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## A strategy of innovative approaches and recommendations for responding to climate change in the next decade

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### A promising future

Climate change is rapidly driving the world toward uncertain scenarios. Simultaneously, the urgent need for a rapid response has led to much greater public recognition of the vital role that resilient ecosystems – and the bevy of natural and cultural services they contribute – can play in mitigating and adapting to climate change. From this vantage point, Protected Areas (PAs) represent an investment in the world’s future as a matter of world security and as affordable and scalable solutions to leapfrog to more resilient ecosystems, societies and economies. At the same time, under a new climate change regime, some protected areas will end up with very different habitat and species assemblages than they were initially designed to protect. Thus, the success of future conservation efforts will depend on innovative policy, planning and management approaches that enhance the application of resilient ecosystem-based approaches. In addition, the degree to which we can enhance the cooperation and coordination between stakeholders in the private, productive, social, media and governmental sectors WILL determines our ability to consolidate a significant increase in investment in protected areas systems as a practical beacon of hope for our new world climate context. To this end, it is crucial that we seize the opportunity to ensure that impending international negotiations and financial mechanisms in development, such as the Conference of the Parties 2015, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Green Climate Fund, fully recognize the value of resilient protected area systems. This would provide unprecedented prospects to advance on global scale responses for climate change mitigation and adaptation.

### The current situation

The ability of protected areas managers to respond to human-induced climate change and ocean acidification and the understanding of the crucial response options provided by protected areas systems have matured and strengthened since the last WPC in Durban, South Africa in 2003. Ten years ago, while there were many advocates speaking out about the seriousness of the issue, these voices largely existed only in the scientific communities. The effects of climate change seemed distant for many people – as something that may happen in the future but did not affect them personally. As a result, policy and management discussions about climate change were noticeably absent during the World Parks Congress in Durban.

Today, climate change is at the forefront of the minds of the world’s citizens. The manifestations of climate change – climate variability and climate extremes – are being felt locally and globally as extreme drought, hurricanes and storms, flooding, fire, and heat waves make headlines all over the world. It is clear that the public now sees climate change affecting them far more personally, and there has been a significant increase in our understanding of the importance of ecosystems – particularly protected area systems – and the many services they provide in absorbing extreme impacts from natural disasters, preserving continuity of cultural

identity, just to name a few.

At the same time, climate change is likely to exacerbate existing threats to the resilience and longevity of those same protected areas. So in order to continue to realize those benefits, protected area management must accommodate and adjust to ongoing and accelerating changes, which often will challenge traditional conservation assumptions, goals, and strategies. Concepts such as ecosystem connectivity, resilience, adaptation and blue and green carbon, which have the best chance of helping nature and people manage in this new world, are being converted into concrete actions by innovative countries, decision-makers, and climate change communicators in an effort to secure food and water supply and reduce climate change emissions. Governments, civil society and local communities are also increasingly integrating climate change resilience into their risk planning, security and peacekeeping strategies. Most importantly, those speaking out and addressing climate change are not just scientists or environmentalists; they are presidents, philanthropists, media moguls, venture capitalists, policymakers, investment firms, four-star generals, concerned parents, and young children. We must now utilize the UNFCCC and other upcoming venues to scale up the world's knowledge and ability to apply innovative approaches to securing protected areas to help people around the world meet the challenges of this new era.

## \*Recommendations for change

1. Countries should bring into the UNFCCC process and COP21 in 2015 outcome the full recognition of biodiversity, ecosystems and particularly protected areas as key to enable countries to adapt and mitigate to climate change.
2. All countries should mainstream the concept of "Protected areas as natural solutions to climate change" into national development plans, communication and financial strategies, for natural and social resilience.
3. Governments and relevant stakeholders should enhance adaptation and mitigation strategies within and outside protected area boundaries through carbon management, long term monitoring, and integrated landscape connectivity.
4. Protected areas must actively engage new thinking in planning and management to ensure equitable participation from society, including youth, women and indigenous and local communities, building on traditional knowledge and working together in finding solutions to climate change.
5. Protected areas should adopt and apply innovative, appropriate, and context-specific adaptation measures to ensure that in the face of transformative climatic change they can continue providing the full array of values, functions, and services for people and nature, including climate protection and disaster risk reduction.
6. New partnerships must be formed and strengthened within and beyond national boundaries to protect and connect landscapes and seascapes as they transform and adapt to climate; we especially must support coalitions in the polar regions, such as the Arctic Council and the Antarctic Treaty System because these areas are experiencing rapid change.

## \*Key partnerships needed

Local communities

Women, particularly in developing countries

Citizens and policy-makers alike

Youth and future generations

Worldwide park agencies and educators

Indigenous and traditional groups and affiliated with protected areas and the resources within them

Traditional and social media