

1.32 Ecotourism and Protected Areas Conservation

RECALLING Resolution 19.1 of the 19th Session of the IUCN General Assembly, which called on IUCN to give particular attention to its members in developing countries while encouraging change in consumption and resource use patterns in the developed world;

NOTING that the expertise and experience of IUCN in conservation gives the Union an important capacity to contribute to formulating and implementing policies for sustainable development at the local, national and regional levels;

RECOGNIZING that protected marine and terrestrial habitats with high biodiversity value are becoming popular tourism destinations throughout the world, including in many IUCN member countries;

NOTING that tourism is expected to double in the next twenty years and that a growing share of that travel will be to national parks and other protected areas, and to other nature-based destinations;

CONCERNED, however, that according to some studies, tourism to natural areas in the absence of appropriate policies and plans does not always lead to conservation;

NOTING that many natural marine and terrestrial tourist destinations are in developing countries which currently have limited institutional capacity and financial resources to manage these ecosystems in a sustainable way;

CONCERNED that many protected areas lack the strong environmental education and interpretation programmes, services or facilities and that many others lack personnel trained in tourism and visitor management;

NOTING, further, that where local peoples do not share in the benefits from tourism to natural areas, they receive little incentive from the tourism industry to preserve these areas in a sustainable way;

RECOGNIZING, nevertheless, that some IUCN member countries and organizations have made noteworthy strides in formulating and implementing tourism policies that generate incentives and revenues to cover a share of the costs of managing and protecting marine and terrestrial protected areas, while benefiting local peoples and national economies;

RECALLING that Actions 1.4, 2.2 and 3.3 of the Caracas Action Plan, adopted by IVth World Congress on National Parks and Protected Areas (Caracas, Venezuela, 1992), call on governments and private environmental groups to assess the full benefits of protected areas and put in place incentives, such as ecotourism, to mobilize resources for the protection of ecosystems on a sustainable basis, as part of a global initiative to strengthen national funding for environmental conservation;

RECOGNIZING that careful planning and supervision of tourism to natural areas can be a powerful tool for enhancing the value of natural areas and therefore avoiding their conversion to other uses, while at the same time providing sustainable opportunities for enhancing the livelihood of local populations;

NOTING further that Resolution 19.4 of the 19th Session of the General Assembly required the Council and Director General to give priority to strengthening and developing the protected areas activities of IUCN;

WELCOMING the recent establishment of the Task Force on Tourism and Protected Areas of the World Commission on Protected Areas (WCPA);

NOTING further that many private sector enterprises, non-governmental organizations and public agencies often use the term "ecotourism" indiscriminately for all tourism in natural areas even when such activity provides no measurable benefits to the natural area or the people living close to the areas involved and at times directly threatens those areas;

The World Conservation Congress at its 1st Session in Montreal, Canada, 14–23 October 1996:

1. CALLS UPON IUCN members and the Director General to promote the concept of ecotourism and proposes for consideration the following general description: environmentally responsible travel and visitation to natural areas, in order to enjoy and appreciate nature (and any accompanying cultural features, both past and present) that promote conservation, have a low visitor impact and provide for beneficially active socio-economic involvement of local peoples;

2. CALLS upon IUCN members to adopt and implement policies, based on the above description, which;
 - a) generate tangible benefits for natural area conservation on a sustainable basis while maintaining the integrity of the ecological systems and biodiversity values of natural areas;
 - b) allow protected areas to collect and retain tourism revenues that reflect:
 - i) the fair market value of visitor services;
 - ii) the real costs of sustainable management and operation of such areas;
 - c) allocate tourism revenues to protect and manage the areas from which these revenues are generated and to provide employment and support activities that benefit local communities linked to the protected areas, with any additional funds being channeled to promote, plan and manage ecotourism, conservation education and environmental awareness at the national level;
 - d) enhance protected area zoning and management, including regulations for private concessions on public lands, trade in wildlife and cultural property, and the clarification of jurisdictional mandates and responsibilities among national, regional and local agencies involved in tourism and conservation so as to ensure that the natural systems and biodiversity of the area are maintained;
 - e) encourage protected area agencies, where appropriate, to hire or train qualified tourism and visitor management staff;
 - f) encourage parks and natural resource education institutions to develop training curricula aimed at all aspects of tourism and visitor management;
 - g) encourage the development or maintenance of environmental education and interpretation programmes, services and facilities;
 - h) encourage the collection of standardized park visitor use and visitor impact data;
 - i) promote the adoption of codes of behaviour relating to visitors and tour service providers, particularly as they might apply in and around protected areas;
 - j) develop formal mechanisms for coordination and participation of different stakeholder groups, and emphasize the use of partnerships between local communities, protected area authorities and the private sector so as to improve the flow and distribution of ecotourism benefits to local communities in such a way that they act as an incentive for improved management of natural resources;
3. REQUESTS the Director General, within available resources, to:
 - a) expand the role of IUCN in communicating information about ecotourism guidelines;
 - b) convene a series of regional workshops on Ecotourism and Conservation, or a summary workshop before or during the next World Conservation Congress, at which IUCN members would be invited to share experiences on topics, including:
 - i) setting policies for mobilizing funding from tourism, and budgeting these revenues for park and protected areas operation and management;
 - ii) strengthening local regulations and institutions involved in overseeing tourism activity in parks and protected areas;
 - iii) exploring means of local ownership in specific ecotourism ventures;
 - iv) identifying market niches for local art, handicrafts and tourism guides and other services;
 - v) organizing local groups to advocate public investments in local education, infrastructure and other services which improve local quality of life and sustain community-based ecotourism efforts;

- vi) working with private enterprises to increase and share the benefits (e.g. through joint ventures and local employment) from their ecotourism operations and to conduct their activities and manage their facilities in an environmentally responsible way;
- vii) monitoring the impact of tourism to protected areas on local cultures and economies as well as on the protected ecosystems;
- c) support WCPA and its Task Force on Tourism and Protected Areas in its work with interested national and international tourism organizations, and with IUCN members, in formulating a comprehensive strategy to ensure that tourism activities support conservation of national parks and protected areas, while sharing benefits locally and minimizing harm to local cultures and the environment;
- d) encourage the WCPA Task Force to explore and evaluate the growing experience on the use and evaluation of standards and independent certification of ecotourism activities to promote the concept of ecotourism in a consistent manner.