Protected Area

Definition

The most used definition of **protected areas** comes from the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN) [1]. Their definition states that "*a protected area is a clearly defined geographical space, recognised, dedicated and managed, through legal or other effective means, to achieve the long-term conservation of nature with associated ecosystem services and cultural values*" (IUCN Definition 2008). [2] IUCN uses different management categories of protected areas based on the level of human involvement/activities. These categories range from 'strict nature reserve' to 'protected area with sustainable use of natural resources'. In the online World Database on Protected Areas (WDPA) all protected areas globally that meet the IUCN definition of protected areas are listed (http://www.protectedplanet.net/).

History

The last couple of decades have seen a substantial increase globally in the percentage of land and marine areas that is designated as protected area. Currently 15,4 percent of the world's land area and 3,4% of the world's marine area is designated as protected area.[3] Protected areas are, however, not a recent phenomenon. For example, the aristocrats in Europe protected their hunting grounds already centuries ago. Also many tribal communities historically regulated access to and activities on their sacred grounds. Yellowstone National Park, established in 1872, is often seen as the first modern protected area. Soon after designating Yellowstone as a protected area, other national parks were established in Australia, Canada, South-Africa and Europe and in other parts of the United States. [4]

Objectives and Challenges

The objectives for designating an area as a protected areas can be numerous, including conserving biodiversity, protecting the carbon function or a specific specie, or conserving cultural heritage. In addition, there are also economic and social objectives, such as protecting livelihoods of local communities, to improve national economies by increasing tourism revenues, or to replenish dwindling fishing stocks. The effectiveness of a protected area for conservation purposes depends on its size, location and on external factors such as climate change. A well-managed protected area can provide many benefits such as a successful biodiversity conservation, delivering ecosystem services and protecting iconic land- and seascapes. The challenges for managing a protected area are manifold, ranging from controlling access to the area, securing financial resources to manage the area, achieving a sustainable balance between conservation and human activities, and maintaining a strong political commitment and a mutually beneficial relationship with local communities.[5] [6] Much has been written in academia and in policy circles about the relationship between protected areas and poverty. Protected areas grant access to some people and exlude or limit the access to and use of natural resource of others. Sometimes this results in negative impacts for the livelihoods of local communities or even displacement. Protected areas can also lead to more secure rights for local communities who were first under threat of losing their access to and use of natural resources to more powerful groups, such as oil companies or the state, and benefits for local communities in the form of tourisme revenues. The consequences of protected areas at the local level can be thus contrary. Much debate is focused on how to off-set the negative local consequenses.[7] [8] [9]

PADDD

The UN Convention on Biological Diversity states that by 2020 at least 17% of terrestrial and inland water area and 10% of coastal and marine areas should be conserved through protected areas. The protected area coverage (terrestrial and marine) is falling short of meeting the (CBD) 2020 targets. It seems that globally there is a lack of political commitment to increase the coverage and effectiveness of protected areas (Watson 2014) [10]. In quite some countries even a decrease in the coverage and effectiveness of protected areas is observed. This trend is called **PADDD** (Protected Area Downgrading, Downsizing and Degazettement) meaning that there is an increase in legal authorization in of human activities in protected areas (downgrading), a decline in the coverage of protected areas through legal boundary change(downsizing) or a loss of legal protection of an entire protected area(degazettement). PADDD events are reported in all regions of the world (Mascia & Pailler 2011, Mascia et al. 2014) [11] [12] The World Wildlife Fund has initiated an online database in which PADDD events are tracked (http://www.padddtracker.org/)).

Non-Conventional Approaches

It is important to note that biodiversity is not only conserved through conventional approaches, in other words by means of protected areas backed by state support. Besides the conventional protected areas , there are also indigenous community conserved areas, and conserved areas through environmental NGO programs. Moreover funding for acquiring and managing protected areas does not only come from the state, but also more and more from other funding sources such as philanthropic contributions, and payments for ecosystem service mechanisms. According to Watson (2011, 71) these non-conventional sources "have the potential to be crucially important future alternative funding sources, as do mechanisms such as offsets and 'debt-for-nature swaps' from the corporate sector. [13]

Protected Areas in Europe

The most important European networks of protected areas are Natura 2000 and the Emerald network. Besides these networks, countries have also national protected areas (although there is quite some overlap between these two). Europe (EU28) currently has a protected area of 25,6% (national protected areas and or Natura 2000). Although the number of protected areas is high in Europe compared to other regions in the world, the average size is quite low due to high degree of fragmentation in Europe (infrastructure, urbanization and intensive land use).[14] Of the national protected areas in Europe, 76,9% is 100 hectares or smaller and 34,5% of the Natura 200 areas are 100 hectares or smaller. [15] Large scale protected areas can be found especially in countries with a low population density such as Sweden. In Europe there is also a high diversity in aim and management approach of the protected areas. The most common IUCN categories of terrestrial protected areas are national parks (II), habitat/species management area (cat. IV) and protected landscapes/seascapes (cat.V). Categories IV and V are the most common in marine protected areas.[16] It is estimated that the economic benefits of Natura 2000 range from 200 to 300 billion euro, while the costs for the management and protection of the protected area is estimated at 5,8 billion euro.[17]

See also

Glossary

nature conservation, natural resource management
1)

http://www.iucn.org
2)

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http://www.eea.europa.eu/themes/biodiversity/protected-areas/facts-and-figures/number-and-size-of-protected-areas-1 Retrieved 15.4.2016
16)

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