

For immediate release

Creating a common language for protected areas

IUCN paves the way for a common understanding of the world's natural gems

Almería, Spain, 11 May, 2007 (IUCN)

From 7 to 11 May 2007 over 100 experts from about 40 countries gathered in Almería, Spain, to improve the internationally-recognized IUCN Categories System, which since 1994 has created a “common language” for the world’s protected areas.

“The IUCN Categories System, which fills a void unfilled by others, has been endorsed by international conventions like the CBD and by regional agreements,” stated **Julia Marton-Lefèvre**, Director General of the World Conservation Union (IUCN). *“It is increasingly used by numerous countries around the world, including in the application of legislation and policy instruments,”* she added.

There are over 140 different names for protected areas around the world, creating confusion when setting standards for improving nature conservation through protected area systems. The six IUCN protected areas categories, which are based on conservation management objectives, have been adopted by various countries, and are used as guidance in the planning and management of protected areas in many others.

Discussions during the Categories Summit, and the open consultation process that preceded it, demonstrated the strong support that exists for such a classification system. It is a global comparative tool that provides the only mechanism for effective comparisons of protected areas at national, regional and international scales. In light of the growing conservation challenges, such as the need to mitigate the impacts of climate change, the Categories System will be all the more important as an international tool for protecting the Earth’s last natural jewels.

“We are not looking at the validity of the Categories, as these are used as a reference guide internationally,” said **Nik Lopoukhine**, Chair of the IUCN World Commission on Protected Areas (WCPA). *“We are looking at how to provide guidance on their application, in order to best support governments, decision-makers and protected area managers in their conservation efforts,”* he added.

The Summit provided the opportunity to start defining concrete ways to clarify and strengthen the six existing categories. Specific recommendations will then be presented to IUCN Members and the conservation community at large at the IUCN World Conservation Congress in Barcelona (2008). In particular, revisions to the System will focus on tightening standards for management and application of the system whilst keeping the necessary flexibility to allow governments, decision makers and protected areas authorities to adapt the categories to their own regional or national needs.

During the Summit, participants visited two protected areas in southern Spain which have applied the IUCN Categories System. The Cabo de Gata-Níjar Natural Park and the Sierra Nevada National Park are clear examples of Category V areas, which are those managed for landscape/seascape conservation and recreation. The distinguishing feature of such protected areas is the interaction between sustainable human activities and nature conservation, which involves a strong involvement of local communities. For example, the Cabo de Gata-Níjar Natural Park permits traditional herding and artisanal fishing activities which would

otherwise disappear. In the case of this park, human activities have actually shaped the biodiversity characteristics of the area, as illustrated by the presence of salt fields which play a key role in the protection of migratory bird species.

“The Cabo de Gata-Níjar Natural Park is a clear example of how nature conservation objectives and human wellbeing can be compatible”, commented David Sheppard, Director of the IUCN Programme on Protected Areas. “This category of protected area is growing in importance, especially in Europe and the Mediterranean, but it is important to highlight that all six categories of the system are equally important depending on the management objective at hand,” he added.

The Summit has been organized by IUCN, its Centre for Mediterranean Cooperation and WCPA, with the support of the regional Spanish authorities (Consejería de Medio Ambiente of the Junta de Andalucía), Fundación Biodiversidad and the Spanish Ministry of the Environment.

Notes to editors

IUCN Protected Area Categories: <http://www.iucn.org/themes/wcpa/theme/categories>

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About the World Conservation Union (IUCN)

Created in 1948, the World Conservation Union (IUCN) brings together 83 States, 110 government agencies, 800 plus NGOs, and some 10,000 scientists and experts from 181 countries in a unique worldwide partnership. The Union’s mission is to influence, encourage and assist societies throughout the world to conserve the integrity and diversity of nature and to ensure that any use of natural resources is equitable and ecologically sustainable.

The Union is the world's largest environmental knowledge network and has helped over 75 countries to prepare and implement national conservation and biodiversity strategies. The Union is a multicultural, multilingual organization with 1,000 staff located in 62 countries. Its headquarters are in Gland, Switzerland.

More information can be found at www.iucn.org