



WPC Recommendation 13

Cultural and Spiritual Values of Protected Areas

The establishment of protected areas is the result of conscious choices of human societies to conserve nature, biodiversity and areas of special cultural value and significance.

Individuals and communities often use protected areas for spiritual reasons, because they inspire and heal them and/or provide them with a place for peace, education and communion with the natural world.

Many transboundary protected areas have already been promoted and managed as areas for peace and cooperation, thus adding a tangible and valuable dimension of peace-building among peoples, nations and communities.

Protected areas serve as fundamental tools for conservation of nature, and thus are an expression of the highest desires and commitments of humankind for the preservation of life on the planet, and that as such, those areas constitute places of deep reverence and ethical realization.

Many societies, especially indigenous and traditional peoples, recognise sacred places and engage in traditional practices for the protection of geographical areas, nature, ecosystems, or species, as an expression of societal or cultural choice and of their worldview of the sacredness of nature and its inextricable links with culture. They also recognise sacred places as a unique source of knowledge and understanding of their own culture thus providing what could be considered the equivalent of a university.

Sacred places are revered and cared for by indigenous and traditional peoples and are a fundamental part of their territories, bringing significant benefits to local, national, and global communities. In some cases, they are seeking to have them recognised as part of existing protected areas systems.

With these points in mind participants in the Session entitled “Building Cultural Support for Protected Areas” held in the Building Broader Support Workshop Stream, recommended that all protected area systems, recognise and incorporate spiritual values of protected areas and culture-based approaches to conservation.

Therefore, PARTICIPANTS in the Stream on Building Broader Support for Protected Areas at the Vth World Parks Congress, in Durban, South Africa (8-17 September 2003):

1. ACKNOWLEDGE indigenous peoples’ internationally guaranteed rights to, among others, own and control their sacred places, their archaeological and cultural heritage, ceremonial

objects and human remains contained in museums or collections within or adjacent to protected areas. These include the following rights to:

- a. DEFINE and name their sacred places and objects, ancestral remains and archaeological, cultural and intellectual heritage and to have such designations respected as authoritative;
 - b. Where relevant, MAINTAIN secrecy about and enjoy privacy in relation to their heritage, objects, remains and places as described above;
 - c. RESTITUTION of sacred places, heritage, objects and remains taken without their free and informed consent;
 - d. FREELY EXERCISE their ceremonies, religious and spiritual practices in the manner to which they are accustomed;
 - e. GATHER, collect or harvest flora, fauna and other natural resources used in ceremonies and practices that take place at sacred places or archaeological and cultural heritage places; and
 - f. MAINTAIN their responsibilities to their ancestors and future generations;
2. THEREFORE RECOMMEND that international institutions, governments, protected area authorities, NGOs, churches, user and interest groups fully recognise and respect the above-mentioned rights in relation to conservation activities;
3. RECOMMEND governments to:
- a. PROMOTE and adopt laws and policies that foster multi-cultural values and approaches to protected area systems;
 - b. PROMOTE and adopt laws and policies that acknowledge the importance of sacred places, particularly those of indigenous and traditional peoples, as valuable for biodiversity conservation and ecosystem management;
 - c. ADOPT and enforce laws and policies with the full and effective participation and consent of peoples and communities concerned, which protect the integrity of sacred places;
 - d. ADOPT and enforce laws and policies that guarantee the restitution of sacred places as well as effective control and decision-making processes by local communities and indigenous peoples;
 - e. PROMOTE and adopt laws and policies, which recognise the effectiveness of innovative governance models such as

Community Conserved Areas of indigenous peoples and local communities to ensure control and adequate protection over sacred areas;

- f. PROMOTE and implement effective action to support community protection efforts in areas of cultural and spiritual importance including sacred places; and
 - g. ADOPT and enforce policies and legal measures, which respect customary use and management of sacred places and ensure access for traditional practitioners in protected areas;
4. FURTHER RECOMMEND governments, NGOs, local communities and civil society to:
- a. ENSURE that protected area systems, protected area designation, objective setting, management planning, zoning and training of managers, especially at the local level, give balanced attention to the full spectrum of material, cultural and spiritual values;
 - b. ASSIST indigenous and traditional peoples in obtaining legal and technical support related to protection of their sacred places when requested and in a manner that respects their rights and interests; and
 - c. DEVELOP and implement public education and media campaigns to raise awareness and respect for cultural and spiritual values and, in particular, sacred places;
5. REQUEST protected area managers to:
- a. IDENTIFY and recognize sacred places within their protected areas, with the participation and informed consent of those who revere such places, and to actively involve them in decisions regarding management and protection of their sacred places;
 - b. PROMOTE inter-cultural dialogue and conflict resolution with indigenous peoples, local communities and other actors interested in conservation;
 - c. SUPPORT the efforts of such communities to maintain their cultural and spiritual values and practices related to protected areas; and
 - d. PROMOTE the use of indigenous languages in these matters;
6. RECOGNIZING the importance of cultural and spiritual values in all protected area categories, request the IUCN to review the 1994 Protected Area Category Guidelines with the aim of including these values as additional potential management objectives in categories where they are currently excluded; and

7. REQUEST the World Commission on Protected Areas of IUCN and its members to plan and implement actions within the protected areas component of the IUCN Programme for supporting the application of the actions recommended above.

Stream: Building Broader Support for Protected Areas

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