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New UNEP Report Unveils World on Track to Meet 2020 Target for Protected Areas on Land and Sea

15.4 Per Cent of Terrestrial Areas, 3.4 Per Cent of Oceans Protected, but Further
Progress Needed to Cover and Effectively Manage Areas of Importance for
Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services

Sydney, 13 November 2014 – The world is on track to meet a 2020 target on the expansion of protected areas, but more work is needed to ensure areas of importance for biodiversity and ecosystem services are prioritized for protection under equitably managed conditions, according to a new United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) report released today at the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) World Parks Congress.

Produced by UNEP's World Conservation Monitoring Centre (WCMC) in partnership with IUCN, and funded by the Swiss Federal Office for the Environment (FOEN), *Protected Planet* not only monitors global efforts to support and expand protected areas, but supports governments toward faster progress with recommendations for action.

The report finds that 15.4 per cent of terrestrial and inland water areas and 3.4 per cent of the global ocean are now protected—highlighting growing global awareness of the need to safeguard the natural resources that will play a crucial role in the upcoming Sustainable Development Goals.

Protected areas are essential to the conservation of species, ecosystems and the livelihoods they support, and also play a key role in adapting to and mitigating the impacts of climate change—for example, by reducing risks from natural hazards and providing a carbon sink through forests, 7.8 million km² of which are in protected areas.

The report, the second in a series tracking progress toward meeting Target 11 of the Convention on Biological Diversity's Aichi Biodiversity Targets, finds that 1.6 million km² of new protected areas have been designated since 2012. Since 2010, the total additional global coverage equates to 6.1 million km²—an area approaching the size of Australia.

Target 11 calls for effectively and equitably managed conservation areas covering at least 17 per cent of the world's terrestrial areas and ten per cent of marine areas—especially areas of particular importance for biodiversity and ecosystem services—by 2020.

Protected Planet 2014 finds that the physical coverage aspect of the target is likely to be met, but highlights a lack of progress in other areas, such as: ensuring protected areas are appropriately

located in areas important for biodiversity and ecosystem services, are effectively and equitably managed, and are well-connected.

The report warns that without further concerted global action on appropriate targeting of areas to come under protection, integrated and improved national planning, and assessments of how protected areas are effectively and equitably managed, the overall target will not be met.

“Protected areas not only provide us with a vital ecological safety net but also play a vital economic role through the valuable ecosystem services they provide, from supplying water and timber, to sustaining tourism,” said UN Under-Secretary-General and UNEP Executive Director Achim Steiner. “As we work toward a comprehensive climate agreement, with the next meeting shortly taking place in Lima, and shape the post-2015 sustainable development agenda, it is crucial to expand protected areas in a targeted manner—thus supporting efforts to tackle climate change, and protecting biodiversity and the ecosystem services that sustain all of us.”

“This report shows that the will to do so is present,” he added. “We now need to build support and funding to ensure protected areas are effectively and equitably managed and cover enough important sites for biodiversity and ecosystem services—including marine protected areas.”

“Ten years ago, the IUCN World Parks Congress in Durban gave birth to the idea of global protected area targets,” says IUCN Director General Julia Marton-Lefèvre. “Today in Sydney, we are proud to launch the Protected Planet report, which shows how well we have advanced in reaching our goals.

We are committed to making sure that our promises are not empty. What we need to see behind those figures are protected areas that are well and equitably managed, healthy, strong and able to deliver the full range of benefits that are essential for the survival of biodiversity and the wellbeing of people around the world.”

The protected area coverage was calculated using the August 2014 version of the World Database on Protected Areas. The database underwent a major update in 2014, based on the overwhelmingly positive response to a CBD request for parties to the convention to submit an update to UNEP-WCMC to compile the UN List of Protected Areas. By August 2014, 124 countries had submitted new data and 15 were in the process of submitting.

Terrestrial protected area coverage has increased by about one million km² since 2010, 126,000 km² of which came since 2012. In total, 20.6 million km² of terrestrial and inland water areas are now covered. To cover 17 per cent of terrestrial and inland waters, 2.2 million additional km² of protected areas are needed.

Just over six million km² of marine protected areas have been added since 2010, with 1.5 million km² of this total coming since 2012. In total, 12 million km² of the global ocean is now covered.

While marine areas are lagging terrestrial areas in attaining the target, real progress has been made in areas within coastal waters and national jurisdiction—reaching coverage of 10.9 per cent and 8.4 per cent respectively.

However, only 0.25 per cent of seas beyond national jurisdiction are covered by marine protected areas, demonstrating a gap in conservation efforts and highlighting the urgent need to overcome challenges in establishing such areas where national governance systems do not exist.

To meet the ten per cent target in areas within national jurisdiction, a further 2.2 million km² of marine areas will be required. In addition, 21.5 million km² in the high seas need to be protected for the target of 10 per cent to be attained.

Recent increases at sea are mainly due to the establishment of huge areas in waters around Australia, New Caledonia and Britain's South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands. In 2014, New Caledonia designated all of its jurisdictional waters as a marine protected area, encompassing an area of about 1.2 million km², the largest protected area in the world.

If these areas were removed from the global marine statistics, coverage would be halved to only 1.8 per cent of the global ocean area and 4.4 per cent of jurisdictional waters.

Lack of progress in other areas

Protected Planet 2012 highlighted a raft of challenges revolving around management and governance of protected areas, and issued 13 recommendations on how to expand protected areas and better track progress.

Of the priority actions identified, only two were judged by *Protected Planet 2014* to have shown good progress: enhancing national reporting to the datasets used to track global progress, and accelerating the targeted expansion of the global protected area network in terrestrial, inland water and marine areas.

Limited progress was recorded on the other recommendations—which included calls for improved understanding of the benefits of protected areas in supporting biodiversity and ecosystem services, better funding, strengthening local community engagement, and improving the connectivity of protected areas and their integration into surrounding landscapes.

The lack of sustainable financing is a particular area of concern—even though previous UNEP studies have shown that the overall economic benefits of protected areas greatly exceed the cost of managing them.

The financial investment required to establish and effectively manage an expanded protected area network to cover important sites for all wildlife groups by 2020 was estimated in 2012 to be \$76.1 billion per year, the report says.

The report issued key messages and recommendations in these areas of concern to assist policy makers in ensuring the target 11 is fully met. These include:

Coverage of biodiversity and ecosystem services

In 2013, 22 per cent of Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas and 23 per cent of Alliance for Zero Extinction sites were completely covered by protected areas, and on average less than half of each site was protected. Targeted expansion of protected area networks is needed to include some of these and other key areas on the land, and especially the seas. In addition, coverage of most ecoregions and species is not sufficient. Having a protected area network that adequately covers all important aspects of biodiversity and ecosystems services will require more than 17 per cent of the land and 10 per cent of marine and coastal areas.

Effective management

Effectively managed protected areas conserve biodiversity and habitats. However, by 2013 only 29 per cent of the total area of nationally designated protected areas had been assessed for management effectiveness. Lack of effective management remains one of the largest problems facing the current global protected area system. More management effectiveness assessments, plus a greater focus on measuring biodiversity and social outcomes, are needed.

Equitable management

There is weak reporting and little available data on equitable management, both of which need to be strengthened to provide meaningful assessments of how equitable protected areas and other kinds of conservation areas are managed.

Connectivity

Available evidence on corridors indicates they have a positive conservation benefit. Despite a growing number of large connectivity projects, there is little knowledge of the level of connectivity between conservation areas across the wider landscapes and seascapes. Connectivity principles should be better incorporated into national planning and climate change adaptation programmes.

Benefits to people and nature

Protected areas deliver numerous benefits for people and nature and need to be recognized as a proven and cost-effective natural way to deal with global challenges such as water provision, food security, disaster-risk reduction, and climate change mitigation and adaptation. This should be fully acknowledged by integrating protected areas into national planning and decision-making processes across all sectors.

Role in the Sustainable Development Goals

Protected area coverage has been used as one of the indicators to track progress towards the Millennium Development Goals. Protected areas, as vital elements of the landscape and models of sustainable development, could play an important role in the establishment and monitoring of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). When the SDGs are agreed, the contribution of protected areas to each goal should be assessed to inform indicator development.

Notes to Editors: The full publication, Protected Planet Report 2014: Tracking progress towards global targets for protected areas is available at <http://wcmc.io/ProtectedPlanetReport2014>.

The UN List of Protected Areas is available here: <http://wcmc.io/2014UNListProtectedAreas> (ENG)

<http://wcmc.io/2014ListeUNAiresProtegees> (FRN)

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