

# Co-managed Protected Areas – From Conflict to Collaboration: Experience in Bwindi Impenetrable National Park, Uganda

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## Abstract

The paper describes the governance trends for Bwindi Forest stretching back to the colonial period. The different management regimes and the associated management styles do reflect a lot on the current governance of the protected area and the resources therein.

Community conservation and collaborative management as they are practised around Bwindi Impenetrable National Park and any other protected areas in Uganda today do not achieve democratic governance of natural resources<sup>1</sup>. This paper describes some of the field experiences that support this statement and attempts to explain why this situation prevails. The paper looks at how the international and national interest in promoting non-state bodies in environmental and natural resources management have greatly influenced community attitudes and expectations on natural resource management. The paper discusses the issue of performance of local institutions in the governance of Bwindi Impenetrable National Park.

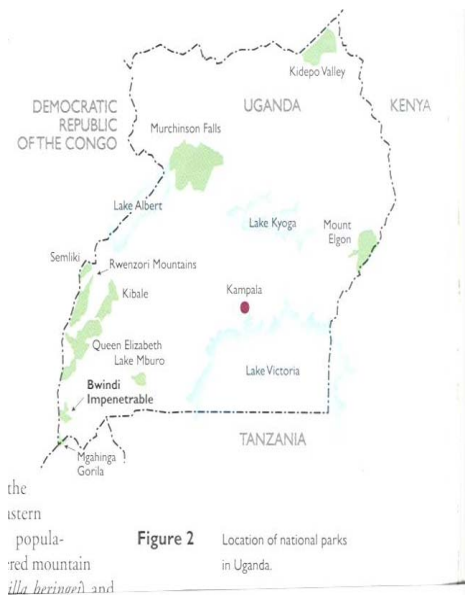
## Introduction

The southwest region of Uganda is endowed with a vast range of ecosystems, ranging from savannah grasslands to high altitude wetlands to alpine vegetation. The high biodiversity in these ecosystems, including endangered species such as the mountain gorilla (*Gorilla gorilla beringei*), has made this region a focal conservation area. There are five National Parks and four Central Forest Reserves. Bwindi Impenetrable National Park and Mgahinga Gorilla National Park are two of the remaining areas of intact and relatively undisturbed afro-montane forest in southwest Uganda. The other one is Echuya Central Forest Reserve.

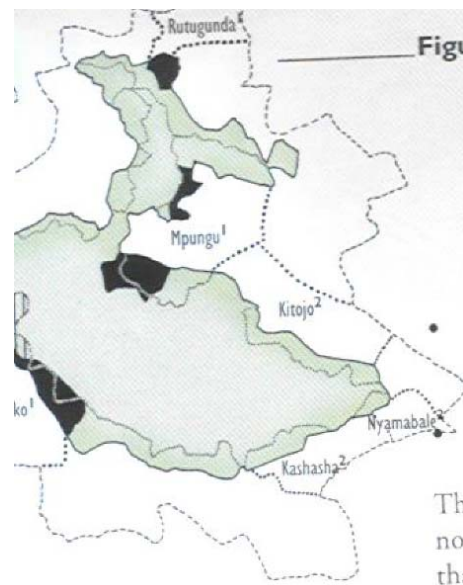


Bwindi Impenetrable National Park is the largest of the three afro-montane forests, with a total area of 330.8 km<sup>2</sup>. It is the home of about 330 mountain gorillas, half of the total world population.

**Map 1 Uganda's National Parks**



**Map 2 Bwindi Impenetrable National Park**



## **Governance/management trends**

Prior to 1932, Bwindi Forest was without marked boundaries and was managed and controlled by local communities. In 1932 the colonial government gazetted Bwindi Impenetrable Forest Reserve with clearly marked boundaries. Management of the forest reserve was vested with the colonial government and communities had to seek permission to access forest resources in the reserve. Hunting and cultivation was still carried on inside the reserve<sup>2</sup>. In 1964 the post-colonial government declared the forest reserve a game sanctuary. From 1964 to 1991, Bwindi Impenetrable Forest was managed as both a forest reserve under the Forest Department and a game sanctuary under the Game Department. Local communities sought permits to collect a number of forest products, including timber in the case of those who could buy licenses from the Forest Department. Hunting was banned. This dual management regime period was characterised by conflicts between the Forest and Game Departments on one hand and between these departments, especially the Game department, and the local communities on the other. During the last half of the 1980s, the European Economic Community (EEC) funded a Forest Department effort to streamline management of Bwindi Forest Reserve. During the same period, WWF implemented a USAID funded project, the Impenetrable Forest Conservation Project (IFCP) that supported a Game Department effort to improve the conservation of wildlife in Bwindi Game Sanctuary, with emphasis on the primate populations and the Mountain Gorilla in particular. In 1988 the development organisation CARE International, in collaboration with WWF, came on board to implement a development extension and conservation project for the communities living adjacent to Bwindi forest. The coming on board of these key actors greatly influenced the course of governance systems in Bwindi Forest.

In 1991 Bwindi Forest Reserve and Game Sanctuary was gazetted as Bwindi Impenetrable National Park (BINP). This brought the forest under a new management regime that was in many

aspects different from the previous two regimes. Following the gazettement of the forest as a national park, community access to the PA and use of its resources was stopped overnight. Entrance to the park without permission from the park management and use or extraction of any forest resources by community members was henceforth illegal. Serious conflicts then emerged between the PA management and the local communities on one hand and PA management and local governments on the other. These conflicts led to increased illegal activities and arson (deliberate fires) in the park.

The management approaches in and around Bwindi forest described above had significant impacts on the behaviour and attitudes of the local communities living adjacent to the forest. The management approaches following the gazettement of Bwindi Forest greatly contributed to a de-linking process that alienated local communities from the forest. People felt complete ownership of Bwindi Forest during the pre-gazetted era (prior to 1932) when the management was under the customary leadership. It is during this era that the people felt the forest was completely “theirs” because there was no management and control from outside the community<sup>3</sup>. Increasing population and hence demand for more agricultural land was the noted threat to this ownership.

The gazettement (1932) and subsequent boundary marking (1938) without the participation of the local people started the de-linking process, as the new management undermined the traditional customary leadership. This era marked the onset of the state-sanctioned resource regime and the reduction of community control over the forest<sup>4</sup>.

The declaration of Bwindi Forest as a national park in 1991, tied as it was to the introduction of stringent policing, denial of access to paths through the park, stoppage of resource uses and the prominent role played by foreigners in the whole process, was the apex of the de-linking process. The Batwa, the indigenous pygmy people who had predominantly depended on the forest for their survival, have been adversely affected by this regime change.

Beginning in 1992, BINP management, with support from WWF/Institute of Tropical Forest Conservation (ITFC), UNESCO/People and Plants Initiative, International Gorilla Conservation Programme (IGCP), World Bank/GEF, Mgahinga Bwindi Impenetrable Forest Conservation Trust (MBIFCT), and CARE International, embarked on trying out various management initiatives geared at improving the conservation of Bwindi Park through good governance. The initiatives included training of park staff, training of national researchers, research and ecological monitoring to generate data for management, a gorilla tourism and revenue sharing programme and community conservation programmes. These initiatives created various entry points for local communities and local governments to actively participate in the management of the PA and the resources therein. The above mentioned and indeed other actors eventually constituted a team of stakeholders with varying powers, capabilities and influences on the management of BINP. These actors and their activities demanded co-ordination to ensure harmony and a shared responsibility in the management of BINP. Uganda National Parks (now Uganda Wildlife Authority) sanctioned, on recommendations from key stakeholders, the piloting of collaborative management in BINP starting with a few initiatives, notably multiple use.

## Collaborative management

The mission of Uganda Wildlife Authority (UWA) is to conserve and sustainably manage the wildlife and PAs of Uganda in partnership with neighbouring communities and other stakeholders for the benefit of the people of Uganda and the global community

Strategic Programme 5 in UWA's Strategic Plan 2002 – 2007, is Collaborative Management<sup>5</sup>. It is cited as one of the strongest approaches that could be used to secure better management and protection of PAs. Collaborative management in UWA relates to management of wildlife and PAs, or parts thereof, in collaboration with strategic partners. The strategic partners identified by UWA include local communities, the private sector, NGOs, local governments, other governments agencies in the natural resources sector, PA authorities in neighbouring countries and international treaty organisations.

As discussed earlier, the de-linking processes caused by the changes in management regimes resulted in serious conflict between local communities and the forest management. The declaration of Bwindi National Park in 1991 was the climax of this process, and this put a demand on the organizations working with local stakeholders, namely ITFC and CARE, to seek approaches, opportunities and the potential to mitigate this conflict. These efforts were boosted when the Board of Trustees of the Uganda National Parks (now UWA) granted permission to Bwindi Impenetrable National Park management and supporting partners to formulate arrangements with communities to allow beekeepers, on a pilot basis, to resume beekeeping activities inside the park. This activity started in 1992. Moreover, in early 1992, Cunningham<sup>6</sup> carried out an ethnobotanical survey in Bwindi to examine species ecology and botanically



identify the plant species used by local communities. Recommendations of this survey included the establishment of low impact, specialist resource use from multiple use zones inside BINP and the provision of substitutes for high impact, general uses of forest resources on farms outside. Based on the results and recommendations of the survey, in 1993 Uganda National Parks headquarters gave permission to begin a process of establishing an extractive resource use programme, later coded multiple use, to allow communities to access medicinal plants, basketry materials, bamboo rhizomes and seedlings of indigenous tree species to plant on farms and foot access to spiritual and cultural sites.

Multiple use served as the entry point for collaborative management in Bwindi Park. After nine months of forest surveys and discussions/negotiations, the first memorandum of understanding (MoU) between Uganda National Parks and the community of Mpungu Parish was signed, formally launching the piloting of collaborative management for the peripheral parts of the park, covering 20% of the total forest area. Subsequently two other MoUs with two other parishes (Nteko and Rutugunda) were signed. The collaborative management/multiple use programme is now operating in fifteen out of twenty two parishes bordering BINP. Following the fairly successful piloting of community resource use agreements in Bwindi Impenetrable National Park, the Uganda Wildlife Statute was formulated to include legal provisions for “regulated resource extraction” from national parks. Recognised resource use programmes are currently in operation in six out of eleven national parks in Uganda.

The “multiple use” programme/collaborative management in Bwindi Impenetrable National Park has been documented by Wild and Mutebi (1996) and has been appraised by three external reviews (Worah 2001, Davey et al 2001 and more recently Blomley 2003). Positive attributes of the programme include regulated resource use by around 390 households for forest products and an additional 350 registered beekeepers who care for bees and harvest honey from hives set in the park (Worah 2001). The local benefits in terms of subsistence (fibres and vines for basketry and crafts, medicinal plants for local use, access to cultural sites, etc.) are undisputed. In addition, many local resource users attach high value to the fact that they can now enter the forest unchallenged by park staff – whereas previously this was an offence punishable by law. (Namar and Nsabagasani 2003) It also is apparent that negotiations around resource use and access undertaken in the early 1990s had broader implications in that they began to open lines of communication between park authorities and local communities at a time of deep mistrust and hostility (Worah, 2001).



Nevertheless, a close look at key aspects, such as the actual tangible benefits to the local communities and the power relations between the community institutions and the protected area management may demonstrate the down side of collaborative management/multiple use. The communities claim that they got a raw deal in the MoUs. The list of non-timber forest products was very conservative, both in number of species/products and the amounts allowed for extraction. This was, among other things, due to the power relationships between the negotiating parties. It was, to say the least, a parent – child relationship. On one hand, the protected area managers, representing central government, were conversant with laws, regulations and the policies of UWA. On the other, local community members, largely illiterate, were unaware of their rights or responsibilities and referred to the process as negotiations by the park managers and their supporting partners. This manifested itself in the negotiation process by the park staff adopting a stance of negotiating from a “position of strength” rather than entering into open-ended negotiations, with compromises made on both sides. The quality of the process was limited by the willingness of park management to concede (or even discuss) access to resources of any significant value (Blomley 2003). The outcome of the negotiations, therefore, has been agreements which provide a limited number of resources, to a limited number of people, but with significant reciprocal responsibilities placed on the shoulders of local communities, including patrolling for illegal activities, reporting law breakers within the community to park staff, assisting in extinguishing forest fires as well as maintenance of detailed records (Blomely and Namara 2003). This then raises the question as to whether resource use is a privilege that can be granted or withdrawn by Uganda Wildlife Authority, or is a right that local communities can demand and are entitled to? In BINP, multiple use is largely perceived as a privilege delegated to the local communities. This may be highlighted by the situation in Nteko Parish where BINP management told the people to choose between multiple use, which has been running since 1994, and gorilla tourism, which is proposed to start sometime this year. To the poor forest resource dependent people, such a position on the part of UWA/BINP management reflects a lack of commitment to the multiple use/collaborative management process.

Current reports and general observations indicate that fewer registered users (other than bee keepers) now go to the forest to harvest registered resources. Yet communities in parishes where MoUs have not been negotiated are demanding that PA management start the negotiation process. There is a need to establish why this trend exists.

Community conservation activities in and around Bwindi national park are evolving rapidly, probably due to the fairly well established Community Conservation Section of BINP management and the number of NGOs and conservation agencies supporting the community conservation programmes.

## **Powers and the associated organisational/institutional alignment**

“They chased us local people from the forest after it was sold to *Bazungu* (white people)”<sup>7</sup>. This view, which was held by the majority of the community members around Bwindi forest, describes the power relations between the local community and the government/ UWA in the governance of the protected area. Though community members recognise the efforts UWA/BINP management is making to solicit and improve people’s participation in the management of Bwindi Forest, the people feel “powerless” before the PA management.

According to established policy, local governments are responsible for management of vermin on public and private land. They are expected to seek technical support from UWA and the management of the relevant PA. UWA and BINP management have often consulted local governments and involved them in planning for the management of BINP, particularly concerning the revenue sharing programme and problem animal control. And local governments have on a few occasions engaged UWA/BINP, such as when Kisoro District pressed for construction of the Ntebeko – Buhoma access road and Nteko community questioned the threat of scabies disease transmission from gorillas to humans. . For the most part, however, local governments feel their participation in the management of PA’s, which are controlled by the Central government, is an optional and unwarranted diversion of their meagre resources.

Supporting NGOs and International conservation agencies do heavily impact on the management of BINP at local, national and international levels. Key park programmes have been designed (at least initially) and implemented by these organisations. Mountain gorilla tourism and the revenue sharing programme were designed and piloted by International Gorilla Conservation Programme, IGCP. BINP management has since taken over this programme, but IGCP still provides logistical and technical support. CARE’s Development Through Conservation project took the lead in the design and piloting of the Collaborative Management process initiatives, such as training of park staff, developing the multiple use programme, developing the Community Protected Areas Committee (described below), and problem animal control. BINP management has now taken over full implementation of these programmes. These organisations, because of the resources they control, have greatly influenced, in most instances positively, the course of events in and around BINP. However, due to lack of operational policy and guiding principles in the early stages of engagement, there was a poorly coordinated working environment between BINP and the NGO community. This resulted in forms of “competition” between the NGOs, leading to duplication of efforts, and sometimes BINP management claimed they were not in control of

some of the projects implemented by the NGOs. The good news is that UWA has now developed a set of policy guidelines, for instance on revenue sharing, community-protected area institutions and collaborative management. UWA has drafted a policy to co-ordinate and guide the efforts of different stakeholders towards PAs management and conservation – The Strategic Partnership Policy<sup>8</sup>. These policies and associated strategies will help to develop a framework within which partnerships can be developed and operationalised and partners can hold one another accountable.

The supporting NGOs and institutions have greatly supported various processes geared toward developing the capacity of individual community members and formal and non-formal institutions to participate in natural resources management. For instance ITFC has involved local “experts” in research and monitoring, thus demystifying science and enabling local resource users to appreciate role of ecological monitoring in BINP.

## **Performance of local institutions in governance of BINP**

Establishment of local natural resource management institutions has been viewed as a critical requirement for community involvement in conservation. The development of local institutions and of mechanisms to enable these institutions to meet legitimate local socio-economic and conservation needs has taken a firm ground in UWA management in general and in BINP management in particular. The process of developing local institutions for collaboration in the management of BINP began in 1996. First a number of field meetings and training workshops for members of local government (at the Local Council II level of government) for all the twenty two parishes immediately adjacent to the park boundary. Then local government units called Production and Environment Committees (PECs)<sup>9</sup> elected representatives, on a parish basis, to the Community Protected Areas Committee (CPAC). This body is intended to ensure that PA management issues arising at the community level are hooked into the local government system, hence building in accountability mechanisms. CPAC also performs a watchdog function by checking and reporting on excessive behaviour of park staff and the performance of resource user groups. Because BINP cuts across district boundaries (Kisoro, Kabala and Kanungu), the inter-district nature of this institution makes it unique in a context where district local governments, both at sub-county and district levels, emphasize their autonomy and independence. This Bwindi CPAC model has since been adopted, with modifications, as the template for Community Protected Area Institutions (CPIs) as called for by the UWA Community Protected Areas Institution policy (UWA 2000b). CPIs are the primary mechanism for realizing community participation in wildlife management in Uganda.

Experience from the field reveals that CPAC has had limited success in the roles described above. To date, CPAC has only been able to report back to communities the amount of revenue sharing money the PA management is availing for community projects. Given that environment and conservation issues rank low on the priority lists of district and other lower levels of local government, it is rare that any conservation policy issues ever come up for discussion during local council meetings. The low levels of legal literacy and knowledge of local community user rights exhibited by PEC/CPAC members undermine the capacity of CPAC as an institution to hold UWA and local government accountable to the local communities. Whereas CPAC

members say they know their roles and power, they claim that they are surrogates of the PA managers and district administrators due to lack of financial resources.

The local community institutions, as indeed the community conservation programme, focus on the parishes immediately adjacent to the boundary of the park and those lying “second deep”, although it is likely that communities beyond the second deep parishes are affected by and affect the park to a significant level. This situation has to some extent undermined the legitimacy and hence the impact of the operations of these institutions at the sub-county (Local Council III) and district (Local Council V) levels. Local governments at these levels claim there are no incentives for their participation in PA management in general and in CPI issues in particular. They claim UWA has relegated responsibilities to local government and local communities without the matching resources, namely funds and skills.

The CPIs represent an evolution of an earlier institutional formation – the Park Management Advisory Committee that was initiated in the early 1990s by Uganda National Parks. This institution drew membership from local communities bordering the park (but had no deliberate linkages to local government) and was principally created to advise park management on community matters. Funded directly by park management, it was criticised for being non-representative and having limited powers beyond a broad advisory or consultative role.

Other community institutions are the Multiple use User Groups (RUGs), such as Beekeepers’ Associations and Herbalists Associations, and the Traditional Local Leaders’ Associations, such as the Stretcher Societies (*Ebibina by ’engozi*). These institutions are community bred and do influence the activities of individual community members on a day-to-day basis.

## **Conclusions and Recommendations**

To date Bwindi Impenetrable National Park, BINP, is a government managed protected area and the authority, responsibility and accountability for managing it rests with the Uganda Wildlife Authority, an agency under the Ministry of Tourism Trade and Industry. By policy, UWA is mandated to involve stakeholders, particularly local governments and local communities, in the management of protected areas.

In his foreword to the CPI policy, the Chair of the UWA Board of Trustees sites the challenge to ensure “that local communities are actively involved in planning and management of wildlife resources through shared roles and responsibilities, benefits and decision making.” Notably missing is the sharing of “costs,” which is the key source of the conflicts between PA management and local communities. UWA is yet to seriously address the issue of costs incurred by individuals and households due to wildlife conservation.

Good policies (read documents) notwithstanding, communities are very often treated as the “usual suspects” when it comes to threats to PA resources. They are quite often viewed as part of the problem and rarely as part of the solution in promoting conservation of natural resources in protected areas. This undermines operationalisation of the policy guidelines that UWA has formulated to enhance local community participation in protected area management. For instance, conservation education outreach programmes emphasise “teaching the local

communities the values of PA resource” and hence the importance of conserving them. The programme is designed by PA managers and supporting international conservation agencies and NGOs. More appropriately, local communities should be given opportunity to participate in the development of the conservation education programme. For instance school children and youth groups could produce educational material that clearly describes local community values (real and perceived), uses (current and future) and governance concerns regarding the respective PA. This would contribute to enhanced participation.

Though the roles of UWA’s partners in BINP management are stated in various documents, the stakeholders themselves do not share the stated view of their roles or do not fully appreciate them. One of the reasons is that the conservation agendas (if and when they exist) of these stakeholders, particularly local communities and local governments, are determined rather than influenced by UWA. Hence these partners do not hold themselves and their respective institutions, such as CPIs and PECs, accountable for delivering on these roles and responsibilities. So whereas UWA refers to local governments as partners in the conservation of BINP, the latter rarely express this view. On the other hand, the supporting NGOs and international conservation agencies develop their conservation programmes and then ask UWA to review and endorse them for implementation. These organizations tend to see UWA as less committed to these programmes and thus retarding their speed in achieving desired results.

To improve local involvement, local governments and local communities must be supported to develop their own conservation agendas/programmes, and both their means and objectives must become the core elements of their partnerships with UWA. This process will motivate these local partners to identify and mobilise the necessary resources to implement their programmes.

Multiple use has resolved many disputes arising from conflicts between local communities and PA management, including over such issues as the handling of cases of illegal activities and the methods and timing of harvests of allowed forest products. However other conflicts still remain unresolved. These include conflicts due to mutual mistrust between protected areas management and communities, conflicts over resource access and use, and conflicts over management of park resources, particularly problem animals and vermin. Both UWA and local communities are using a number of approaches to resolve these conflicts such, as avoidance<sup>10</sup>, mediation<sup>11</sup> and facilitation<sup>12</sup>. Now UWA needs to apply more direct and in-depth approaches, including frank and transparent negotiations with informed communities.

Civil society’s role in promoting good governance in NRM is still weak. The civil society organisations around BINP are yet to demonstrate their capacity to empower local people to exercise as much influence as possible on PA related issues. The civil society structures are reactive to PA management actions but not very proactive on matters and issues they consider important for good governance. There is strong need to strengthen, and in some cases develop, a strong civil society that can engage UWA in quality negotiations.

The voice of the Batwa, generally referred to as the indigenous forest people of Bwindi, is yet to be heard in the governance of Bwindi Impenetrable National Park. The current programmes around BINP, including the Trust, are addressing the needs of the Batwa outside the forest, such as access to agricultural land, formal school education, employment and health care. However,

the question of the relationship between the Batwa and Bwindi Forest still remains largely unanswered.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Agrippinah Namara and Xavier Nsabagasani, 2003, Decentralization and Wildlife Management: Devolving or Shedding Responsibilities? Bwindi Impenetrable National Park, Uganda. Environmental Governance in Africa Working Papers: EP#9

<sup>2</sup> Agrippinah Namara, People and Bwindi Forest. A Historical Account as Given by Local Community Members. UNESCO/WWF Funded Study

<sup>3</sup> Agrippinah Namara and Xavier Nsabagasani, 2003. Decentralization and Wildlife Management: Devolving or Shedding Responsibilities? Bwindi Impenetrable National Park, Uganda. Environmental Governance in Africa Working Papers: EP#9

<sup>4</sup> Agrippinah Namara and Xavier Nsabagasani, 2003. Decentralization and Wildlife Management: Devolving or Shedding Responsibilities? Bwindi Impenetrable National Park, Uganda. Environmental Governance in Africa Working Papers: EP#9

<sup>5</sup> The Uganda Wildlife Authority 2002 – 2007 Strategic Plan, June 2002

<sup>6</sup> Cunningham, 1996. People, Park and Plant Use. Recommendations for Multiple use Zones and Development Alternatives around Bwindi Impenetrable National park, Uganda. People and Plants working paper 4, UNESCO, Paris

<sup>7</sup> Agrippinah Namara, People and Bwindi Forest. A historical Account as Given by Local community Members. UNESCO/WWF Funded Study

<sup>8</sup> UWA Strategic Plan 2002 – 2007; June 2002.

<sup>9</sup> PECs are functional sectoral committees whose role is to plan, supervise and monitor the implementation of Production & Environment Committee policies at all levels of local government councils and they are accountable to the respective councils.

<sup>10</sup> Communities sometimes fine wrong doers such as hunters ‘quietly’, so that the PA management does not come to know the culprits; lower level PA managers also ‘charge’ culprits and let them go without knowledge of senior managers.

<sup>11</sup> Both UWA/PA management and communities have on a number of occasions appealed to supporting NGOs and organizations to intervene on their behalf. CPAC leadership does request Bwindi Trust or CARE to mediate between them and PA management on issues of revenue sharing.

<sup>12</sup> CARE organized and modulated (through a contracted consultant) the institutional development process, which identified the need for and the roles, functions and structure of the Community – Protected Area Committee (CPAC).

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