

The Global Partnership for Protected Area Training (GPPAT): Professionalizing Protected Area Management

El Iniciativa Global para Entrenamiento de los Profesionales de Áreas Protegidas: Profesionalizar la Gestión de las Áreas Protegidas

Le Partenariat Mondial pour la Formation de la Zone Protégée (GPPAT): Professionnalisation de la Gestion des Aires Protégées

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ABSTRACT

The thousands of MPAs worldwide represent increasingly complex management institutions that require highly diverse skill sets to optimally manage. These areas are often managed by staff without formal training, continued skill development, or associations to certify professional development and to represent MPA staff as a skilled trade like any other. This is a suboptimal paradigm for managing the institutions increasingly responsible for protecting threatened natural and social capital from diverse threats including climate change. Without professional development infrastructure similar to other important professions (from teachers to electricians to physicians), MPA practitioners are often hard-pressed to acquire the resources and respect from business and political interests that are essential to long term success. In addition to quality training programs in the classroom and the field, staff should be empowered through their full career cycle by professionalizing career development with the aid of transparent performance standards. These can be achieved through carefully designed certification programs that recognize performance on the job. A partnership to work with existing organizations to further professionalize marine and terrestrial PA management worldwide is in development by IUCN through the WCPA Training Task Force, the Global Protected Areas Programme, and the CBD Secretariat, with many global partners. The plan includes: 1) development of high-quality open access curricula specific to rangers, managers, or system administrators; 2) accreditation of partner institutions and creation of a scholarship trust fund for trainees; and 3) establishing regional certification programs for MPA professionals based on proven job performance using the successful MPA PRO model.

KEY WORDS: MPAs, careers, global, training, management, WCPA, MPA PRO

INTRODUCTION

The more than 160,000 protected areas worldwide are increasingly complex *management institutions* that require highly diverse skill sets to optimally manage. Though potentially providing trillions of dollars' worth of ecosystem services, these areas are often managed by staff without formal professional training, certification or resource support. This is a suboptimal paradigm for managing billion-dollar institutions that could also mitigate catastrophic climate change impacts.

A plan to professionalize protected area (PA) management worldwide received consensus endorsement in May 2011 at a meeting of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the World Commission on Protected Areas (WCPA-IUCN), German Federal Agency for Nature Conservation, and other major PA institutions. The new Global Partnership for Protected Area Training (GPPAT) will:

- i) Develop leading-edge open source curricula to professionalize training for three essential PA staff categories;
- ii) Implement advanced training through accreditation of exceptional training institutions and creation of a scholarship trust fund for trainees;
- iii) Establish a certification program that assesses and certifies on the job performance of PA professionals based on core competences and coordinate existing PA professional associations so that services for the entire career of PA professionals can be ensured.

GPPAT is about full-life-cycle development of PA professionals. It innovates by moving beyond training programs alone by coordinating courses into a larger professional certification system that services the needs of both young and veteran PA professionals throughout their career. It *incentivizes* PA staff to pursue the new opportunities that will *professionalize* PA management.

The proposed training elements of the program build on verified online and in-person PA curricula developed by WCPA by providing secure funding and onsite training facilities in selected UNESCO sites throughout the world. Working with both World Heritage and MAB sites will provide a range of training models from iconic, highly protected reserves to PAs that are integrated with multi-use activities. The initiative will be led by IUCN through the WCPA Training Task Force, the Global Protected Areas Programme, and the CBD Secretariat.

The proposed certification elements build on the existing WIO-COMPAS (W. Indian Ocean Certification of MPA Professionals) program and now in the process of expanding to other regions. This certification program can be easily modified for terrestrial PAs and exemplifies a regional model to ensure local ownership. WIO-COMPAS is endorsed by IUCN WCPA, WWF, International Ranger Federation and others.

Protected Areas are Critical yet Share Tenuous Futures

Protected areas (PAs) are the world's most cost effective tool for ecosystem service conservation and contributing to local people's livelihoods, thus assisting in poverty reduction. PAs have been recognized as critical instruments in achieving the objectives of the CBD and the Millennium Development Goals. Complex government initiatives have established more than *160,000 PAs worldwide* covering nearly 13% of the Earth's terrestrial surface and growing amounts of ocean area. These efforts represent a continued emphasis on PAs as increasingly critical *management institutions*.

Global change creates unprecedented challenges for PAs but also open windows of opportunity. Change is now the rule, both in speed and intensity, and the values of PAs in both climate mitigation and adaptation are now well-established. PAs are often at the core of efforts to conserve ecosystem services that are essential for water supply, agriculture, public health and mitigation of natural disasters. Yet, dozens of science and policy analyses have concluded that most PAs are not effectively managed.

Despite their contribution to national and local economies, PAs have often not attained a prominent place in national policies and priorities. The CBD established goals to stop biodiversity loss, yet, the recently released Global Biodiversity Outlook 3 concludes that targets have not been met. The Outlook warns that the principal pressures leading to biodiversity and ecosystem services losses are, in many cases, intensifying.

Protected Area Personnel Need Professional Development in Diverse Skills

The goals of PA management can be highly diverse, including biodiversity and ecosystem service conservation, protection of indigenous livelihoods, sustainable tourism, multi-use recreation, and climate change resilience. The complexity of modern PA management requires professionals with knowledge of disparate fields who have been adequately trained to comfortably integrate diverse skills. Yet, the need to professionalize PA management has not been adequately recognized. Advanced professional development programs for a diverse array of staff roles is crucial to ensuring PAs are capable of withstanding current threats and are prepared for new challenges (e.g., climate change).

In economic sectors other than PAs, formally trained professionals are required for managerial positions, with a

degree or specialization related to what they are managing. Academic institutions that offer formal programs in PA management are rare. PAs in many developing countries are mostly managed by those trained in narrow technical fields like biology, anthropology, and forestry who have modified their career paths. Professionals are also certified so they can perform services to a high standard and in an ethical manner.

An effective PA manager must understand ecological and social dynamics with broad knowledge of conservation science, including population dynamics, genetic diversity, and research. This person must also understand complex human social dynamics including socio-economics, stakeholder outreach, and conflict management. Knowledge of organizational administration, project management, budgeting, human resources, risk management, tourism, environmental education, infrastructure maintenance, and fundraising are also necessary.

Many national PA systems are understaffed, both in terms of quantity of staff and in depth of expertise. This limitation has led to a dependency on international and national NGOs and government technical assistance projects that are often not-lasting. Due to the limited number of academic programs in PA management, few long-term employees have specialized training that integrate the above fields of PA management and biodiversity conservation. Challenges are increased for governments since many professionals migrate to the NGO or consulting sectors and the capacity for national systems to train new personnel is often very limited. Training will not alone improve staff retention: there is a need for tools such as certification to incentivize career development actions and to reward consistently solid performance.

If we recognize the value of the national heritages and ecosystem services at stake, we realize the urgency of professionalizing PA management. We need professionals to manage not only the field- and office-scale issues of individual PAs but the administration of larger national systems. These professionals require advanced skills in policy, strategic planning, communications, and fundraising. Professionals at all level require specialized training and a diverse array of follow-up opportunities.

THREE LINKED OPPORTUNITIES

There is now a WCPA and CBD consensus to establish a global partnership for training and certification in PA management focusing on three mutually – dependent initiatives to professionalize the management of PAs:

1) Building Advanced Global Curricula for Three Levels of PA Professionals

The GPPAT partnership will establish advanced, interdisciplinary training and competency standards for PA professionals at a global level. Leading-edge curricula will build from existing and new tools to best implement PoWPA.

Objective: To empower globally rigorous professional training at three levels: Rangers, PA Managers, and PA System Administrators to improve PA management in all global regions.

Outputs:

- i) Development of state-of-the-art and regularly updated, training content on PA management for three professional categories: Rangers, Park Managers and System Administrators;
- ii) Three sets of differing curricula will cover all ecological, social, and management aspects of PAs relevant to each of the three specific professional categories.
- iii) All academic materials will be delivered using both e-learning and face to face modules.
- iv) WCPA members will develop, review, and update course materials;
- v) WCPA will ensure quality control and the capacity building of trainees by developing an accreditation system for training institutions using the materials (See Component 2 below);
- vi) The quality of education will be assured through development of a system to accredit training institutions in order for them to use training material developed by WCPA (see Initiative 2).
- vii) Management and updating of course material will be self-funded through fees from academic institutions for use of course material and for accreditation.
- viii) Training the trainers curricula will promote curricula adaptations and their local cascades.
- ix) Individual PA staff can access material free of charge for self-tuition, but these people will not earn a degree.

Partners: WCPA and Global Protected Areas Programme – IUCN, CBD, International Rangers Federation, The Latin American School for Protected Areas from the University for International Cooperation, the International Academy for Nature Conservation Isle of Vilm, and other organizations, academic and training institutions.

Timescale: To be launched at COP-11 and ready for the Rio Plus 20 meeting: i.e. an 18 month plus development period.

2) Accreditation and Financing of Training Centers of Excellence

Training will be implemented through accreditation of exceptional academic institutions and training centers which will provide scholarships as feasible to deserving trainees.

Objectives:

- i) Establish a network of accredited “Training Centers of Excellence” to ensure best instruction practices using PA curricula developed and accredited by GPPAT partners.
- ii) Provide scholarships for training at GPPAT accredited institutions to managers and system administrators (ranger programs will occur in national systems, supported by local institutions).

Outputs:

Accreditation

- i) Development of a system of WCPA partners to accredit specialized GPPAT training and host institutions to enhance existing institutional leaders and create new ones.
- ii) The accreditation system will ensure best standards, assist in improvement of programs and lever funding for the administration and updating of curricula.
- iii) Institutions and their PA training will be assessed against standards including: capacity to hire and train necessary staff, facilities, understanding and delivery of course content, feedback from recipient PAs, use of practical training sites including UNESCO World Heritage and MAB sites.

Scholarship-based Financing

- i) GPPAT courses will be supported by a scholarship trust fund at accredited institutions to provide capacity-building for PA trainees with a focus on developing self-financing mechanisms.
- ii) Funds will also provide for a small amount of seed-funding to facilitate practical projects on site to reinforce training and enhance management applications.

Partners: Key training institutions include the PA Training Center at Zapovedniks in Russia, Wildlife Institute of India, ASEAN Regional Center for Biodiversity Conservation, the Latin American School for PAs in Costa Rica, the International Academy for Nature Conservation Isle of Vilm, Germany, the International Ranger Federation, Southern African Wildlife College in Tanzania, just to name a few of the ones that have signed on. A survey of regional training institutions will identify additional institutions. Many universities and other organizations (Caribbean MPA Managers Forum) are associated with periodic PA training and will be included as feasible.

Timescale: It is intended that the accreditation system and funding mechanisms will be launched alongside the GPPAT curricula at CBD COP-11 and the 2012 Rio Plus 20 meeting.

3) Certification of PA Professionals and Networking PA Professional Associations

Certification based on proven job performance will accompany front end training programs by establishing the core competences and standards for PA professionals. Certification following the successful MPA Pro model provides clear milestones for PA professionals who have applied skills from training courses to their work as well as for those veterans who have performed on the job without formal training. Certification addresses the demand of PA professionals for recognition of their work, career guidance and networking.

The partnership recognizes that for the sustainability of this initiative there needs to be a foundation upon which a variety of services can be delivered. As with any other profession, such as doctors, engineers and lawyers, there is value in having professional associations that establish the standards, training process, ethics and professional services for an industry. Fortunately there already exist several PA professional associations including the International Ranger Federation which could serve as the home for the expansion of services outlined in this initiative. Most PA professionals are not scientists and need their own unique community to aid their development, advocate for their needs, establish performance standards, network people and promote innovation. There could be a single global professional association or a network of regional associations that adhere to established set of training, competences and services.

Objectives:

- i) Establish a certification program that recognizes leaders based on an assessment of proven on the job performance; and
- ii) Partner with existing PA professional associations to serve as the hub for developing services and responding to the needs PA professionals.

Outputs:

- i) Core competences and standards used for assessment of individuals at multiple levels of the profession (field operators, site supervisors, policy and planning
- ii) Regional Certification Bodies to lead the modification of the general competences and standards for the regional context
- iii) Assessment instruments and tools to conduct certification program
- iv) Formal process to train and recognize regional assessors to deliver the program
- v) Standardization across regions to ensure the core of the certification program is rigorous and complimentary – regions can modify the program around the edges to make it relevant to their place
- vi) Formal recognition of existing international PA professional associations that can deliver services

and provide the focus on the needs of PA professionals in advocacy.

- vii) Development of the core competences and standards for PA professionals from which other services can evolve (career guidance, performance appraisal, and hiring)
- viii) Regional capacity development services to increase staff retention, career guidance, ethical standards and motivation
- ix) Networking of regional PA professional leaders to define the regional needs that can strengthen the performance of PA professionals (thinking before and after training)