

Emerging Issue

“Private Protected Areas”

Privately owned protected areas continue their quiet proliferation throughout much of the world. Despite this expansion, little is known about them. Preliminary evidence suggests that private parks number in the thousands and protect several million hectares of biologically important habitat. They serve as increasingly important components of national conservation strategies. In a time when many governments are slowing the rate at which they establish new protected areas, the private conservation sector continues its rapid growth. Conservationists desperately need to examine this trend closely, assessing its overall scope and direction, and determining ways to maximise its strengths while minimising its weaknesses.

In Eastern and Southern Africa, privately owned lands play a particularly important role in conserving critical biodiversity. Private protected areas in Southern Africa alone protect millions of ecologically important areas, especially in critical buffer zones and corridor areas.

The Annex below contains the world's first Private Protected Area Action Plan. The Action Plan summarizes key aspects of the private protected area sector and suggested important next steps in the evolution of this promising conservation tool.

PRIVATE PROTECTED AREA ACTION PLAN

(13 September 2003)

WPC Governance Stream, Parallel Session 2.5

“Protected Areas Managed by Private Landowners”

Session leaders: Dr. Jeff Langholz & Dr. Wolf Krug

Background: This document represents the consensus opinion of participants at the Vth World Parks Congress Session on "Protected Areas Managed by Private Landowners" with respect to the future of privately owned protected areas worldwide. Its purpose is to chart a course for the coming decade that improves and expands biodiversity conservation occurring on privately owned lands. It was adopted by unanimous vote on 13 September 2003.

Definitions: A private protected area (PPA) refers to a land parcel of any size that is:

- 1) predominantly managed for biodiversity conservation;
- 2) protected with or without formal government recognition;
- 3) and is owned or otherwise secured by individuals, communities, corporations or non government organisations.

Recognising that:

Ecological and biological issues

- A great share of global biodiversity occurs on privately owned lands;
- Private lands represent an opportunity for significant expansion of the world's network of protected natural areas;
- Private land holders have demonstrated a willingness and capacity to protect natural habitat and endangered species successfully;
- Conservation on private lands represents an essential and expanding complement to public conservation efforts by protecting corridors, buffer zones, inholdings, areas underrepresented in public park systems, and other key components of larger ecosystems that governments are not protecting for lack of financial resources, political will, or other reasons;
- Private conservation models, like publicly protected areas, vary greatly in terms of management objectives, allowable activities, and level of protection. These may include formally declared private areas, lands subject to conservation easements, game ranches, mixed commercial operations based on sustainable use, land trusts and other options.
- Privately owned protected areas best serve as supplements to, not replacements for, strong public protected area systems.

Economic and social issues

- Private protected areas provide public goods in conserving biodiversity and natural resources at comparatively low cost to society.
- The private sector has shown it can be efficient, accountable and innovative in conserving natural resources and biodiversity while integrating economic uses in a sustainable way. Examples include activities such as nature tourism, game ranching, or harvesting non-timber forest products, which provide revenues that make private conservation appealing and financially feasible.
- Private lands conservation may be vulnerable to economic fluctuations caused by changes in policy at the local, national and international level that increase the profitability of competing land uses such as agriculture, logging, and ranching.
- Some private land conservation mechanisms are extremely flexible, and can be used to implement conservation practices on productive lands in a manner that can attain a broad range of social and economic benefits.
- That there is an increasing tendency for landholders to form collaborative networks.

Legal and political issues

- That secure property rights to land and natural resources form an essential foundation for any long-term conservation strategy, particularly one involving private sector participation and investment;
- That private landholders represent an important stakeholder group that can contribute meaningfully to local, national and international conservation planning efforts;

- That many privately protected areas are subject to legally binding conditions and restrictions regarding land use practises, that can ensure their durability and long-term conservation, including in perpetuity;
- The increasing tendency for multiple private landholders to form collaborative reserves and conservancies that jointly manage large conservation units;

Recommendations to governments and civil society

The international workshop on privately owned parks (Session 2.5 of the Governance Workshop Stream) at the Vth World Parks Congress, in South Africa (8-17 September, 2003), makes the following recommendations to governments and civil society:

1. Strengthen the legal framework for private lands conservation, including through:

- Conducting a global assessment of the current legal frameworks for private lands conservation, identifying key gaps in the design, implementation, and evaluation of relevant legislation;
- Working to fill existing legal gaps by developing laws, regulations, policies, and programs that support creation of appropriate land use planning regimes, formally declared private protected areas, conservancies, conservation easements and similar instruments, conservation concessions, and other protection mechanisms;
- Strengthening the legal security for conservation lands, including the recognition of rightful owners, reform of land tenure laws and improved law enforcement. Secure use rights over land and wildlife are an essential ingredient in any strategy to conserve and encourage long-term investment in wildlife habitat;
- Ensuring that the IUCN protected area category system explicitly addresses privately owned protected areas.

2. Strengthen economic incentives for private land conservation, including:

- Develop economic incentives for private landowners to adopt private lands conservation practices. These should include property tax exemptions for lands placed in conservation status; payments for the environmental services provided by conservation lands; development of markets for environmental goods and services; purchase or transfer of development rights; and other forms of government financial and technical assistance. In providing incentives, priority should be given to lands that are within publicly protected areas, or have been granted official recognition as private conservation lands;
- If not already established, governments should establish environmental trust funds, with donor support, and authorize the use of such funds to support key private lands conservation actors.

3. Strengthen institutional capacity for private lands conservation:

- Increase capacity of federal and state governments to authorize and monitor formal private conservation protection efforts, and better integrate private lands conservation actions into their overall conservation strategies. This includes ensuring that even those government agencies whose primary responsibility is not conservation work to support private lands conservation actions (e.g., land reform, tax, and planning agencies);
- Identify and remove gaps and overlaps in institutional responsibilities regarding conservation initiatives on private lands;

- Improve capacity of local governments to ensure that local registrars properly record private land conservation instruments;
- Increase capacity of government judicial systems to enforce private land conservation mechanisms effectively and consistently;
- Expand efforts by conservation NGOs and government agencies to:
 - develop private lands conservation tools;
 - identify private lands conservation priorities;
 - establish and maintain private conservation areas; and
 - provide technical assistance to conservation-minded landowners;

4. Improve and expand education and training opportunities for private lands conservation, including:

- Design, develop, deliver, and evaluate a comprehensive portfolio of education and training opportunities for key sectors involved in private lands conservation. Target audience includes government parks agencies, conservation NGOs, commercial entities, registrars, judges, prosecutors, and private and community landowners. Topics range from general capacity-building to the application of detailed technical issues and procedures. Delivery formats will include short courses, field work, various forms of workshops, internships and fellowships, and formal academic education programs.

5. Increase public-private collaboration in the management and conservation of protected lands:

- Integrate private lands conservation efforts into public conservation strategies. This includes:
 - increasing overall collaboration between public and private conservation sectors, including communicating available programs and conservation options;
 - maximising protection of ecosystems inadequately represented among public protected areas;
 - enhancing public protected areas by protecting buffer zones and conservation corridors; and
 - improving the management of privately owned lands within "mixed" public/private protected areas.

6. Promote community involvement and sustainable development through privately owned protected areas:

- Increase and deepen the transfer of technology, knowledge and experience between private landowners and other stakeholders.
- Improve and promote cooperation between private landowners and other stakeholders, particularly regarding complementary land uses.

7. Create information networks, including:

- Establish networks of conservation owners and other stakeholders for the purpose of sharing information, knowledge, and expertise on a regional, national, and international basis;
- Conduct a global inventory of privately conserved lands that characterises their overall contribution to protecting natural habitat, endangered species and cultural resources;

- Conduct a global analysis on the economics of private lands conservation, including financial sustainability, contribution to national economies, job creation, and other economic and social costs and benefits;
- Identify, then work to remove, perverse economic incentives at the regional, national and international level that distort the market and promote unsustainable land use practices (e.g., subsidies for unsustainable agricultural practices);
- Investigate the myriad social issues surrounding privately owned protected areas worldwide, including levels of social acceptance and costs and benefits to local communities.

