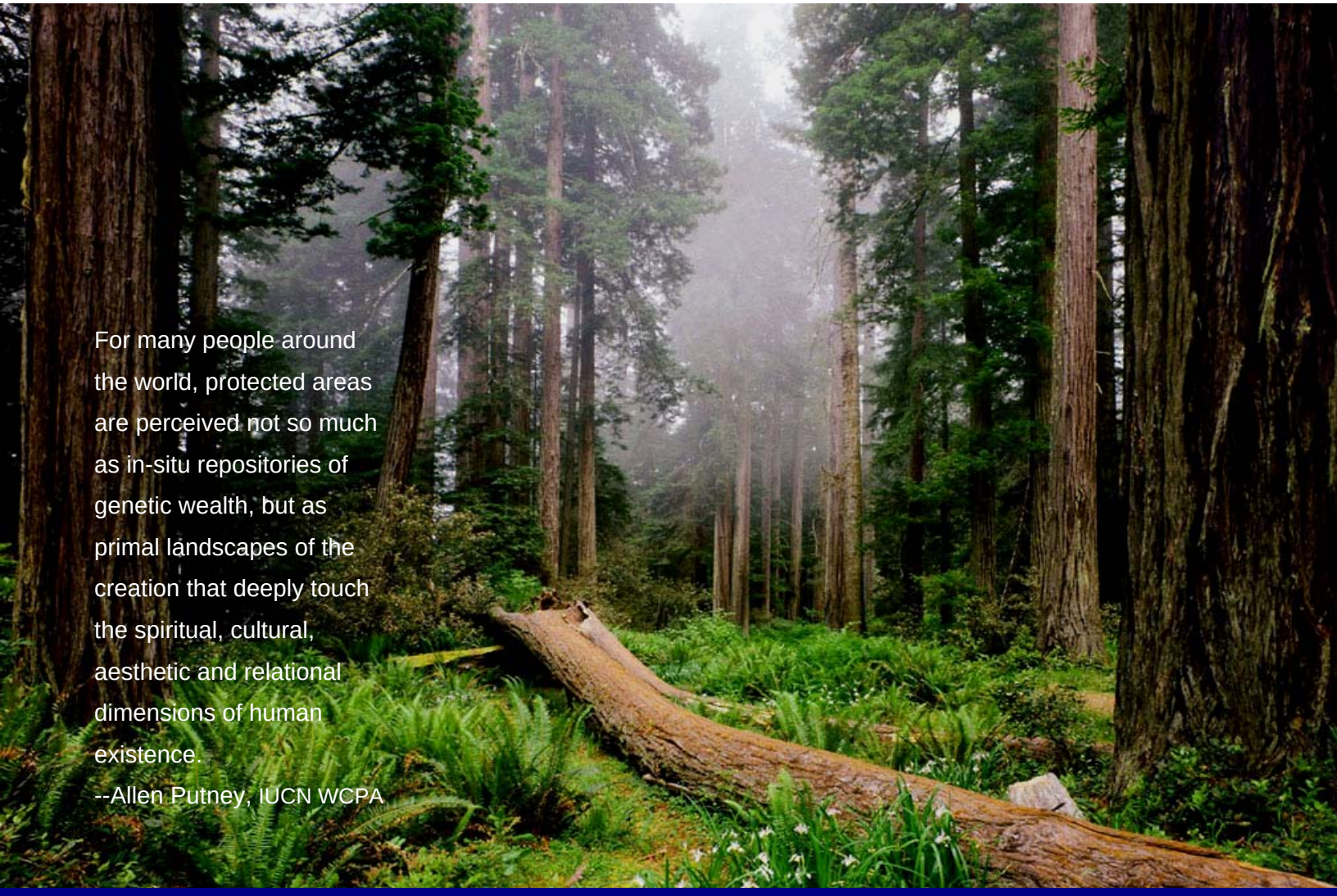
Sacred Dimensions

Understanding the cultural and Spiritual Values of Protected Areas



IUCN – The World Conservation Union

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Introduction

Traditional societies all over the world have established sacred natural places and protected them from destruction from time immemorial. These are true "protected areas" that, however, are often not recognized and not protected under official conservation systems, and that currently are under threat in many places. Parks, and other categories of protected areas, are highly valued by important segments of society, even when they are unfamiliar with the traditional rationales for preserve natural areas, such as biodiversity economic values. For many people around the world, protected areas are perceived not so much as in-situ repositories of genetic wealth, but as primal landscapes of the creation that deeply touch the spiritual, cultural, aesthetic and relational dimensions of human existence. These are fundamental aspects of the human spirit that inspire and move, that trigger responses of awe, appreciation and, for the keen observer, the understanding that all is related (Putney 2006).

During the past two decades, the conservation of biological diversity, or "biodiversity," has taken center stage as the rationale for the establishment and management of protected areas. The concept of biodiversity is a theoretical construct that captures the complexity and variability of life on earth. Though this is a crucial concept for the survival of humankind that has great meaning for the scientific and environmental community and appears in the mission statements of almost all environmental organizations, it is little understood by the public at large (Kellert 1996, 44). There is little doubt that the preservation of biodiversity is one of the most important challenges of our time, and that the in-situ conservation of biodiversity in protected areas is one of the most important strategies for achieving that end (Putney 2006). This document, however, highlights the need for protecting natural landscapes and sites for their values outside of science and economics, for values that are closer to culture, heritage, and the human spirit.

With this in mind, Allen Putney of the IUCN World Commission on Protected Areas (WCPA) created the Task Force on Cultural and Spiritual Values (TFCSV) to work towards preserving lands for the sake of non-material values—called "Sacred Natural Sites (SNSs).

Headed by IUCN's TFCSV, SNS is a collaborative effort which includes the following international organizations:

- IUCN – The World Conservation Union
- Sacred Land Film Project, Earth Island Institute
- UNESCO - The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
- United Nations University
- Secretariat for the Convention on Biological Diversity
- U.N. Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues
- FAO
- UNDP/GEF Small Grants Facility
- Cambridge University, Center for Landscape and People (still in planning stage)
- Applied Indigenous Studies Department, Northern Arizona University

"Heritage is our legacy from the past, what we live with today, and what we pass on to future generations. Our cultural and natural heritage are both irreplaceable sources of life and inspiration. Places as unique and diverse as the wilds of East Africa's Serengeti, the Pyramids of Egypt, the Great Barrier Reef in Australia and the Baroque cathedrals of Latin America make up our world's heritage." --UNESCO

IUCN and WCPA

IUCN and its World Commission on Protected Areas combine a global conservation partnership with the world's premier network of protected area expertise.

The World Conservation Union

IUCN is the world's largest and most important conservation network. The Union brings together 82 States, 111 government agencies, more than 800 non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and some 10,000 scientists and experts from 181 countries in a unique worldwide partnership.

The Union's mission is to influence, encourage and assist societies throughout the world to conserve the integrity and diversity of nature and to ensure that any use of natural resources is equitable and ecologically sustainable.

The World Commission on Protected Areas

The World Commission on Protected Areas (WCPA) is the world's premier network of protected area expertise. It is administered by IUCN's Programme on Protected Areas and has over 1,200 members, spanning 140 countries.

WCPA's international mission is to promote the establishment and effective management of a world-wide representative network of terrestrial and marine protected areas as an integral contribution to the IUCN mission. WCPA works by helping governments and others plan protected areas and integrate them into all sectors; by providing strategic advice to policy makers; by strengthening capacity and investment in protected areas; and by convening the diverse constituency of protected area stakeholders to address challenging issues. For more than 50 years IUCN and WCPA have been at the forefront of a global effort to protect important landscapes before they are destroyed by human activity.

Task Force on Cultural and Spiritual Values

The WCPA Task Force on Cultural and Spiritual Values was formed to achieve the goal of improving understanding, recognition of, and respect for the cultural and spiritual values of Protected Areas (including community conserved areas). They work to promote the integration of these values into policy, planning, management, and evaluation, where appropriate.

Relation to Environmental Ethics:

Indigenous and traditional people have well-developed systems of environmental ethics that are expressed through their worldviews and cosmologies, and which are given geographical grounding through sacred natural sites and landscapes. These expressions and places provide powerful instruments for introducing the sacred dimension into PA programs, and for raising issues related to environmental ethics.

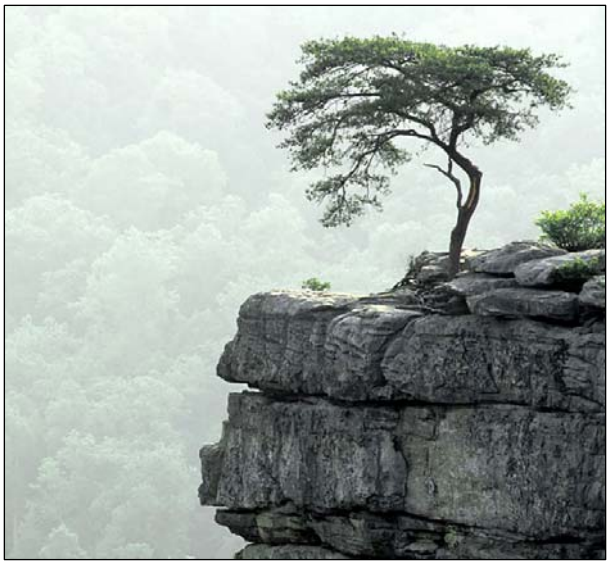
The Task Force has already made major progress towards these goals with several milestones including the publication of a book, "The Full Value of Parks, from Economics to the Intangible", Rowman and Littlefield, 2003 and increasing the volume of parks based on non-material values.

The Value of Protected Areas

Cited from Allen Putney's essay: **The Non-Material Values of Protected Areas**

The inter-relatedness of all things is a basic concept that is central to many fields of study, such as economics, ecology, physics, and spirituality. Yet, it is the profound personal, gut-level knowing of oneness that causes individuals and communities to act, to seek harmony with the environment and with the rest of humanity (WCPA 2001). As a consequence, perhaps one of the important values of protected areas in the long run will be their potential to reconnect increasingly urbanized societies to nature, and to encourage a reencounter with the knowing of oneness.

There is a substantial literature on the economic benefits of protected areas, including monetary valuation of intangible benefits, and on environmental ethics as they relate to the non-material aspects of nature and wildlands in general (Harmon 2001). There is growing literature on the cultural and spiritual values of biodiversity (Posey 1999), and the link between cultural and biological diversity (Maffi et al. 2000; Maffi 2001). Only recently has attention turned to the intangible values of protected areas in and of themselves, without seeking to fit them into a discussion of economics, ethics, indigenous and traditional peoples, or biodiversity (Harmon 2001).



Intangible Values:

As used here, the term "intangible values" refers to:

"that which enriches the intellectual, psychological, emotional, spiritual, cultural and/or creative aspects of human existence and well being" (WCPA 2000).

Current international discourse on protected areas, and the programmatic themes of international organizations (with the notable exception of the World Heritage and Biosphere Reserve Programs of UNESCO) pay scant attention to intangible values. It is as if science and economics were considered adequate tools for characterizing the qualities of the intricate web of life (Posey 1999, xvii). This seems to be a reflection of the western tendency to concentrate on "knowing" based on scientific, technical, and economic criteria, while assigning less importance to other ways of "knowing" through humanistic, cultural, and spiritual means (WCPA 2001). There is a need to redress this imbalance; to make explicit the intangible values that impact the way we perceive, select, establish and manage protected areas without trying to force them into some sort of scientific, ethical, or economic framework. Indeed, it is hoped that an increased recognition of the full spectrum of human values will generate increased public support and improve the process of selecting and managing protected areas (Harmon 2001).

The establishment of a protected area can transform the perceptions of, and identification with, a particular landscape (Harmon 2001). Thus it is essential to explicitly recognize those deeply rooted values that made the national parks and protected areas movement such a powerful force, which started in the United States and then spread around the world. It is an idea wrapped in primal values that has caught the imagination of millions.

Many Different Approaches to Values

Protected areas are valued by society for myriad reasons, some of which are quite obvious while others are more subtle. These reasons include the material resources of protected areas that contribute to human physical well being, the intangible benefits that contribute to the non-material dimensions of the quality of life, and intrinsic benefits that exist independently of humankind.

In practical terms, the values that most societies assign to protected areas are either utilitarian or intrinsic, that is, based on whether something is useful to humankind or not. The vast majority of modern societal values are utilitarian, even those that are intangible. For example,

spiritual or cultural values associated with protected areas are meaningless if humans are taken out of the picture. Intrinsic values tend to be associated with modern-day 'deep ecologists' and 'ecofeminists', and indigenous peoples.

Different societies, and different segments within a society, generally approach protected areas in different ways (Harmon 2001). Some assign intrinsic value to an area, regardless of whether it has 'protected area' status or not. This is certainly the case of people, especially traditional peoples, who have developed a deep 'sense of place' that encompasses the area. Indeed, for indigenous and traditional peoples, community, culture, spirituality, nature, and territory are an indivisible whole (Masinde and Tavera 1999).

Others tend to assign value to an area's features precisely because it has been designated a 'legally protected area'. This tends to be a characteristic of urban populations that perceive protected areas as natural spaces accessible to them for recreational purposes. Still others value a protected area as a setting that provides opportunities for discovery or fulfillment of deeper values, regardless of the particular features of the area. Of course, these three ways of approaching protected area values are not mutually exclusive, and for many individuals may operate simultaneously.
Environmental philosophers tend to separate these values into three distinct categories (Posey 1999). The most commonly identified values are those that are *anthropocentric*, which relate to human welfare and concerns. *Biocentric* values are based on an approach that assigns moral standing to species according to their characteristics of sentience (awareness) and conation (the capacity to strive for certain ends). Values that are derived from a concern for ecology of whole communities and their interdependent relationships are *ecocentric* in nature. For example, the religious traditions that developed in the Middle East (Islam, Judaism and Christianity) tend to view nature in anthropocentric terms, while Eastern religions (Buddhism, Hinduism, and Taoism) and the cosmologies of indigenous and traditional peoples, often relate to nature in ecocentric terms.

Perhaps most appreciated by the scientists and environmentalists of western society are the material values of protected areas. They tend to value protected areas as spaces dedicated to conservation within larger landscapes that are more heavily impacted by human use. In this sense, protected areas are seen as sites for protecting the diversity and variability of life on earth, as well as the ecosystem processes that support this life. The arguments put forward for biodiversity conservation in protected areas by this group (although there are notable exceptions) tends to be utilitarian in nature, relating to the economic value of wild species to humans, the maintenance of life support systems, and the medicinal use of wild species for human health (WRI, IUCN, and UNEP, 1992).

On the other hand, the general public tends to give more importance to the intangible values of protected areas, whether these are perceived in personal, cultural, or societal terms. *Personal values* include such things as the psychological or therapeutic benefits of visiting protected areas. *Cultural values* include those that link people together, such as spiritual values. *Societal values* are those that bring cultures together, such as are featured in peace parks, or parks that serve as 'intercultural spaces' that help to link modern and traditional cultures.

The growing trend towards co-management arrangements with indigenous or traditional peoples offers the potential for developing and broadening this notion of parks as intercultural spaces, where differing cultural perspectives are held as equally important, management decisions are based on a profound sharing of perspectives, and interpretive programs address these cultural perspectives with respect. It even holds the potential for bringing to the fore the archaic whisper, those incredibly eloquent tribal societies, the "voices of the earth", that express with such directness and simplicity the need for harmonious relationships with nature and with one another (Posey 1999). It is this archaic whisper that calls forth the barely perceptible remembrance within moderns that wants to remind us that we are part of nature, not its master, not its steward.

Sacred Sites

You can list your own projects here – these are from the SNS Concept paper.

Sacred Forests: Naimina Enkiyio of the Maasai

"The Naimina Enkiyio indigenous forest is the centre of our lives. It means our survival, our spirit, our past and our future. As we are part of it, it is part of us. The forest is the holy temple or shrine of our people, a place of worship and communion with our deity. In the centre is the Cathedral of the Seven Trees, a sacred place where the Laibons or prophets bring offerings to Enkai, our Maasai God. Many ceremonies essential to our way of life are performed within or at the edges of our sacred forest. Emowuo Olkiteng, the beginning of a new age group when boys begin their rite of passage as young adults is marked by initiation rites. Enkitainoto Olorrip Olasar Lolporror – when the chosen spiritual leader of the new age group, accompanied by an elder spends the whole night awake standing motionless under a sacred tree deep within the forest. Emayian oo Nkituak/ Ntomonak – where Maasai women are blessed and cleansed to enhance their fertility under sacred trees of the forest. Ilpuli – in which morans partake of meat feasts deep within the forest to convalesce and restore their strength, commune with God, develop brotherliness and test their courage. Our spirituality is ultimately at one with the forest and everyday life. Our culture has preserved Naimina Enkiyio since it is the spiritual centre of our lives" .

Sacred Seas: Customary Maori Fisheries

In Maori culture all elements of the natural world originate from the gods, and are thus imbued with mana atua - the presence and the power of gods. Fish, like all living things, are possessed of mauri – the physical life force. The fisheries are mahinga kai – places of customary food gathering, and because of their origins and utility, they are taonga or valued resources. The customary rules and practices by which Maori managed their waters and fisheries reflected the significance of this view. Conservation has always been important to the Maori, and traditional Maori fishing practices included measures intended to maintain the habitat, preserve fish stocks, and regulate fisheries use.

Contributions to Livelihoods: Sacred Groves in India and Ghana

In several sacred groves of the Western Ghats of India, people are allowed to collect fallen dry wood, fruit from the forest floor, honey, sap (by tapping Caryota urens to make an alcoholic beverage) and other products. In some groves, cattle grazing is permitted. In most groves however, timber cannot be felled without the express permission of the deity, which is obtained through a ritual process known as kaul . In Ghana, the use of products from sacred groves varies between and within communities. It partly depends on the power of the spirit of the grove in question. In the village of Nanhini, no villagers enter the grove of the goddess Numafoa or ignore her taboos. In the same village, a second deity has less influence and so the taboos are not so strictly followed. Each grove has particular governing rules. In some cases, entry to a sacred grove is strictly limited, but in others the area may be exploited or restricted for certain forest resources. In one sacred grove in Nanhini, palms can be tapped for wine, and medicines and other specified products can be gathered, but it cannot be used for farming or hunting .

Sacred Mountains: The 'Dragon Hills' of Yunnan Province, China.

The Dai (T'ai), an indigenous ethnic group in South-West China, inhabit the Xishuangbanna region in Yunnan Province. According to their traditional concepts a Holy Hill or Nong is a forested hill where gods reside. All the plants and animals that inhabit the Holy Hills are either companions of the gods or sacred living things in god's garden. The Dai also believe that the spirits of great and revered chieftains go to the Holy Hills to live, following their departure from the world of the living. Their management of the Holy Hills through informal and informal norms, ethical rules and religious beliefs has resulted in bodiversity and habitat conservation within the area. There are hundreds of well preserved seasonal rainforest areas, which are characterised by species of Antiaris, Pouteria, Canarium, and others. A large number of endemic or relic species of the local flora have also been protected, including about 100 species of medicinal plants and more than 150 economically useful plants. The large number of forested Holy Hills distributed throughout the region form hundreds of 'green islands'. This pattern could help the natural reserves, which were established by the state government in recent years, by exchanging genes and playing the role of 'stepping stones' for the flow of genetic materials .

Sacred Wetlands in West Africa

In the forest and savannah zones of Guinea, traditional beliefs are deeply embedded in everyday village life. Here, several lakes are sacred to local communities, and strict religious taboos and local rules shape the use of wetland resources. At Lake Wassaya it is forbidden to hunt, there is a very short fishing season, and even the Wassaya's
crocodiles are sacred. People wishing to see the lake must first gain permission from a group of village elders. These traditional beliefs are still followed today and have helped maintain the ecological integrity of these wetlands . For coastal peoples of Côte d'Ivoire', the great fishing period (May to October) is initiated by an opening rite over the 'Aby' lagoon, sometimes carried out simultaneously in the different areas. The priest of the spirit called Assohon opens the fishing in May and closes it in October. Sacred catfish of Sapia are sheltered in the Dransi River which is formally forbidden to fishermen. Together with the sacred crocodiles from Gbanhui, all the aquatic species are covered by food prohibitions to villagers. During the day it is forbidden to go to the Yonyongo River because it is dedicated to venerated crocodiles.

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