IUCN Category Ib - Wilderness Area

DEFINITION

Large unmodified or slightly modified areas that retain their natural character without permanent or significant human habitation, which are protected and managed so as to preserve their natural condition.

DESCRIPTION

IUCN Management Category Ib (Wilderness Area) refers to those areas that remain largely unchanged by humans. They are defined by IUCN as *"large unmodified or slightly modified areas, retaining their natural character and influence, without permanent or significant human habitation, which are protected and managed so as to preserve their natural condition"*. [1]

The primary objective of protected areas in this category is to protect the long-term ecological integrity of natural areas that are undisturbed by significant human activity, free of modern infrastructure and where natural forces and processes predominate, so that current and future generations have the opportunity to experience such areas. Other objectives include to enable indigenous communities to maintain their traditional lifestyles, to protect their cultural and spiritual values and to allow for low-impact research activities.

SUPPORTED BY

Developed by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) with support of the World Commission on Protected Areas (WCPA) and other international institutions such as the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), and assigned by national governments.

YEAR OF CREATION

The current IUCN Categories were approved in 1994, and revised guidelines were published in 2008. [1]

COVERAGE

Globally applicable.

CRITERIA

The area should generally: [1]

- Be free of modern infrastructure, development and industrial extractive activity, including but not limited to roads, pipelines, power lines, cell phone towers, oil and gas platforms, offshore liquefied natural gas terminals, other permanent structures, mining, hydro-power development, oil and gas extraction, agriculture including intensive livestock grazing, commercial fishing, low-flying aircraft etc., preferably with highly restricted or no motorized access.
- Be characterized by a high degree of intactness: containing a large percentage of the original extent of the ecosystem, complete or near-complete native faunal and floral assemblages, retaining intact predator-prey systems, and including large mammals.
- Be of sufficient size to protect biodiversity; to maintain ecological processes and ecosystem services; to maintain ecological refugia; to buffer against the impacts of climate change; and to maintain evolutionary processes.
- Offer outstanding opportunities for solitude, enjoyed once the area has been reached, by simple, quiet and non-intrusive means of travel (i.e., non-motorized or highly regulated motorized access where strictly necessary and consistent with the biological objectives listed above).
- Be free of inappropriate or excessive human use or presence, which will

decrease wilderness values and ultimately prevent an area from meeting the biological and cultural criteria listed above. However, human presence should not be the determining factor in deciding whether to establish a category Ib area. The key objectives are biological intactness and the absence of permanent infrastructure, extractive industries, agriculture, motorised use, and other indicators of modern or lasting technology.

MANAGEMENT

These areas are managed to maintain natural condition with minimal human intervention, and this can be carried out by a range of actors depending on the governance type of the area (see factsheet IUCN Protected Area Categories for information on governance types).

BUSINESS RELEVANCE

Legal and compliance – The classification of a Category Ib protected area requires that such areas are managed for conservation by legal or other effective means, and therefore legal recognition and protection at the national or sub-national level is likely to be present in these sites. The level of legal protection will however vary between countries, and will depend on the governance type of the area, as they receive differing levels of recognition by government in different countries. Nonetheless a number of national laws are likely to apply to these sites that deter large-scale economic activities in order to maintain the conservation values of these large unmodified areas.

As designated protected areas, these sites receive international attention and have been incorporated into a number of environmental safeguard standards. These include those of multilateral financial institutions, such as but not limited to the World Bank [2] and the International Finance Corporation [3]. For details on environmental safeguard standards which are applicable to all protected areas, please see the Protected Areas page.

In addition, a number of sector specific safeguard standards refer to protected areas, many of which are related to certification programs, including the Roundtable on Sustainable Biomaterials (RSB) that declares categories I to IV as ‘no-go’ areas. [4] For details on certification programmes which are applicable to all protected areas, please see the Protected Areas page.

Biodiversity importance – These areas are protected for their biodiversity

conservation values based on their size and intactness. These areas are therefore likely to hold high biodiversity value due to their potential role in maintaining natural processes and species that are perhaps threatened in more modified landscapes. Although relatively large in size, these areas form distinct management units that are therefore of high relevance for mitigating and avoiding risk from biodiversity loss.

Socio-cultural values – These areas are largely free of human habitation and activity and therefore the presence of socio-cultural values are less likely due to a lack of large-scale human presence and intervention at sites. Nonetheless, some small-scale activities and human presence may exist within these areas, and many will hold some cultural value as a result of the solitude that can be experienced at these sites. The protection of cultural and spiritual values of indigenous and non-indigenous populations of these areas is an objective of the category guidelines, therefore any socio-cultural value present in the area should be actively safeguarded.

REFERENCES & WEBSITE

1. Dudley, N. (Ed.) Guidelines for Applying Protected Area Management Categories (2008).
2. The World Bank. World Bank Operational Manual. Revised Version 2013. OP 4.04 Natural habitats (2013).
3. International Finance Corporation (IFC). Performance Standard 6: Biodiversity Conservation and Sustainable Management of Living Natural Resources (2012).
4. Roundtable on Sustainable Biomaterials. RSB Conservation Impact Assessment Guidelines. version 2.0, 1–23 (2011).

The Everglades, Florida, USA (IUCN Management Category Ib). Jason Patrick Ross/Shutterstock.com

Category:

Protected areas

Related pages

IUCN Protected Area Management Categories (Areas)

IUCN Category Ia - Strict Nature Reserve (Areas)

IUCN Category II - National Park (Areas)

IUCN Category III - Natural Monument or Feature (Areas)

IUCN Category IV - Habitat / Species Management Area (Areas)

IUCN Category V - Protected Landscape / Seascape (Areas)

IUCN Category VI - Protected Area with Sustainable Use of Natural Resources (Areas)

High-Biodiversity Wilderness Areas (HBWA) (Areas)

Last of the Wild (Areas)

Wilderness (Terms)

Tools

Protected Planet a tool for visualizing information on protected areas at the site level, country level, regional level and global level. This includes information on the IUCN category where known. Protected Planet brings together spatial data, descriptive information and images from the World Database on Protected Areas, WikipediaTM and PanaramioTM.

The Integrated Biodiversity Assessment Tool (IBAT) provides a visualisation

and GIS download tool for protected areas, including the IUCN category where known.

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