



**VTH IUCN WORLD PARKS CONGRESS:
8 - 17 SEPTEMBER 2003**

The Vth IUCN World Congress on Protected Areas, or World Parks Congress (WPC), opened on Monday, 8 September and will continue until Wednesday, 17 September, in Durban, South Africa. IUCN - The World Conservation Union organizes the Congress every ten years to take stock of protected areas (PAs), appraise progress and setbacks, and chart the course for PAs over the next decade. The theme of the 2003 WPC is "Benefits beyond Boundaries." Participants will address: the role of PAs in alleviating poverty; how PAs adapt and anticipate global change; PAs' place in our sustainable future; and their contribution to security.

Several outputs are expected from the meeting. The Durban Accord and Action Plan will consist of a high-level vision statement for PAs and an outline of implementation mechanisms. WPC Recommendations will be linked to the workshops that will take place during the Congress. The WPC will also provide input to the seventh Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). In addition, it will review drafts of the 2003 United Nations List of Protected Areas report, the global report on the world's PAs, prepared by the United Nations Environment Programme - World Conservation Monitoring Centre (UNEP-WCMC), with input from the World Commission on Protected Areas (WCPA). A handbook, "Managing Protected Areas in the 21st Century" will collate case studies, models and lessons learned during the Congress and will be the "User Manual" for the Durban Accord. Other anticipated outputs include a Protected Areas Learning Network, African Outputs and a Durban Youth Accord.

On Monday, 8 September, WPC participants attended an opening ceremony, including an African theatre performance and keynote presentations by Congress Patrons Nelson Mandela, former President of South Africa, and Her Majesty Queen Noor of Jordan.

OPENING CEREMONY

Welcoming all participants and guests, Achim Steiner, IUCN Director General and WPC Master of Ceremonies, highlighted the international community's accomplishment in designating at least 10% of the earth's surface as PAs.

Thabo Mbeki, President of the Republic of South Africa, stressed the need to protect natural ecosystems to preserve biodiversity and ensure sustainable livelihoods. Drawing attention to the UN Millennium Declaration and the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation, he expressed the hope that globalization would become a positive force for the equitable distribution of resources. Identifying poverty and

underdevelopment as major threats to nature conservation, he commended the New Partnership for Africa's Development for combining environmental and social goals.

HM Queen Noor underlined the WPC's relevance to the goals of the World Summit on Sustainable Development. She highlighted the role of ecosystems in sustaining livelihoods and of transboundary PAs in promoting peace and security. Stressing the need for transboundary PAs, she called for increased international cooperation.

Focusing on challenges for conservation, Nelson Mandela stressed the need to involve youth in PA management and to consider PAs' contribution to poverty alleviation. Highlighting projects empowering people and plans for transboundary PAs in southern Africa, he noted that a sustainable future for PAs lies in developing partnerships.

A youth representative noted that PAs are sacred places important for life on earth. She added that PAs enhance socioeconomic development and preserve cultural heritage. Noting that African youth lack not interest but opportunities, she called for funding youth programmes related to nature conservation. Another youth representative stressed PAs' contribution to economy, recreation, education, medicine and ecotourism. He called on present generations to better manage PAs for the benefit of future generations.

Klaus Töpfer, UNEP Executive Director, delivered a message from Kofi Annan, UN Secretary General. Noting the vital services provided by ecosystems, Töpfer highlighted the need to: address the isolation of PAs; ensure adequate funding for protection; protect the rights of indigenous people; and equitably share the benefits of biodiversity. Emphasizing the economic dependency on marine resources in coastal areas, he said protection of the oceans had so far been neglected.

Ian Johnson, World Bank Vice President, read a statement on behalf of James Wolfensohn, World Bank President. Regarding the management of PAs, he emphasized three challenges: ensuring that protected areas are ecologically and socially sustainable; providing adequate human and financial resources; and equitably sharing the costs and benefits of PAs.

Zhu Guangyao, Vice Minister of the Environmental Protection Administration of China, said that PAs cover over 15% of China, and outlined his country's efforts regarding PAs, including the creation of plans and regulations for PA establishment and management, international cooperation for transboundary areas, and recognition of the relationship between PAs and the surrounding communities. He said challenges include weak management, insufficient funding, conflicts between stakeholders and the lack of a comprehensive legal framework.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENTS

Len Good, Chief Executive Officer, Global Environment Facility (GEF), stressed that developing countries and the poor depend on nature for their development. Highlighting that the GEF is the largest financial contributor to PAs, he noted several GEF-funded projects related to PAs worldwide and expressed the GEF's commitment to strengthening the global PA network.

Aroha Te Pareake Mead, indigenous community representative, stressed the significance of PAs for indigenous peoples. Emphasizing the importance of cultural diversity, equity and justice, she advocated the recognition of indigenous rights and views with regard to the designation and management of PAs.

Yolanda Kakabadse, IUCN President, outlined challenges for managers of PAs regarding: mobilizing resources; linking PAs to adjacent lands; involving interested groups in decision making; supporting indigenous communities; and distributing benefits to society. She said threats facing PAs include climate change, armed conflicts and invasive alien species, and stressed the need for solutions to cover the costs of establishing and managing PAs and for gaining the support of urban people.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE WPC

FIRST WORLD CONFERENCE ON NATIONAL PARKS: The First World Conference on National Parks (Seattle, US, 30 June - 7 July 1962) aimed to establish a more effective international understanding of national parks and to encourage further development of the national park movement worldwide. Issues discussed included: the effects of humans on wildlife; species extinction; the religious significance and aesthetic meaning of certain parks and wilderness; international supervision of boundary parks; the economic benefits of tourism; the role of national parks in scientific studies; and some practical problems related to park management.

SECOND WORLD CONFERENCE ON NATIONAL PARKS: The Second World Conference on National Parks (Yellowstone, US, 18-27 September 1972) addressed: the effects of tourism on protected areas; broad aspects of park planning and management; special social, scientific and environmental problems within national parks in wet tropical, arid and mountain regions; controversial aspects of wildlife management in PAs; the social, scientific and environmental problems of marine, island, polar and sub-polar PAs; the problems associated with communicating park values to visitors and raising environmental awareness; international training opportunities; opportunities to expand and improve the global park system; and the need for and benefits of public support for PAs.

THIRD WORLD CONGRESS ON NATIONAL PARKS: The Third World Congress on National Parks (Bali, Indonesia, 11-22 October 1982) focused on the role of PAs in sustaining society, and recognized 10 major areas of concern, including the inadequacy of the existing network of terrestrial PAs worldwide, and the need for: more marine, coastal and freshwater PAs; improving the ecological and managerial quality of existing PAs; a system of consistent categories of PAs to balance conservation and development needs; links with sustainable development; capacity to manage PAs and economic tools to support and promote their value; monitoring; international cooperation mechanisms; and developing a global programme on PAs using the IUCN network.

FOURTH WORLD CONGRESS ON NATIONAL PARKS AND PROTECTED AREAS: The Fourth World Congress on National Parks and Protected Areas: Parks for Life (Caracas, Venezuela, 10-21 February 1992) emphasized the relationship between people and PAs, and the need for: the identification of sites of importance for biodiversity conservation; a regional approach to land management; investments as part of an overall development package; and building a stronger constituency for conservation. The Caracas Action Plan synthesized the strategic actions for PAs over the decade 1992-2002 and provided a global framework for collective action under four objectives:

integrating PAs into wider planning frameworks; expanding the support for PAs by involving local communities and other non-traditional interest groups; strengthening the capacity to manage PAs; and expanding international cooperation for the financing, development and management of PAs. The Plan aimed to extend the PA network to cover at least 10% of each major biome by the year 2000.

SYMPOSIUM: PROTECTED AREAS IN THE 21ST CENTURY: FROM ISLANDS TO NETWORKS: The symposium "Protected Areas in the 21st Century: from Islands to Networks" (Albany, Australia, 25-29 November 1997) concluded that PAs face significant challenges, including the need for: moving from an "island" to a "network" view of PAs; mainstreaming PAs into other areas of public policy; managing PAs by, for and with local communities; and raising management standards through capacity building. It produced five outputs: the Road to Durban 2003 – recommendations for planning and implementing the next WPC; imperatives for PAs; a campaign document for PAs: from islands to networks; new directions for the WCPA; and PAs and the CBD.

REGIONAL MEETINGS: Numerous regional meetings were held in preparation for the WPC. At the West and Central Africa workshop (Kribi, Cameroon, 27-31 January 2003), participants discussed the need for novel financing and poverty alleviation mechanisms, the development of an effective communications system and the involvement of minority groups and women in decision making. They agreed on a communiqué and a Declaration for Durban, a report including background papers and recommendations, a synthesis document on major issues and a formal WCPA network.

During the Fourth World Ranger Congress (Victoria, Australia, 21-28 March 2003), IUCN and the International Ranger Federation launched an initiative on "Protecting the Protectors: addressing the increasing threats faced by rangers," which adopted a resolution to promote measures for protecting rangers.

Concluding a series of four workshops, a Mediterranean meeting (Murcia, Spain, 26-30 March 2003) presented different experiences and defined Mediterranean specificities. Participants addressed the linkages between PAs and surrounding land uses, gaps in the system, sustainable financing, training and governance, and outlined orientations and recommendations.

In South America, a regional forum on national parks and PAs (Buenos Aires, Argentina, 26-28 March 2003) produced the Buenos Aires Declaration, which stresses the protection and management of natural areas as a component of human development agendas. Participants concluded that the region has lessons to offer on national conservation systems, conflict resolution and bottom-up conservation models. They also decided to develop a regional common agenda for PAs. In North America, a workshop was held during the joint conference of the George Wright Society and the U.S. National Park Service on "Protecting our Diverse Heritage: the role of parks, protected areas and cultural sites" (San Diego, US, 14-18 April 2003). In Central America, a regional forum was held (El Zamorano, Honduras, 27-31 July 2003), which discussed draft resolutions and recommendations for the WPC.

THINGS TO LOOK FOR TODAY

PLENARY: Plenary will convene at 9:00 am in the Main Hall to hear keynote presentations and a panel discussion on "Benefits beyond Boundaries."

SYMPOSIUM: At 2:00 pm, Symposium A on "Benefits to People" will convene in the Main Hall. Symposium B on "Managing with Change" will be held in Hall 3A.

EVENING EVENT: At 8:30 pm, an evening event on "Celebration of the Sacred and Non Material Values of Protected Areas by Indigenous and Traditional Leaders from around the World" will take place in the Main Hall.