the discussions on protected areas at the ninth meeting of SBSTTA and the seventh meeting of the Conference of the Parties.

6. It is essential to ensure that these key events have accurate information available on the current status of the world's protected area systems, as a basis for decision-making and priority setting. This includes those sites designated or recognised by international conventions and programmes.

II. PROPOSED ASSESSMENT

A. *Mandate and purpose*

7. The mandate for compiling this information and developing an assessment of the world's protected areas already exists. Recognizing the importance of protected areas, the United Nations Economic and Social Council requested the Secretary-General to compile and maintain a list of the world's national parks and equivalent reserves (resolutions 713 (XXVII) and 810 (XXXI)).

8. Since 1959, the *United Nations List* has been periodically compiled and published by IUCN, with the work being carried out since 1981 by the UNEP World Conservation Monitoring Centre working in collaboration with the IUCN World Commission on Protected Areas (WCPA).

9. It is proposed by UNEP-WCMC and WCPA that the next assessment is carried out in closer collaboration with other relevant United Nations organizations and the secretariats of both global and regional biodiversity-related treaties concerned with protected areas. The intended activities will deliver an assessment of the status of the world's protected areas, at the same time promoting the harmonisation of information management and reporting for those international agreements and programmes.

B. *Needs*

10. It is intended that this assessment project will address the following needs:

(a) Preparation of a *State of the Parks* report that will inform decision making at national and international levels, particularly through the World Parks Congress in 2003 and the seventh meeting of the Conference of the Parties;

(b) Compilation of an up-to-date and accurate list of the world's protected areas that meet certain criteria, including the objectives of the Convention, as a basis for other activities (implementing the mandate from the Economic and Social Council);

- (c) Review and quality control of the *World Database on Protected Area*, which is one of the core datasets managed by UNEP-WCMC and made publicly available through the Internet;
- (d) Development of mechanisms for increased harmonisation of information management and reporting for international agreements and programmes concerned with protected areas;
- (e) Ensuring greater stakeholder participation in the review and update of information on protected areas managed by UNEP.

C. Results

11. It is anticipated that the key results of the project would include:

- (a) Informed discussion and decision taking on protected areas in international forums including the World Parks Congress (2003) and the seventh meeting of the Conference of the Parties;
- (b) Improved compilation and quality control processes for information on protected areas at international levels, based on increased stakeholder involvement and taking into account the objectives of the Convention;
- (c) Public access to the definitive list of the worlds protected areas that meet certain internationally defined criteria;
- (d) Moves towards harmonization of information management and reporting with respect to sites recognised by international agreements and programmes;
- (e) Comparative information on nationally and internationally designated sites that will help inform national planning and decision-making.

D. Assumptions to achieve results

12. The process of compiling the information required involves input from a large number of organisations working at different levels and jurisdictions, from national and sub-national protected area agencies to convention secretariats and United Nations offices. Success in achieving results very much depends on the level of response to the requests for information.

13. Experience suggests that the response can be poor, because requests are often not given the level of priority that might be expected. This has led to variability in the quality of information provided by protected area agencies. In order to deal with this, the following actions will be incorporated into the new assessment project:

- (a) Information collection and quality control procedures are being defined and agreed by the wider community of protected area experts through WCPA;
- (b) Increased liaison and interaction with international agreement and programme secretariats is being incorporated, in order to ensure that the assessment is meeting their needs;
- (c) The primary product of the process is being delivered as a *State of the Parks* report to which the list is appended, rather than in list format, therefore ensuring a more practically useful product;

(d) The process of information collection and processing will be decentralised as far as possible, working with regional organisations, as appropriate, to avoid duplication and to ensure that wherever possible their needs are built into the process.

E. Outputs

14. The primary outputs of the assessment project will be:

(a) A *State of the Parks* report based on the information compiled, which will be presented at the World Parks Congress in 2003, and provide a major input to discussion at the ninth meeting of SBSTTA and the seventh meeting of the Conference of the Parties;

(b) The *2003 United Nations List of Protected Areas* in both published (paper and CD-ROM) and Internet forms, incorporating summary information and analysis to support decision making, as well as the list itself;

(c) Significant update and improvement to the *World Database on Protected Areas* managed by UNEP-WCMC as a core dataset, which is publicly available over the Internet, and supports other assessment processes such as the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment.

(d) Review of the information and reporting needs of international agreements and programmes as they relate to protected areas, and a *State of the Parks* report and *United Nations List* that respond to those needs;

(e) Recommendations for the future streamlining and harmonization of information management and reporting needs of international agreements and programmes as they relate to protected areas.

F. Implementation

15. The assessment project could be coordinated by the Executive Secretary and UNEP-WCMC with the support and advice of the IUCN World Commission on Protected Areas. This will include the following activities:

- (a) Preparation of work plans, guidelines and procedures;
- (b) Liaison with United Nations bodies and international agreement and programme secretariats;
- (c) Liaison with national and regional organizations;
- (d) Liaison with non-governmental organizations internationally operating;
- (e) Liaison with other relevant assessment programmes;
- (f) Information compilation from national and international agencies, and data entry;
- (g) Review and quality control;
- (h) Analysis, synthesis and drafting;

- (i) Publication in printed, CD-ROM and interactive online formats;
- (j) Dissemination and presentation of outputs.
