

World Commission on Protected Areas (WCPA)

Draft Mandate 2026–2029

VISION

Effective and equitable protected and conserved areas (PCAs) are fundamental to restoring the richness and abundance of life on Earth. Well-connected networks of PCAs – which include protected areas, other effective area-based conservation measures and, as appropriate, Indigenous and traditional territories – help protect the intrinsic rights and values of nature; contribute Nature-based Solutions for global challenges facing humanity; and provide benefits to Earth's climate and human health and well-being.

MISSION

The World Commission on Protected Areas develops and provides scientific, technical and policy advice, and advocates for global and national systems of marine, inland water and terrestrial PCAs that result in successful outcomes for the conservation of nature¹ and the well-being of humankind, based on principles of sound design, good management and equitable governance.

OBJECTIVES

The World Commission on Protected Areas mandate for 2026–2029, aligned with the IUCN Programme 2026–2029 and the 20-year Strategic Vision, catalyses and supports global efforts to expand, recognise and improve systems of PCAs to halt and reverse biodiversity loss by 2030 by:

1. Providing a clear vision and common set of definitions for area-based conservation, anticipating threats and recognising emerging priorities, to influence the development and implementation of global biodiversity and climate policy, in recognition of the significant value of PCAs for nature conservation and human well-being;
2. Promoting and helping guide the design, management, governance and monitoring of well-connected PCAs to support the conservation of nature and deliver Nature-based Solutions to global challenges such as climate change, land degradation, food and water security, One Health and well-being;
3. Advocating for people who constitute the workforce directly supporting protected and conserved area systems, including and especially rangers, Indigenous stewards, protected area staff and other front-line workers;
4. Making the case for institutional, public and private investment to enable well-functioning, ecologically connected, and effectively and equitably managed PCA systems, supported by public policy, incentives, capacity development and a mainstreamed role;
5. Recognising and acknowledging the diversity of stakeholders and of governance types that contribute to the success of PCAs and their systems and promoting robust collaboration among the diverse interests, as well as the valuing of benefits of PCAs by larger parts of societies.

¹ Nature always refers to biodiversity, at genetic, species and ecosystem level, and often also refers to geodiversity, landform and broader natural values.

PROGRAMME PRIORITIES

WCPA will generate knowledge and support the implementation of relevant IUCN 2026–2029 programme areas, working closely with all relevant elements of the Secretariat and other IUCN Commissions. The expertise that WCPA brings to the Union as a key global knowledge-broker and standard setter on PCAs will advance this work by incorporating the diverse perspectives and experience of the WCPA membership network.

Ensuring protected and conserved areas result in effective and equitable conservation outcomes

WCPA will:

- (i) Work to scale up the conservation of nature with effective PCAs in support of agreed global targets and taking into account the variable conditions that exist in today's world; work with national, subnational and regional governments, Indigenous peoples, local communities, private landholders and others on the design and completion of well-connected systems of effective and equitable PCAs that target areas of importance for nature, including the High Seas and the Antarctic and Southern Ocean ecosystems;
- (ii) Provide high-level guidance on assessment and reporting on PCA effectiveness and conservation outcomes with reference to all forms of threats to the ecological integrity² including "Crimes that Affect the Environment (CAE)"³;
- (iii) Develop and deliver science, tools, guidance materials, standards and training to build capacity and professionalise protected area management. Topics include (but are not limited to) harmonisation of criteria for classifications and categories of conservation areas, and sustainable limits of acceptable use in protected and conserved areas (e.g. agriculture, aquaculture, forestry, fisheries, non-timber use, wildlife exploitation);
- (iv) Support PCA leaders, rangers, Indigenous stewards and other front-line staff as an essential planetary health workforce through strategic partnerships;
- (v) Work with other commissions, national and subnational governments, Indigenous peoples, local communities and private landholders to facilitate the equitable governance, effective management and sound design of protected areas, based on respect for human rights, nature rights and country commitments under the Convention on Biological Diversity; and
- (vi) Serve as a lead or co-convenor of workshops and conferences including the World PCA Congress, International MPA Congress, and World PA Leaders Forum and continue to support the World Ranger Congress.

Promoting Protected and Conserved Areas as Nature-based Solutions to address climate change and other societal challenges

- (i) Continue to work towards mainstreaming PCAs as Nature-based Solutions to address climate change, One Health, land degradation, disaster risk reduction, food and water security, and other societal challenges. WCPA will also develop technical guidance and advice on the sound design and management of well-connected PCAs to effectively deliver these benefits, with a focus on advancing the protection of primary forests, peatlands and other carbon-rich ecosystems;
- (ii) Provide guidance on and advocate for the importance of ecological integrity as a concept

² Operational definition from the Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) glossary. Ecological integrity is defined as "the degree to which an ecosystem's composition, structure and function resemble those characteristic of its natural range of variation, which may be defined from historical or minimally disturbed reference states, replicated contemporary samples, ecosystem models and/or expert judgment. CBD 2024"

³ Terminology as adopted in the merged Motions 48/52. "Crimes that affect the Environment (CAE) constitute a broad category of crimes, including but not limited to a subset of CAE (illegal deforestation, mining and land conversion; illegal wildlife exploitation, use and trafficking; and illegal fishing) that some refer to as nature crime."

that delivers on biodiversity and climate and can support human well-being outcomes. In addition, WCPA will develop guidance on the risks to ecological integrity;

- (iii) Continue to position PCAs as essential contributors to the objectives of all three Rio conventions as well as the Convention on Wetlands, World Heritage, the Convention on Migratory Species and other multilateral environmental agreements; work with the conventions to replicate regional and national initiatives to incorporate PCAs into climate change and disaster risk reduction strategies;
- (iv) Support capacity development to encourage and support new conservation leaders, including young professionals, and strong communication and outreach to demonstrate the relevance of PCAs to human welfare and well-being; and
- (v) Continue engagement to expand global constituencies for nature conservation with a focus on (including but not exclusively) urban conservation, the #Nature for All initiative, Rights of Nature, One Health and Restoration.

In addition to these established priorities, WCPA will remain flexible and responsive to issues affecting PCAs that are as yet unknown or anticipated.

STRUCTURE

WCPA is led by the Commission Chair and a Deputy Chair, supported by a Steering Committee and an operational structure including Themes, Task Forces and Specialist Groups that will contribute to the realisation of this mandate. They will collaborate with the Commission Support Unit and relevant units concerned with Protected and Conserved Areas, Oceans, Forests and Grasslands and the World Heritage Programme in the IUCN Secretariat as well as IUCN Regional Offices, other Commissions, and IUCN Members to realise IUCN's One Programme Charter. Thematic and Regional Vice-Chairs will be appointed to guide programme delivery and ensure there is a meaningful WCPA presence in relevant regions of the world.

MEMBERSHIP

WCPA will continue to expand and strengthen its globally active and geographically representative network of experts to support programme implementation and will increase its capacity through strategic partnerships, active fundraising and network mobilisation. WCPA membership is voluntary and by invitation or application, with review by the Regional Vice Chairs. Membership includes some of the world's foremost conservation practitioners, thinkers and knowledge-holders, including natural and social scientists, protected area managers and staff, academics, young professionals, Indigenous peoples and community leaders.