A Historic Role for Protected Areas

From ocean depths to sun-washed mountain peaks, protected areas are refuges for life and for our natural heritage. They conserve ecological systems larger than countries, genes too small for a microscope, and countless species in between, from whales to lichens. At the same time, these special places provide economic and social benefits for societies at large.

The Global Environment Facility's support for protected areas worldwide is a recognition of the historic role protected areas have played in human civilization.

Going back thousands of years, people have designated specific regions or features of the natural world for protection. These include sacred forests, mountains, rivers, waterfalls, and caves. Special attention to individual species of trees, flowers, mammals, and birds added to the conscientious protection of biological diversity.

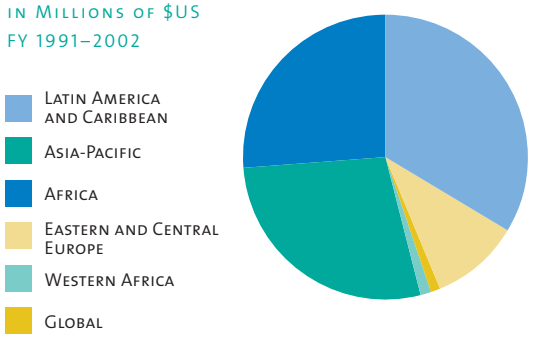
In times of less pressure on natural resources, these places did not need to serve as havens for species, or as representative examples of intact ecosystems. Today, however, protected areas are a critical component of the effort to stem the loss of biodiversity, and preserve our environment for future generations.

The modern protected area movement sprang up in the late 19th century when Yosemite and Yellowstone in the western United States became the world's first "national parks." This movement continues to grow and gain momentum. At last count, the World Conservation and Monitoring Center listed 68,540 protected areas covering 9.95 percent of global land area.

These jewels in the landscape represent one of humanity's best investments, rich in vistas and resources but also in ideals and values. The GEF will continue to support the strengthening of this global network in coordination with the full range of stakeholders and partners, from indigenous groups and local entrepreneurs to government agencies and NGOs.

GEF Support for Protected Area Projects

In Millions of $US
FY 1991–2002



The GEF's Small Grants Programme and Protected Areas

The Community Management of Protected Areas Conservation project is a joint initiative of the GEF's Small Grants Programme, the U.N. Foundation, and UNESCO.

The project demonstrates how community-based initiatives can significantly increase the effectiveness of biodiversity conservation in and around World Heritage Sites by complementing and adding value to existing conservation programs. It is underway in Mornes Trois Pitons in Dominica; Puerto Princesa Subterranean River in Palawan, Philippines; Belize Barrier Reef World Heritage Site in Belize; Sian Ka'an Reserve in Mexico; Mt. Kenya National Park in Kenya; and Mt. Kilimanjaro National Park in Tanzania. To date, $6 million—$3 million from GEF and $3 million from the U.N. Foundation—have been invested in a participatory planning process involving local and national stakeholders, and in more than 100 community-based initiatives.

Protected Areas and the GEF

The Global Environment Facility is the major source of funding for conservation and sustainable use of earth's biodiversity.

In its first decade of operation, GEF provided $1.1 billion for approximately 200 biodiversity projects involving parks and other protected areas. This portfolio supports more than 1,000 sites covering more than 226 million hectares—just over a quarter of the total global area under protection.

GEF's direct contribution helped leverage almost $2.5 billion in co-financing from project partners.

Performance against investment has also been high. The Second Overall Performance Study of the GEF, an independent review completed in early 2002, found that "GEF's biodiversity program has made significant advances in demonstrating community-based conservation within protected areas," and that "GEF has steadily improved standards of management of protected areas through participatory approaches."

As the financial mechanism for the Convention on Biological Diversity, GEF receives guidance from the Conference of Parties on policy, strategy, program priorities, and eligibility criteria related to the use of resources. Projects generally deal with one or more of four critical ecosystem types and the human communities found there: arid and semi-arid zones; coastal, marine, and freshwater resources; forests; and mountains.

In many corners of the globe—Africa, the Asia-Pacific region, Central and Eastern Europe, Central and Western Asia, and Latin America and the Caribbean—individuals and institutions are working to extend and sustain protected area systems through results-driven GEF projects.

They are assisted by GEF's three implementing agencies: the U.N. Development Programme (UNDP), the U.N. Environment Programme (UNEP), and the World Bank. Other GEF initiatives such as the Small Grants Programme, administered by UNDP, and the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund led by Conservation International, are also contributing to this growing mosaic of community-based, high-priority protected areas.

GEF projects are also implemented through seven executing agencies: the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the U.N. Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), the African Development Bank (AfDB), the Asian Development Bank (ADB), the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB), and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD).

In Africa, a full 37 percent of hectares under protection receive GEF support. This covers 266 individual sites. Indigenous peoples, governments, and non-governmental organizations alike work with the GEF to secure resources and identify best practices for strengthening management capacity and creating the right conditions for long-term support.

In 2002 the GEF received commitments of $3 billion for its third replenishment, an unprecedented vote of confidence in its efforts to safeguard the global environment and support sustainable development. To effectively program and disburse these funds, the GEF has developed a series of strategic priorities for biodiversity conservation. Decisions are guided by the GEF's Council, in line with the Convention on Biological Diversity.

Bolstering the sustainability of protected area systems is one of four main directions in which the GEF will seek to develop its portfolio. This priority targets not just ecological sustainability, but also institutional, social, political, and financial sustainability in the context of national protected area systems. Support for individual protected sites will be grounded in the long-term vision countries have for their protected area systems.

Objectives include expanded engagement of the private sector, further development of innovative financial mechanisms, intensified capacity building and comprehensive stakeholder participation, and an emphasis on *in situ* conservation through the conservation of globally important and threatened sites and ecosystems. The GEF will also continue to increase its assistance to "mainstream" biodiversity conservation in landscapes where the primary emphasis is on economic uses.

III
Links to Land and Sea

Protected areas are important storehouses of genetic, species, habitat, and ecosystem diversity. The list of benefits and services they provide is long. Their supporters are legion, enthusiastic, and hail from many walks of life.

Still, there is a strong emerging consensus that conservation efforts must extend beyond the formal boundaries of protected areas. Experience shows that the full potential of these areas is realized only when they are linked to their surrounding geographic, economic, and social contexts. Greater awareness must be created among protected area managers and government agencies of the necessity of establishing, understanding, and managing protected areas in light of the larger landscape or seascape.

A good example is found in a GEF project implemented by UNDP in the northern archipelago of the Sabana-Camagüey ecosystem in central Cuba. Cuba's offshore cays, 60 percent of which are located in the project area, are among the country's most important tracts for the preservation of terrestrial and marine biodiversity of global significance. Hundreds of invertebrates, and 46 vertebrate taxa, are found on these isolated islands.

The project identified eight areas for priority protection. It also consolidated institutional capacities for integrated coastal zone management, educated people about biodiversity conservation and sustainable use, and directly addressed problems caused by conventional tourism development, over-fishing, and agro-industrial pollution.

From a scientific standpoint, the scope for biodiversity conservation is enhanced in moving from the concept of "islands" of conservation to networks. This entails the adoption of a mosaic of land uses, pairing production landscapes with protected ones. The biggest challenge may stem from the fair allocation of costs, benefits, and trade-offs related to biodiversity conservation. Local stakeholders must contribute to the development and implementation of institutional, organizational, and legal frameworks that support good decision-making at all local levels, factoring in economic, social, and environmental concerns.

GEF projects work to link protected areas and their surroundings in a myriad of ways—among them, buffer zones, corridors, cultural linkages, integrated ecosystem and coastal zone management, and transboundary protected areas.

Buffer zones create a transition between protected areas and the surrounding landscape, where planners and managers can work with neighboring communities to address their needs and expectations. Forty-four GEF-financed biodiversity projects have incorporated buffer zones, and these projects include at least 209 protected areas. Ecological corridors multiply the conservation benefits of protected areas by linking them within the larger context of surrounding ecosystems. Thirty-two GEF biodiversity projects, involving at least 207 protected areas, include corridor components.

An outstanding example is the Program for the Consolidation of the Meso-American Biological Corridor, coordinated by the Commission for Environment and Development in Central America and Mexico's National Commission for Knowledge and Use of Biodiversity (CONABIO). Co-implemented by UNDP, UNEP, and the World Bank, the program seeks to establish interconnected biological corridors throughout a region that has been a wellspring for biodiversity for thousands of years. GEF-supported national and regional projects are working to mainstream biodiversity conservation into agriculture, trade and investment, and other economic development priorities.

To complement these efforts, the GEF's Small Grants Programme is using the Meso-American Biological Corridor to prioritize grant selection and approval in Central America. Some 70 of the 81 grants in Costa Rica, for example, have been implemented in priority geographic areas linking national parks. This enables local and indigenous communities to contribute to conservation efforts while improving their livelihoods.

Another example can be found far to the north in the vast landscapes of Arctic Russia, some of the last remaining wilderness on earth. The region serves as the feeding and breeding ground for millions of migratory birds and mammals from Asia, Africa, and Europe. However, its rare and endemic plants and wildlife are beginning to be imperiled by over-harvesting, illegal harvesting, and habitat

The GEF Outlook

- Protected areas are the most important tool to achieve biodiversity conservation and ecological integrity. As such, they will remain a target area for future GEF support.

- Protected areas must increasingly be linked to their surroundings and the environmental context in which they are found. Thus, the GEF will continue supporting the expansion of protected areas to the larger production landscape.

fragmentation. Only a few species are currently protected.

A GEF-supported project implemented by UNEP is contributing to the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity in these wilderness areas. Its immediate objective is to adopt strategies and initiate action plans for integrating ecosystem management in three model areas—that is, carefully combining conservation and sustainable use of forests, tundra, freshwater, and marine resources. Protected area management is part and parcel of the larger landscape conservation and ecosystem management effort.

Each model site represents different patterns of ecosystems and types of people pressures. The project seeks to enhance and incorporate the use of traditional indigenous knowledge. By building on national policies and priorities, it promises to show how integrated ecosystem management can fulfill ecological, economic, and social goals and generate local as well as global benefits.

Georgia's Caucasus region is a recognized global biodiversity hotspot—home to unique and threatened large mammals like the Caucasian tur. A GEF project implemented by the World Bank is working to develop the country's system of protected areas and link them to the broader landscape. The desired result: a viable ecological network of habitats for *in situ* biodiversity conservation and the sustainable use of biodiversity.

The project places particular emphasis on ecosystem management and corridor conservation. Corridor plans that link management activities in protected areas and similar activities on adjacent state forest lands are being tested in high priority areas. These plans promote habitat management practices consistent with the needs of key threatened species.

Corridor plans are also integrating recommendations for range management in specific alpine habitats, and provide detailed performance indicators to monitor the effectiveness of management efforts. By strengthening the management of Georgia's protected areas and linking them to each other and the surrounding land-use management, this project can help conserve biodiversity while supporting sustainable livelihoods in the Caucasus region.

The GEF's Protected Areas Portfolio — Linking Natural Landscapes

	GEF Projects	Protected Areas
Buffer Zones	44	209
Corridors	32	207
Cultural Linkages	8	24
Transboundary Protected Areas	5	29
Integrated Coastal Zone Management	7	15