

IX CONSTRUCTING COMPREHENSIVE PROTECTED AREA SYSTEMS

After years of working to improve and expand protected area systems, the international conservation community has achieved the protection of roughly 10 percent of earth’s land area. Despite this progress, there are ecosystems and species that continue to be critically threatened and endangered, and many ecosystem services are still being degraded.

The GEF has focused on protecting globally significant and representative ecosystems, including sites designated at Global 200 ecosystems, biodiversity hotspots, World Heritage sites, Man and Biosphere reserves, and representative coastal and mountain ecosystems. Yet there remains a great need for continued action to build a global network of protected areas and to connect them in ways designed to conserve earth’s natural wealth and to secure the full range of ecosystem services. Toward this end, the GEF will continue to work to develop comprehensive protected area systems in priority ecosystems.

The GEF biodiversity portfolio has been carefully developed with the goal of comprehensive ecosystem coverage in mind. It is now necessary to identify the gaps that remain and work to reduce

them, whether they be gaps in regional coverage, biome coverage, or species coverage.

Brazil retains the world’s most extensive tracts of tropical rainforests, and its forests contain millions of species. Brazil is acknowledged as the most biodiversity rich country in the world, with one-fifth of all vascular plants and one-sixth of the world’s birds. However, the high biodiversity of the Brazilian Amazon is threatened by deforestation driven by a complex set of forces.

The Amazon Region Protected Areas project, implemented by the World Bank and funded in part by the GEF, seeks to expand the existing protected area network in the Brazilian Amazon and improve management capacity. The project aims to create 18 million hectares of new protected areas, half for strict protection and half for sustainable use. The active participation of local communities in the selection and design of protected areas is a key component of the project.

Other regions of Latin America also contain some of the most biologically rich ecosystems on the planet. The eastern slope of the Andes mountains, for example, may hold a greater number of terrestrial species than any other single location on earth. Yet, ecosystems in the region face many and increasing threats, including logging, agricultural expansion, and forest fires. A recent UNEP-implemented project supported by the GEF works to catalyze conservation in five globally significant ecoregions in Latin America: the Choco/Darien Tropical forest, the Eastern Andes Cordillera Real Montane Forest, the Peruvian Yungas, the Bolivian Yungas, and the Chaco Savannahs.

The project endeavors to enable decision makers to strategically target scarce human and financial resources to areas that have the highest biodiversity values. Experience gained through this project will serve as a model that can be replicated throughout Latin America and the Caribbean

THE GEF’S PROTECTED AREAS PORTFOLIO — SAFEGUARDING ECOSYSTEMS				
	GEF PROJECTS	GEF SUPPORT (IN MILLIONS OF US DOLLARS)	CO-FINANCING (IN MILLIONS OF US DOLLARS)	PROTECTED AREAS INCLUDED
Global 200	140	\$816.7	\$1,770.9	761
Hotspots	112	\$604.6	\$1,565.7	606
World Heritage Sites	50	\$357.4	\$594.5	65 sites
Coastal Ecosystems	55	\$252.7	\$638.6	292
Mountain Ecosystems	68	\$441.9	\$813.1	412

Note: Some projects may target areas that have multiple designations.

where limited resources require focused conservation actions to conserve biodiversity.

Russia's Kamchatka Peninsula provides a rich array of globally significant ecosystems. As the area has become more open and accessible to outsiders, and as government protected area budgets have declined, these resources have come under increased threat from poaching and from unmanaged and unrestricted human use. A recently approved GEF project implemented by UNDP will seek to demonstrate sustainable conservation of biological diversity in four representative protected areas in Russia's Kamchatka Oblast. Activities are designed to strengthen administrative and management capacity, develop a more supportive protected area legal foundation, increase stakeholder awareness of biodiversity conservation, promote alternative livelihoods, and improve collaboration between federal and regional protected area authorities.

The GEF Outlook

- To effectively conserve the full range of representative ecosystems and species, the global system of protected areas must be strengthened to cover important areas that have little protection.
- GEF plans to continue its focus on assistance for protected areas and national and transboundary protected area systems to ensure the establishment of a comprehensive network of protected areas.

THE GEF AND THE WORLD HERITAGE CONVENTION

The World Heritage Convention, adopted in 1972, recognizes the important characteristics of common global heritage embodied in hundreds of natural and cultural sites around the world. Of the 112 World Heritage sites designated as being of outstanding natural or mixed natural and cultural value in developing countries and countries with economies in transition, 65 sites are located within GEF projects.

Selected as a World Heritage site in 1988, Sri Lanka's Sinharaja Forest Reserve is the country's last viable tract of primary tropical rainforest. A large percentage of the trees, birds, butterflies, mammals, insects, reptiles, and amphibians found in the reserve are found nowhere else. The GEF project to conserve globally threatened species in southwest Sri Lanka's rainforests, implemented by UNDP, is helping identify sustainable uses for non-timber forest products, and striving to reduce illegal logging of the rainforest ecosystems, among other project activities.

Aldabra Atoll, a small group of islands in the Seychelles, is home to the world's largest remaining population of giant tortoises. Inscribed as a World Heritage site in 1982, the area's marine environment has come under severe threat from climate change-related factors and people pressures. A World Bank-implemented Marine Ecosystem Management project, supported by the GEF, is working to increase the scientific understanding of the area, and is collaborating with local stakeholders to improve the management of the marine environment.

Royal Chitwan National Park in Nepal is one of the few remaining undisturbed vestiges of the Terai region, which formerly extended over the foothills of India and Nepal. The park, identified as a World Heritage site in 1984, has particularly rich flora and fauna, including one of the last populations of single-horned Asiatic rhinoceros, and it contains habitat that serves as one of the last refuges of the Bengal tiger. A GEF project implemented by UNDP aims to promote landscape-level biodiversity conservation with strong community-based management links to conserve endangered species in and around the park.



X LOOKING FORWARD: LET EARTH LAST

What can be accomplished between now and the next World Parks Congress? What is a decade in the course of earth's history?

The challenge: The need for effective and innovative partnerships and initiatives for the conservation of biodiversity through the fortification of the global protected area network has never been greater.

The good news: we know from experience that much can be accomplished in just a decade. The conservation movement has grown and matured, along with the GEF, over the past ten years. The GEF is now well-positioned to continue its role as the world's most significant single financial contributor to protected areas.

The GEF's Second Biodiversity Program Study and the independent Second Overall Performance Study confirmed that GEF's biodiversity portfolio is predominantly focused on *in situ* conservation in existing or new protected areas. Protected areas remain the critical foundation of biodiversity conservation worldwide, and as such, they will continue to be a major GEF focus.

Catalyzing the sustainability of systems of protected areas is one of the GEF's main strategic priorities going forward. GEF's operational focus will be

flexible and based on a thorough understanding of major strengths and weaknesses at the system and national institutional levels. The emphasis will be on cost-effective and innovative interventions. Each individual intervention will be examined in light of its contribution to long-term environmental, social, and financial sustainability.

The GEF will work to:

- Demonstrate and implement innovative financial mechanisms,
- Build capacity for long-term sustainability,
- Catalyze community and indigenous initiatives, and
- Remove barriers to public-private partnerships.

The GEF will pursue activities that further the impact of its catalytic role. It will seek to better place individual projects within the context of strengthened country or regional natural resource policy frameworks, management programs, and financing strategies.

Finally, the GEF will build on new and existing partnerships with countries, local and indigenous communities, government agencies, implementing and executing agencies, NGOs, and the private sector.

The GEF's drive for closer working relationships with countries and partner institutions, together with its new capacities and initiatives, promises to create many new opportunities to address global environmental concerns in the context of sustainable development.

It is in everyone's interest today—and that of generations to come—to make the most of them.

AN AZTEC POET WRITING IN 15TH CENTURY PUEBLA OFFERED THIS INVOCATION:

*Let the earth last
And the forests stand a long time*

*Ayocuan Cuetzpaltzin said this, traveling
The road to Tlaxcala
The road to Huexotzinco*

*Let field after field
Unfold with a brown corn
Flowers of cacao*

Let the earth last

From *Collecting the Animals*
—Peter Everwine

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