

Technical Note

Defining ‘long-term’ for protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures (OECMs)

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Summary

The concept of ‘long-term’ is a key part of the definitions of both protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures (OECMs). Here we outline existing global guidance on the interpretation of ‘long-term’ for area-based conservation and clarify aspects that may have led to misinterpretation. As national governments rapidly seek to define OECMs in response to the raised ambitions of the Convention on Biological Diversity’s Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF), there will be increasing interest in what counts towards Target 3 of the GBF. Ultimately, more land managed for conservation is good and all forms of area-based conservation should be encouraged. However, not all forms of area-based conservation qualify for inclusion in Target 3. Long-term intent and outcomes are fundamental, as outlined in the definitions of protected areas and OECMs.

Existing guidance on ‘long-term’ for protected areas and OECMs

The concept of ‘long-term’ is a key part of the definitions of both protected areas (Dudley, 2008) and other effective area-based conservation measures (OECMs) (CBD, 2018; IUCN-WCPA Task Force on OECMs, 2019). All protected areas reported to the United Nations Environment Programme World Conservation Monitoring Centre (UNEP-WCMC) need to meet the definition of a protected area and associated principles agreed by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). The definition is: “A *clearly defined geographical space, recognized, dedicated and managed, through legal or other effective means, to achieve the long-term conservation of nature with associated ecosystem services and cultural values*” (Dudley, 2008). The IUCN guidance defines every phrase within this definition. The definition of ‘long-term’ is: “Protected areas should be managed in perpetuity and not as a short-term or temporary management strategy.” This means areas that have temporary measures, such as short-term grant-funded agricultural set-asides, rotations in commercial forest management, or temporary fishing protection zones are not protected areas as recognised by IUCN.

However, in some jurisdictions, it can seem a challenge for owners and managers of non-state-owned areas such as Privately Protected Areas (PPAs) to ensure and demonstrate protection for the long term, in effect in perpetuity. Additionally, some governments stipulate that protection status is regularly reviewed, although the intent remains for permanent protection. IUCN thus developed guidance to help PPA owners and managers interpret the broader IUCN protected area guidance to demonstrate conservation in the long term (Mitchell et al., 2018; Stolton et al., 2014).

The IUCN's *Guidelines for Privately Protected Areas* (Mitchell et al., 2018) make it clear that PPAs need to meet IUCN's definition of a protected area, including for long-term conservation. In some countries, PPA declaration brings legal obligations for long-term protection or has legal provisions to achieve long-term protection, putting PPAs on equal footing to state-run protected areas.

Where this is not the case, IUCN made suggestions in the PPA Guidelines as to how sites could demonstrate their long-term intent for conservation in perpetuity. The *Guidelines for Privately Protected Areas* state:

“In *The Futures of Privately Protected Areas* (Stolton et al., 2014) ‘long-term intent’ was proposed as an alternative to ‘long-term conservation’, to encompass a broader set of situations. The report proposed that PPAs should demonstrate an intent to conservation ‘in perpetuity’, or at least ‘long-term’. Defining long-term for any protected area is fraught with difficulties and some government-managed protected areas may not be secure in the long term (Mascia et al., 2014). With PPAs it is understood that it can take time to put in place arrangements (covenants, tenure agreement, etc.) which ensure permanent protection. IUCN's guidance is that PPAs should demonstrate conservation in perpetuity or at least the intent for conservation in the long term, the latter being defined in this case as for a minimum of 25 years (Stolton et al., 2014).”

The guidelines go on to elaborate this in more detail, noting that:

- ‘Long-term’ should be proven for at least 25 years, but the intent should be for perpetuity; thus, PPA status should transcend changes of ownership, through easement, covenant, wills, etc.
- Where formal agreements relating to PPAs are short-term, they should be tied to commitments for long-term protection (e.g., renewable agreements or long-term stated objectives) and the ending of agreements should never prohibit continuation of PPA status.

Long-term intent should also be linked to conservation actions which demonstrate commitment to conservation, such as:

- Some form of long-term monitoring to ensure adherence to conservation intent.
- Active or passive management practices being applied to safeguard the integrity of the natural resources present in the PPA, that are validated by local or regional

units of a national association of PPAs with guidelines and a national inventory (Stolton et al., 2014).

To reiterate, this guidance does not mean that protected areas can be established for only 25 years, but that long-term intent can be demonstrated in several ways. If, for existing policy or legal reasons, the management objectives of a site need to be regularly reviewed, 25 years was proposed as a minimum period between review, provided that relevant stakeholders show clear intent to continue conservation management in the long term (Mitchell et al., 2018). Recent draft policy proposals by some nations suggesting that a 25-year ‘intention’ to deliver biodiversity outcomes equates to ‘long-term’ is not consistent with global guidance (Fitzsimons et al., 2024). It should be noted that the IUCN’s OECM guidance also discusses the term ‘long-term’, noting that “IUCN’s guidance is that the factors that govern and manage an OECM should be expected to be ongoing and for the long-term” (IUCN-WCPA Task Force on OECMs, 2019).

The CBD has defined ‘other effective area-based conservation measures’ in these terms:

“A geographically defined area other than a Protected Area, which is governed and managed in ways that achieve positive and sustained long-term outcomes for the in situ conservation of biodiversity with associated ecosystem functions and services and where applicable, cultural, spiritual, socio-economic, and other locally relevant values” (CBD Decision 14/8).

The OECMs guidance from the IUCN and CBD Decision 14/8 on long term is the same as for protected areas. *Long-term* refers to the idea that an OECM is expected to deliver *in situ* conservation of biodiversity in perpetuity, and not be temporary or time limited.

Ultimately, more land managed for conservation is good, and all forms of area-based conservation should be encouraged. However, not all forms of area-based conservation qualify for inclusion in global biodiversity targets. Long-term intent and outcomes are fundamental, as outlined in the definitions of protected areas and OECMs.

As national governments rapidly seek to define OECMs in response to the raised ambitions of the GBF, there will be increasing interest in what counts towards Target 3. Significant deviation from global guidance and existing national policy that lessens the chances of achieving long-term conservation sets a concerning precedent and is not consistent with the intent of the GBF. We trust the above expansion of the explanation of long-term timeframes as they relate to PPAs (and thus, potentially other forms of area-based conservation) is helpful for national and subnational governments to aid in their decision-making.

References

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