

UNDER STRICT EMBARGO

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World met target for protected area coverage on land, but quality must improve

UNEP/IUCN Protected Planet Report: great progress since 2010 with over 22 million km² of land and 28 million km² of ocean protected or conserved and 42% of current coverage added in the last decade; but a third of key biodiversity areas lack any coverage, and less than 8% of land is both protected and connected.

Nairobi, 19 May 2021 - The international community has made major progress towards the global target on protected and conserved area coverage, but has fallen far short on its commitments on the quality of these areas, according to a new report from the UN Environment Programme World Conservation Monitoring Centre (UNEP-WCMC) and the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), produced with support from the National Geographic Society.

The latest edition of the biennial Protected Planet Report is the final report card on [Aichi Target 11](#) – the global 10-year target on protected and conserved areas which aimed to bring important benefits to both biodiversity and people by 2020. Aichi Target 11 included the aim of protecting *at least 17% of land and inland waters and 10% of the marine environment*. Today, **22.5 million km² (16.64%) of land and inland water ecosystems and 28.1 million km² (7.74%) of coastal waters and the ocean are within documented protected and conserved areas**, an increase of over 21 million km² (42% of the current coverage) since 2010, the new report reveals. It is clear that coverage on land will considerably exceed the 17% target when data for all areas are made available, as many protected and conserved areas remain unreported.

The [post-2020 global biodiversity framework](#) is due to be agreed at the UN Biodiversity Conference (CBD COP15) in Kunming, China, in October and is anticipated to include the ambition to scale up coverage and effectiveness of protected and conserved areas. The Protected Planet Report concludes that the challenge will be to improve the quality of both existing and new areas to achieve positive change for people and nature, as biodiversity continues to decline, even within many protected areas. The [IUCN Green List Standard](#) is the only global measure of an overall change in quality.

Neville Ash, Director, UNEP-WCMC says: “Protected and conserved areas play a crucial role in tackling biodiversity loss, and great progress has been made in recent years on strengthening the global network of protected and conserved areas. However, designating and accounting for more protected and conserved areas is insufficient; they need to be effectively managed and equitably governed if they are to realise their many benefits at local and global scales and secure a better future for people and planet.”

Effectiveness and equity are crucial post-2020

To be effective, protected and conserved areas need to include important places for biodiversity. Yet, one-third of key biodiversity areas, be they on land, inland waters or the ocean, are still not protected at all, according to the report.

Protected and conserved areas also need to be better connected to each other, to allow species to move and ecological processes to function. While there has been recent improvement, less than 8% of land is both protected and connected – far below the almost 17% of land area that is now under protection – and there remains a need to ensure surrounding areas are managed appropriately to maintain biodiversity values.

As well as designating new areas, the report calls for existing protected and conserved areas to be identified and recognised, by accounting for the efforts of indigenous peoples, local communities and private entities, whilst recognising their rights and responsibilities. The conservation efforts of these custodians remain undervalued and under-reported, though their contributions are extensive in securing a future for nature.

The report also finds that more needs to be done to manage protected and conserved areas equitably, so that the costs of conservation are not borne by local people while its benefits are enjoyed by others. This is key to building conservation networks that have the support and participation of people everywhere.

“IUCN welcomes the enormous progress made, particularly over the last decade, with protected areas covering a growing proportion of the globe. As biodiversity continues to decline, we now call for Parties at the UN Biodiversity Conference in Kunming to set an ambitious target that will ensure protected area coverage of 30% of land, freshwater and ocean by 2030 - and these areas must be placed optimally to protect the diversity of life on Earth and be effectively managed and equitably governed,” says IUCN Director General, Dr Bruno Oberle.

Protecting and restoring nature are mutually dependent

By protecting intact areas and restoring degraded ecosystems, countries can create a network for nature that helps to halt and reverse biodiversity loss, maintains essential ecosystem services, helps society tackle and adapt to climate change and reduces the risk of future pandemics. Managed effectively, protected and conserved areas can help to prevent further ecosystem degradation and consolidate progress on the [UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration](#). The Decade will be officially launched on 5 June, World Environment Day 2021. In many cases, areas in the process of being restored will themselves likely be added to the protected and conserved area network, to ensure that the benefits from restoration are sustained.

NOTES TO EDITORS

To receive the full report and key facts and figures under embargo, please request access via the contact details below.

Post-embargo, the report will be available (please note the website currently accessible via this link is the 2018 Protected Planet Report. It will be replaced with the new version at the time of launch): <https://livereport.protectedplanet.net/>

Report authors are available for advance interviews.

They will also take part in a virtual news conference launch: Wednesday 19 May, 10:15am

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To join: https://zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_LAHleGkGTUyqVYsawtJBhw

About UNEP-WCMC

The UN Environment Programme World Conservation Monitoring Centre (UNEP-WCMC) is a global centre of excellence on biodiversity, operating as a collaboration between UN Environment Programme and the charity WCMC. UNEP-WCMC works on the interface of science, policy, and practice to help tackle the global nature crisis.

About IUCN

IUCN is a membership Union composed of both government and civil society organisations. It harnesses the experience, resources and reach of its more than 1,400 Member organisations and the input of more than 18,000 experts. IUCN is the global authority on the status of the natural world and the measures needed to safeguard it.

About the UN Environment Programme (UNEP)

UNEP is the leading global voice on the environment. It provides leadership and encourages partnership in caring for the environment by inspiring, informing and enabling nations and peoples to improve their quality of life without compromising that of future generations.

About the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration

Led by the UNEP and the Food and Agriculture Organization, the UN Decade will draw together political support, scientific research and financial muscle to massively scale up restoration with the goal of reviving millions of hectares of terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems.

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