A decade of protected area growth

Change in global protected area coverage from 2005 to 2016

Key messages

The global protected area network has expanded substantially over the last decade, driven by efforts to conserve biodiversity through international, national and regional strategies.

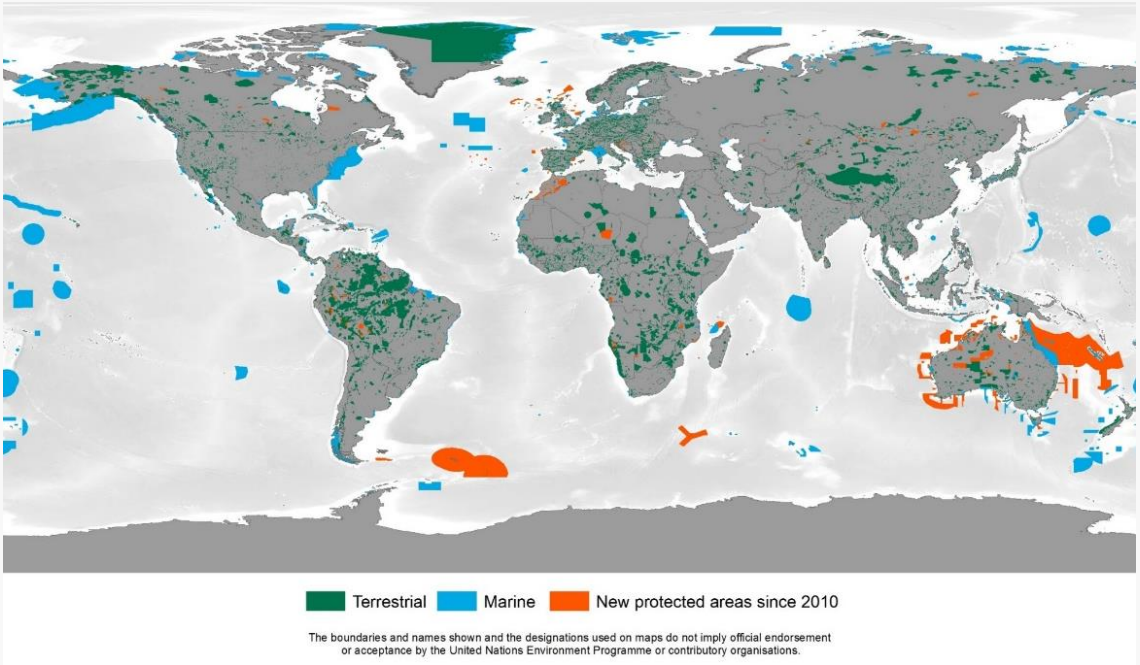
Overall, global protected area coverage has increased by 66% since 2005, with growth strongest in the Asia-Pacific region and for protected areas managed for sustainable use of natural resources[1].

Increases in coverage are observed for all types of protected areas and for all geographic regions.

For businesses, working in or close to protected areas can bring reputational, financial and operational risks, which need to be considered in early project development stages. As a result, those companies wishing to operate in these areas may experience longer lead times for project development and higher exploration costs. A thorough understanding of the rate of change of protected area coverage and the significance of the different types of designation can provide advanced insight to help companies map potential risk factors and plan appropriate mitigation measures. This is therefore an essential filter for informing a company's risk management and investment strategies.

The temporal analysis described in this technical briefing note follows the same methodology used to report to the Convention on Biological Diversity on progress of protected area coverage against Aichi Biodiversity Target 11. The approach is based on year of designation, so increases in coverage are not down to an increase in reporting. However, this approach may potentially underestimate true protected area coverage over time, due to changes in the status of a protected area, time-lags, etc. For further information please refer to the Appendices, which also contain supplementary tables and figures.

Global protected area coverage in the year 2016



[1] IUCN Management Category VI protected areas. Further information can be found here.

Introduction

Protected areas have undergone notable growth over the past decade. The expansion of protected area networks is driven by global efforts to conserve biodiversity, and efforts to mainstream biodiversity and ecosystem services in regional and national strategies.

In 2010, the 192 State Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) adopted The *Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020* to halt biodiversity loss and ensure the sustainable and equitable use of natural resources. The plan formulated twenty targets, the *Aichi Biodiversity Targets*. Target 11 calls for the protection of 17% of terrestrial and inland water areas, and 10% of coastal and marine areas and is a key driver of increasing global protected area coverage (CBD, 2010).

In 2015, the global commitment to protect the natural environment was further reinforced with the adoption of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (UN, 2015) by world leaders as a blueprint until the year 2030. Three of these directly relate to the environment under the headings of Climate Action, Life below Water and Life on Land (Goals 13, 14 and 15).

Increasing protected area coverage has a material impact on many sectors and can be a particular problem for the extractives industry. There have been some moves to grant protected areas additional protection. Members of the International Council on Mining and Metals have committed to considering World Heritage sites as 'no-go' areas (ICMM, 2003) and many companies have adopted internal policies not to work in certain designations of protected areas. This will limit, to some extent, the areas of the world where these companies can operate. A thorough understanding of the rate of change of protected area coverage can help companies map potential risk factors and plan mitigation measures.

This briefing note describes the change in protected area coverage since 2005 across both the terrestrial and marine realm. The analysis was completed using the April 2016 release of the World Database on Protected Areas (WDPA).

Table 1. Protected area coverage from 2005 to 2016, including absolute values, percent change from 2005 and percent of global area protected.

Year	Absolute coverage (million km²)	Percentage increase from 2005 (%)	Percentage of global area protected (%)
2005	20.5	0.0	4.0
2006	21.6	5.3	4.2
2007	23.4	14.0	4.8
2008	24.0	17.3	4.7
2009	26.0	27.1	5.1
2010	27.8	35. 8	5.4
2011	28.1	37.1	5.5
2012	32.1	56.6	6.3
2013	32.6	59.1	6.4
2014	34.1	66.4	6.7
2015	34.1	66.4	6.7
2016	34.1	66.4	6.7

How has global protected area coverage changed from 2005 to 2016?

Global protected area coverage increased by 66% between 2005 and 2016 (Table 1). Protected area coverage has increased on average 4.4% per year over the 2005-2016 period. In 2005, 4% (20.5 million km²) of the total surface area of the globe was covered by protected areas, rising to 6.7% (34.1 million km²) in 2016.

How do these changes vary across continental regions?

Rates of change of protected area coverage differ notably between continental regions[2]. Protected area growth is strongest in the Asia-Pacific region, increasing almost threefold (170%), from 5.3 million km² in 2005, to 13.3 million km² in 2015 (Figure 1), mainly due to the inscription of two large marine areas. Growth rates in Africa and South and Central America and the Caribbean vary from 30% to 36%. The lowest rates of growth are in North America and Europe-Central Asia at around 12-14%.

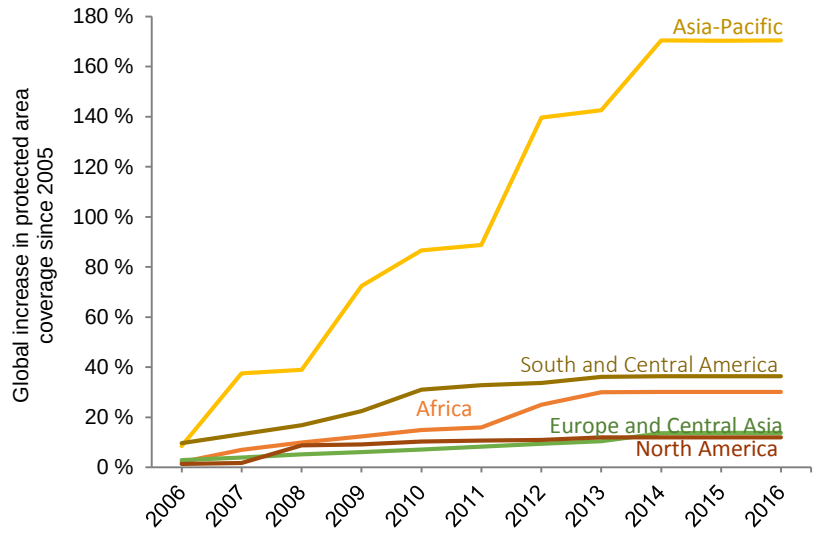


Figure 1. Change in protected area coverage since 2005, for the five continental regions[2].

[2]The base layer used for this analysis differentiates five continental regions. It includes both terrestrial protected areas and marine protected areas under national jurisdiction, i.e. within Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs), which extend 200 nautical miles (370 kilometres) off the coastline.

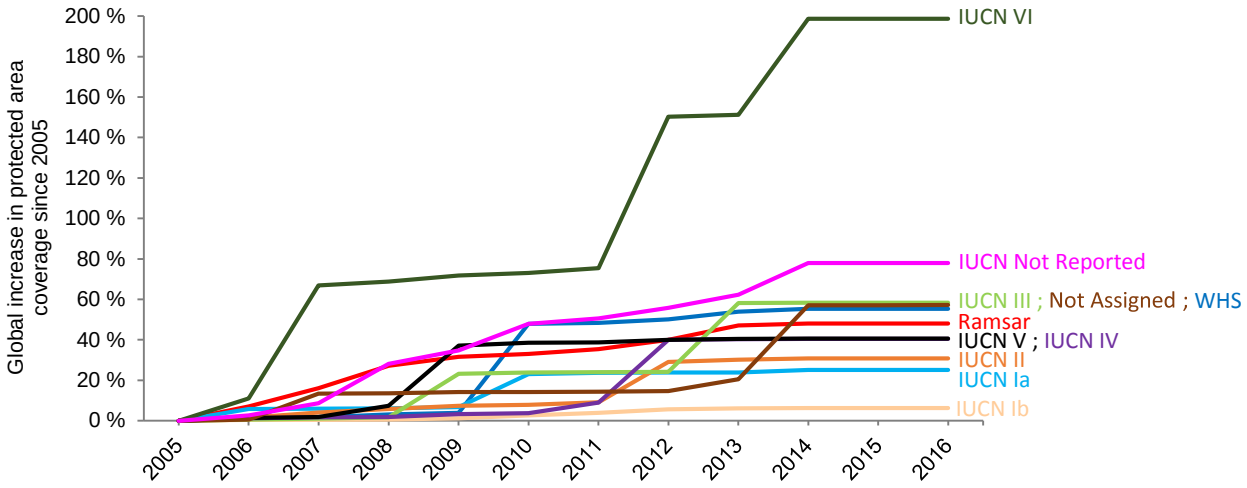


Figure 2. Change in global protected area coverage since 2005, split by IUCN management category, Ramsar sites and World Heritage sites (WHS).

How do these changes vary across protected area designations?

Growth of national-level protected areas is largely driven by those managed for sustainable use of natural resources. The coverage of these IUCN management category VI protected areas has tripled since 2005, and now covers a global area of 8.4 million km² (198% increase; Figure 2). Almost 40% of the total area protected globally is designated as IUCN management category VI.

Natural and mixed World Heritage sites and Ramsar sites (Wetlands of International Importance) account for a large proportion of the protected area increase over the last decade, with both showing an increase in coverage of approximately 50% since 2005.

The dramatic increase in natural and mixed World Heritage coverage observed in 2010 is mainly the result of two large marine areas being inscribed.

Lowest growth rates in global coverage are noted for IUCN category Ib protected areas (Wilderness Areas), with these increasing by only 6% in a decade. Growth rates for other protected area designations range from 25% to 77%.

The analysis shows near zero growth in 2015 and for the first quarter of 2016, which is most likely due to time delays in submitting data on newly designated areas to the WDPA rather than a real plateau in growth.

Further results of the analysis are provided in the Appendices.

References

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