

Is Your MPA Effective?: New Report Offers Ways to Assess Management

The number of marine protected areas is growing worldwide. But how effective is each in meeting its objectives? A new report from the World Conservation Union (IUCN) offers a method for evaluating the successes and shortfalls of individual protected areas and protected area systems.

Evaluating Effectiveness: A Framework for Assessing the Management of Protected Areas, published in October 2000, is an evaluation workbook for protected-area stakeholders. Providing step-by-step advice, the report is designed to be used at a variety of assessment levels, from relatively quick evaluations at a national level to detailed monitoring programs at each site.

The report guides readers through decisions about how thorough an assessment should be, what indicators should be used, how the framework may be applied at different scales, and who should carry out the assessment. It is designed for both marine and terrestrial protected areas.

"First and foremost, evaluation should be seen as a normal part of the process of management," says the report. "Evaluation helps management to adapt and improve through a learning process." By learning, managers can ensure that money and other resources are not wasted on programs that are not achieving objectives.

Adaptable to local conditions

The report's framework arose from discussions within the IUCN World Commission on Protected Areas, whose Management Effectiveness Task Force conducted pilot studies for three years prior to the report's publication. Marc Hockings, a co-chair of the task force, authored the report with Sue Stolton and Nigel Dudley of Equilibrium Consultants (UK).

The authors arranged the report in two main sections. The first explains the theoretical and methodological aspects of the framework. The second section contains case studies to demonstrate a range of evaluative approaches for protected areas around the world. Included in the report is a checklist for evaluators to use in ranking their protected areas on 19 issues, including enforcement, communications, economic benefits to local communities, and regional development.

The framework is designed to be adapted to local conditions. Although the above-mentioned checklist has been implemented at a number of protected areas (namely terrestrial sites in Africa and Australia), Hockings said he wouldn't want to see it applied without modification in every circumstance. "Rather, it can be a starting point for working with site managers, local communities, and other stakeholders to develop a more locally relevant assessment instrument," he said.

Likewise, while the framework was designed to work for both terrestrial and marine protected areas, Hockings said its elements need to be fitted to the biome. "For example, the nature of threats to protected areas differ substantially between marine and terrestrial areas," said Hockings. "The greater connectivity within marine systems means that translocated impacts will be more significant and the threat analysis will have to be sensitive to this."

Resistance to evaluation

Still a relatively new tool for protected areas, performance evaluation has encountered some resistance from managers, concerned that the tool will be used primarily to watch and punish them for inadequate performance. It is just as important, said Hockings, for the tool to be used to identify what is going well.

"The major beneficiaries of [evaluation] systems should be the managers themselves," he said. "The results of such assessments should help them do their jobs better, demonstrate the need for more resources where these are needed, and

assist in developing a more open dialogue and partnership with local communities and other stakeholders."

For more information:

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Report Is Available for Free Online

Evaluating Effectiveness: A Framework for Assessing the Management of Protected Areas is available to be downloaded for free from the IUCN website, at <http://wcpa.iucn.org/pubs/publications.html>.

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