

# **ITTO/IUCN International Workshop on Increasing the Effectiveness of Transboundary Conservation Areas in Tropical Forests**

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## **Transboundary Conservation and Protected Areas in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

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### **Summary**

In September this year, more than 2500 scientists and professionals from various agencies and institutions around the world, and across a wide range of sectors linked to biodiversity conservation, will gather in Durban, South Africa for the V<sup>th</sup> World Parks Congress (WPC). Since 1962, this 10-yearly event has had a crucial influence on the evolution of protected areas and their integration into development priorities at all levels – from local, national to global. The emergence of numerous strategies, approaches, and tools for enhancing the role of protected areas in biodiversity conservation has been spurred on by the last four WPCs, and indeed so has the impetus for high level political discourse that has resulted in various international conventions such as the World Heritage Convention. The V<sup>th</sup> WPC will be no exception to this trend, and clearly the issue of Transboundary Conservation Areas (TBCAs), though not entirely new to the Congress, offers one of the best opportunities for shaping a global biodiversity conservation agenda for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

With nearly 60,000 protected areas now in existence and dedicated to safeguarding biodiversity worldwide, it is prudent to assume that countries have made a tremendous effort in allocating portions of their sovereign territory to conservation. Even more important is the fact that most countries have set aside protected areas covering up to 10% of terrestrial biomes within their national boundaries, a target that was influenced by discussions at the 1982 WPC in Bali, Indonesia. Despite these tremendous achievements, global biodiversity loss in the 20<sup>th</sup> century was unprecedented, and even though hardly any major extinction was recorded, many more species were added to the 2000 IUCN Red List. Clearly, the existing global network of protected areas does not leave room for complacency if the goal of biodiversity conservation is to be advanced in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. There is need for more prudent and pragmatic thinking about how to strengthen existing areas in the face of global change, while at the same time trying to accommodate those elements of global biodiversity that are poorly represented.

Over the last few decades, an amazing amount of work has been done to mobilize scientific data on the occurrence and distribution of biodiversity around the world. These data have helped promote large-scale priority setting and conservation planning processes that focus on defining realistic targets at the level of ecosystems or biomes. An important lesson from these exercises has been the fact that, in order to fully accommodate the range of biodiversity targets and ecological processes supported within the ecosystem, as well as brace against the potential vagaries of global change conservation priorities must extend across national boundaries. This has helped promote landscape level conservation strategies such as the Ecosystem Approach, Bioregional Planning, and even Biosphere Reserves, all of which attempt to integrate biodiversity conservation into broader land use needs. TBCAs offer a unique opportunity for extending these approaches across borders, and calls for innovations in management effectiveness, governance, finance, providing benefits to communities, improving linkages in the landscape, and building public support

for protected areas. All of these will be addressed at the V<sup>th</sup> WPC to help establish a framework for decision-makers through high-level political forums such as the Convention of Biological Diversity (CBD) Conference of Parties and the New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD).

## **Introduction**

In September this year, more than 2500 scientists and professionals from various agencies and institutions around the world, and across a wide range of sectors linked to biodiversity conservation, will gather in Durban, South Africa for the V<sup>th</sup> World Parks Congress (WPC). Since 1962, this 10-yearly event has had a crucial influence on the evolution of protected areas and their integration into development priorities at all levels – from local, national to global. The emergence of numerous strategies, approaches, and tools for enhancing the role of protected areas in biodiversity conservation has been spurred on by the last four WPCs, and indeed so has the impetus for high level political discourse that has resulted in various international conventions such as the World Heritage Convention. The V<sup>th</sup> WPC will be no exception to this trend, and clearly the issue of Transboundary Conservation Areas (TBCAs), though not entirely new to the Congress, offers one of the best opportunities for shaping a global biodiversity conservation agenda for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

When I was approached to give this Keynote Address, the first thing I did was to look a bit into why the concept of TBCAs is so crucial for biodiversity conservation. The most obvious reason is the one that is commonplace knowledge for anyone involved in conservation – that *“ecosystems and species do not recognize political borders, which have usually been defined for historical and geo-political reasons, without reference to ecological functions or processes”*. And of course the creation of “Peace Parks” and Transboundary Protected Areas clearly makes sense in this regard, because the protected areas abut each other across borders.....so why not manage them as a unit, and for a good cause such as promoting a culture of peace and stability?

And this actually raises an important issue that I'll like to point out at this stage....how broadly is the concept of TBCAs being used? I noticed from the range of papers to be presented this week that TBCAs appear to be equated with Transboundary Protected Areas (TBPAs). If this is actually the case, then perhaps we should use this international workshop to reach consensus on a consistent definition. Given my own interest in putting protected areas within the context of broader landscapes, I have chosen to go with TBCAs because it does not restrict the conservation initiative to just those areas where protected areas are adjoining across national borders. TBCAs should apply even to areas where the PAs could be miles away from international borders, and yet fall within a landscape that makes sense for integrating biodiversity conservation efforts across those borders. I'll elaborate a bit more on the implication of this later in my presentation. Let me at this stage acknowledge the crucial role played by the IUCN and its World Commission on Protected Areas (WCPA) in promoting TBPAs through the “Parks for Peace” initiative. I am sure all of you here have seen the recent guide to TBPAs produced by the WCPA as part of its highly popular Guidelines series. More specifically in Africa, I should acknowledge leadership of the Peace Parks Foundation in promoting TBPAs in the Southern Africa region.

## **Protected Area challenges in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

As I continued to dig a bit deeper in my reading, it dawned on me that TBCAs are not merely a response to historical and geo-political constraints imposed on ecosystems and species. Rather, the concept is actually being influenced by an increasing need to scale-up biodiversity conservation from the single-site or so-

called “*trench warfare*” approach to increasingly larger landscapes. The fact is that scaling-up conservation is really the only way to maintain viable species populations and ecological processes over the long term. And surely, if those landscapes fall across geographical boundaries, then we are confronted with the reality of facing management across two or more jurisdictions, thereby posing an entirely new conservation challenge.

The growth of protected areas in the 20<sup>th</sup> century was truly remarkable. With nearly 60,000 protected areas now in existence and dedicated to safeguarding biodiversity worldwide, one can assert that countries have made a tremendous effort in allocating portions of their sovereign territory to conservation. Even more important is the fact that most countries have set aside protected areas covering up to 10% of terrestrial biomes within their national boundaries, a target that was first influenced by discussions at the 1982 WPC in Bali, Indonesia. Indeed protected areas still remain the single most important tool for safeguarding biodiversity around the world. Granted that most protected areas around the world are faced with a myriad of difficulties and management challenges, recent studies have shown that even just having them legally designated makes a huge difference for biodiversity conservation. In other words, “paper parks” are better than no parks at all.

Despite the tremendous achievements in protected area creation, global biodiversity loss in the 20<sup>th</sup> century was unprecedented. Although hardly any major extinction was recorded, many more species were added to the IUCN Red List at turn of the century. For example, in 1996, there were 5,205 threatened animal species on the Red List. That number increased to 5,435 species when the List was revised in 2000. Clearly, this means that the existing global network of protected areas does not leave room for complacency if the goal of biodiversity conservation is to be advanced in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Even more important is the obvious possibility that many threatened species are poorly represented in the existing global system of protected areas.

The fact is that the world is undergoing biophysical, demographical and institutional changes, which makes it increasingly difficult to focus exclusively on managing protected areas in a business as usual fashion – what I described earlier as “*trench warfare*”. Climate change is perhaps the most crucial with regard to impacts on biodiversity, and indeed various modeling exercises are predicting drastic changes in vegetation patterns over the next 50 years if current trends in global warming continue. Other models are predicting increase in domesticated land, which could potentially undermine vital life support processes at the ecosystem level. So merely holding on to our existing protected area systems is no longer practical in the long run, and may in fact become a potential source of their demise in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. There is need for more prudent and pragmatic thinking about how to strengthen the management of existing protected areas in the face of global change, while at the same time trying to accommodate those elements of biodiversity that are poorly represented in the global system.

### **Scaling-up Biodiversity Conservation**

Over the last few decades, an amazing amount of work has been done to mobilize scientific data on the occurrence and distribution of biodiversity around the world. These data have helped promote large-scale priority setting and conservation planning processes that focus on defining realistic targets at the level of ecosystems or biomes. In the last 10 years alone since the 1992 WPC in Caracas, Venezuela, at least three major global-scale processes led by international organizations have been published to help establish a worldwide agenda for conservation based on biodiversity data and information: BirdLife International's

*Endemic Bird Areas (EBAs)*, World Wildlife Fund's *Global 200 Ecoregions*, and Conservation International's *Global Biodiversity Hotspots*. An important lesson from these exercises has been the fact that, in order to fully accommodate the range of biodiversity targets and ecological processes supported within the ecosystem as well as brace against the potential vagaries of global change, conservation priorities must be scaled-up across larger landscapes. This has helped promote landscape level conservation strategies such as the Ecosystem Approach, Bioregional Planning, Biodiversity Corridors and even Biosphere Reserves, all of which attempt to integrate biodiversity conservation into broader land use needs.

None of these approaches are entirely new, however, and indeed landscape approaches have been pursued and written about extensively over the last two decades. It would be unfair to even attempt a review of the literature on these approaches in the time frame that I have, but suffice it to say that the theory and logic behind them has been relatively well thought through. Lessons from their application around the world suggest a range of initiatives that are top-down and government driven (international, regional), or bottom-up and grassroots driven. In both cases, the stakeholders come together to help harmonize the social and economic needs with the potential for natural resource management and biodiversity conservation. This is pretty much the basic tenet of TBCA initiatives. A crucial component that is often missing from these efforts, however, is an adequate characterization of the underlying biodiversity and ecosystem context, which often makes it difficult to set realistic conservation targets at the landscape level.

To fully address this crucial need, there has been an increasing move toward migrating the global scale priority-setting processes down to the level of ecosystems or ecoregions. For example, BirdLife International has employed the *Important Bird Area* process to identify site-specific priorities for safeguarding threatened and restricted range species within the larger EBAs. Similarly, Conservation International and World Wildlife Fund have promoted *regional priority-setting workshops* where scientists and decision-makers come together to build consensus on landscape-level priorities based on biological and socio-economic knowledge of a given Biodiversity Hotspot or Ecoregion.

### **Making TBCAs Work to Protect Global Biodiversity**

So what we have seen is an increasing focus on science-based approaches that helped establish a framework for biodiversity conservation across global, ecosystem, regional and landscape scales. By refining our understating of the underlying biodiversity, conservation targets become clearer and can be easily integrated into landscape approaches where management is pursued. Because of the increasing difficulty of bringing new areas under protection based solely on the "percentage" rule, biodiversity-based targets must become a sine qua non in the 21<sup>st</sup> century if we are to enhance coverage and representation of those elements that are missing from the existing system. TBCAs offer a unique opportunity for extending landscape approaches across borders, and a major emphasis must be placed on their importance for maximizing biodiversity representation and persistence. This will further engender the need for innovations in their management effectiveness, governance, finance, strategies for leveraging benefits to communities, improving link to other sectors in the landscape, and building public support for protected areas. To help set the stage for discussions that will happen at this very important workshop, let me briefly highlight a few crucial aspects of some of these issues.

- Throughout this presentation, I have emphasized the fact that TBCAs should be driven by the need to *build comprehensive protected area systems* that represent the full range of biodiversity within any given ecosystem or ecoregion. This means having some clearly defined conservation targets that are

either linked to species or ecological processes. For example, even in cases where protected areas abut one another across borders, we must assess how the conservation targets unique to each protected area will be affected by managing them as a unit. Indeed recent analysis has shown that there are at least 169 cases where one or more protected areas (666 in total) adjoin across international boundaries. Do these areas necessarily represent the best alternative for scaling-up conservation to improve coverage of biodiversity? I know that opportunism will always be good for conservation, and we should continue to take advantage of new TBCAs wherever the opportunities emerged. Nevertheless, we now have access to so much data and scientific tools to analyze them, that it no longer makes sense for the conservation community to rely exclusively on opportunism. As we shall see from the case studies that will be presented throughout this week, TBCAs are not an easy undertaking. In order to fully capture the value-added, the underlying biodiversity context must be fully articulated and rationalized before investing in the establishment of a TBCA. This may involve examining data on species distribution or movement patterns across borders, as well as other ecosystem processes. Why else should a TBCA be promoted if the same added value can be achieved by focusing on a landscape within a single country?

- Of course creation of a TBCA does not automatically imply or guarantee a conservation success. Since we are still dealing with “paper parks”, sooner or later someone out there is going to coin the phrase “paper TBCAs” to describe those that are merely a formality. The effective management of TBCAs will require clear harmonization of objectives across borders, which implies some degree of consistency in the priority challenges on either side of the border. For example, the occurrence of invasive species on one side of the border may not be a priority management issue for a TBCA unless the threat posed extends across the border into the neighboring country or countries. What if elephants from one side of the border suddenly take pleasure in raiding crops on the other side where small-scale agriculture is a priority land use around the TBCAs. Clearly, these challenges cannot be dealt with in isolation of a unified and integrated approach. How can such management innovations be fostered? What kinds of standards are needed for effective management of TBCAs to ensure that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts?
- Which brings up the issue of governance. Given the usual dilemma of political and legal differences from one country to another, progress with TBCAs will increasingly depend on the degree to which institutions are willing to operate under a common framework that is consistent across borders. For example, poachers might be prepared to risk getting caught on a particular side of the border if the prosecution process is weak in that country. What are the potential implications if such poachers were to be prosecuted in the other country where the process is more efficient? Or is it in fact realistic for this to happen? Another issue related to governance is the need for innovative partnerships in management. Although TBCAs are often government controlled, the potential for leveraging economic benefits will depend on the extent to which other stakeholders, such as local communities and the private sector are engaged. The potential for leveraging benefits from TBCAs has been touted as one of the greatest advantages for creating them, and this certainly needs to be closely examined to ensure that it does not become a panacea especially in tropical forest ecosystems where such economic potentials remain poorly developed even at the level of individual protected areas.
- Capacity development is a crucial need for TBCAs if the relevant innovations necessary for their management are to be met. One of the greatest difficulties with scaling-up conservation is the need to

refocus the thinking and management style of park managers. To them the concept of scaling-up simply implies the spatial increase in relevant conservation targets, which then requires them to equally increase their workload. On the contrary, landscape approaches simply call for shared responsibility and environmental stewardship involving all stakeholders and sectors operating within the landscape. The traditional park manager is one that focuses exclusively on protecting the park from the boundary inward, which means everything or everyone beyond the boundary is the enemy. Such thinking no longer has a place in conservation at a time when non-anthropogenic threats are becoming even more important. For TBCAs to work, innovation in park management should emphasize the transformation of core competencies and skills that are necessary for working beyond park boundaries.

### **Conclusion – TBCAs and the V<sup>th</sup> World Parks Congress**

All of these issues will be addressed at the V<sup>th</sup> WPC as part of the technical workshop sessions, which comprise seven main streams and three crosscutting streams. Like all the other four congresses, the V<sup>th</sup> WPC will help establish a framework for decision-makers through high-level political forums such as the Convention of Biological Diversity (CBD) Conference of Parties and the New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD). This workshop on TBCAs is therefore a great opportunity to synthesize lessons learnt from implementing them around the world so that a very refined and strategic agenda can be developed for review at the congress. The theme of the V<sup>th</sup> WPC is Benefits beyond Boundaries, which is clearly consistent with the vision of TBCAs that seek to integrate protected areas across landscapes.

In conclusion, let me throw out a proposal for this workshop to consider as part of the targeted recommendations to be delivered in Durban. And that is, should TBCAs be accorded a special category or recognition by the IUCN as a way of acknowledging their global significance in the 21<sup>st</sup> century? If nothing else, it will definitely help raise their profile to a new level and pose a meaningful challenge for governments around the world as we work toward building a comprehensive global protected area system.

Let me close by saying that I am very delighted to be part of this workshop, which has indeed brought together a superb group of experts from around the world. On behalf of my institution, Conservation International and the IUCN World Commission on Protected Areas, I thank the organizers for giving me the privilege and opportunity to share my views in this keynote address. I look forward to working with you all over the next few days, and certainly hope to see you all again in Durban.