

Protected Areas in the Arabian Peninsula

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Abstract. Protected areas help conserve key elements of biodiversity, play a significant role in social and economic development, and embody many practical approaches to participatory and collaborative management. Although approximately 230 protected areas have been legally established in the Arabian Peninsula comprising approximately 900,000 km², this system does not fully reflect the diversity of habitats and species, and the level of management greatly varies from one area to the next. The IUCN Protected Areas Programme helps to guide and enhance the development of adequate regional approaches and models for effective protected area management, with a focus on community participation and involvement at all levels.

Key words. Protected Areas, Arabian Peninsula, Participatory Approaches, IUCN.

Overview

A Protected Area (PA) is defined by IUCN as: “A clearly defined geographic 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”. Protected Areas now cover more than 11.5% of the earth’s surface (CHAPE et al. 2008). The number of PAs has increased rapidly in recent years and they are now a major land use in their own right. Well-managed Protected Areas are essential to address biodiversity loss and to protect species – particularly those threatened by habitat loss.

IUCN is recognized as a global leader in relation to protected areas, particularly in relation to standard setting, provision of policy advice and convening key forums and dialogues. IUCN’s mission in relation to PAs is: to promote an effectively managed, representative system of marine and terrestrial protected areas. The key IUCN strengths and activities in relation to protected areas include:

- Knowledge – preparation of practical guidance on a range of management issues, such as through the Protected areas Best Practice Series.
- Convening – major events such as the World Parks Congress, convened by IUCN every 10 years.
- Standard Setting – such as in relation to the IUCN PA Category System.
- Advising Conventions and Agreements: such as the World Heritage Convention and the Convention on Biological Diversity.
- Support for protected areas field projects, such as training PA managers in developing countries.

The main objective of the IUCN Protected Areas Programme is to guide and enhance the development of adequate regional approaches and models for effective protected area