

# World Parks Congress



## Introduction

The World Parks Congress is only held once every 10 years

Next event:

**Sydney**

**November 2014**

Theme:

**Parks**

**People**

**Planet**

**Global  
Biodiversity  
Agenda**

In 2014 there is a landmark global event which only comes around once every 10 years, the World Parks Congress (WPC). The 2014 WPC in Sydney will build on the theme 'Parks, people, planet: inspiring solutions'. It will collate and communicate the most compelling solutions to global challenges. The aim is to bridge the gap between the conservation and sustainable development agendas. So, what is the World Parks Congress?

*It is a forum where thousands of professionals from many sectors come together from around the world to discuss protected areas*

Each Congress provides an important opportunity for protected areas experts, policy makers and those affected by the protected area agenda to meet, review the current global situation and chart the path forward for protected areas. The global agenda for the next ten years will be set in Sydney in November.

The 2014 WPC is predicted to be the biggest protected areas focused event staged to date. Previous congresses have influenced international environmental and social policy, driven the signature of international conventions and provided impetus to increase the global coverage of protected areas. The World Parks Congress is convened by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). The first WPC was held in 1962 in Seattle; at the time it was called the World Conference on National Parks. There have been five Congresses so far held in diverse places round the world. The sequence of events is listed below.

Date	Location
1962	Seattle, USA
1972	Yellowstone, USA
1982	Bali, Indonesia
1992	Caracas, Venezuela
2003	Durban, South Africa
2014	Sydney, Australia

## A Window in Time

The series of World Parks Congresses (WPCs) has influenced and tracked perspectives on the role of protected areas in biodiversity conservation and sustainable development. Paradigm shifts in thinking, policy and action are revealed from reviewing the discussions and outcomes from past WPCs. Views on what constitutes a protected area, the purpose of such areas, and how they should be managed have all changed fundamentally since the first conference in 1962. A protected area has changed from being managed to a strict exclusion principle to an approach based around natural resource management. The rights of indigenous communities are becoming recognised and the concept that protected areas support sustainable development has become widespread. The impacts of the WPCs can be seen both immediately in its aftermath and

*The World Parks Congresses are defining moments which record key changes*

develop more gradually in its wake. Each WPC has highlighted challenges faced by protected areas. Challenges include threats from poaching, pressure from development and habitat destruction. Additionally damage from invasive alien species, pollution and encroachment all compromise the ability of a protected area to function. Opportunities to overcome these difficulties are sought and the community of professionals brought together at the WPCs provides support and solutions. The WPCs have helped established standards to ensure that protected areas are effective and provided guidance on the role protected areas can play in environmental management. The WPCs are not just targeted at the protected areas community but also governments, policy makers, businesses and those who are involved in, and affected by, the protected areas agenda.



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## Outcomes from Past Congresses

The World Parks Congress (WPC) in 1962 was seminal. It was the first ever international conference to focus on protected areas. Since that time there has been significant growth in the designation of protected areas (see graph).

### *First United Nations List of Protected Areas*

In the same year as the first WPC, the first UN list of protected areas was published. This list has now evolved into the World Database on Protected Areas (WDPA).

The second conference was hosted in Yellowstone National Park which celebrated the centenary of its designation that year. 100 years earlier the area had been set aside for the benefit and enjoyment of the people. Yellowstone is considered to be the first of the modern concept of national parks.

### *World Heritage Convention*

The World Heritage Convention was provided with considerable impetus by the Yellowstone WPC and in November of the same year (1972) it was adopted by UNESCO member states.

### *Paradigm shifts highlighted by Bali*

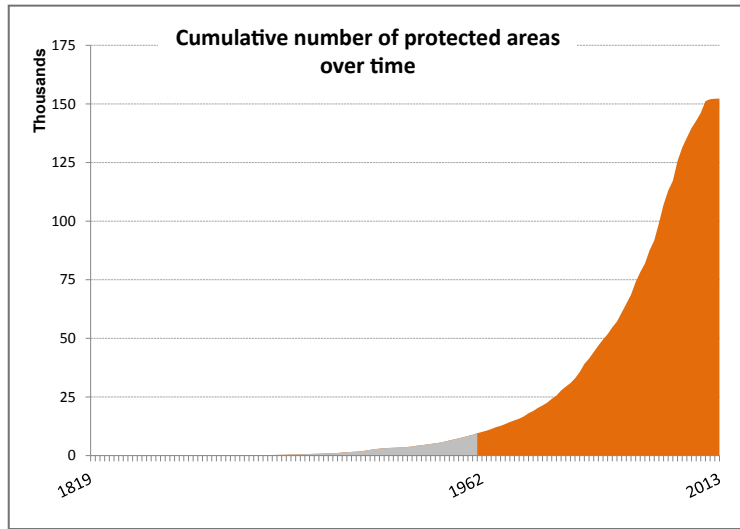
Two paradigm shifts in protected areas thinking were revealed by the third WPC in Bali in 1982. First it was recognised that the models for national park management needed to be tailored to the local context. Countries all have different cultural, economic and historical relationships with nature and this needed to be reflected by the management structures.

Secondly, there was recognition of the broader role of protected areas within society reflecting the interdependence of environment and development in creating a sustainable future.

At the Bali WPC it became clear that parks should no longer be considered set aside and that they were a component of sustainable development. The link between protected areas and the development agenda began. The message from Bali to policy makers was that there are many contributions that protected areas make to ecological and social wellbeing. This message was highlighted in the influential Brundtland report, *Our*

*Protected areas are part of sustainable development*

*Common Future*, released in 1987. The Brundtland report was an important driver behind the Rio Earth Summit in 1992 and is a key document within the sustainable development agenda.



### *Fourth Congress in Caracas reached out to a wider audience*

In 1992 the WPC in Venezuela visibly changed its focus to include a wider audience. From being an event predominantly focused on the protected area professionals, in Caracas it aimed to reach out to other sectors including business.

### *Six level IUCN Management Categories agreed to in Caracas*

Terminology and categorisation issues began to be resolved. At the 1992 WPC the IUCN six-category system for classing protected areas by their management objectives was agreed. These were approved in 1994 by the IUCN General Assembly meeting. The IUCN definition of a protected area was also published.

Tools and methods to help managers of protected areas to assess and improve the effectiveness of their management were called for and were the focus of continued work resulting in the management effectiveness tracking tool used by the World Bank.

### *Links between the WPC and the Convention on Biological Diversity occurred in Durban*

The most recent WPC was in Durban, South Africa in 2003. One of the outcomes was the Durban Action Plan on which the Convention on Biological Diversity Programme of Work on Protected Areas (POWPA) was based.

The role of indigenous people and communities in conservation took off after the attention received in Durban. International policy now includes indigenous people to a much greater extent and Indigenous and Community Conserved Areas (ICCAs) are becoming increasingly recognised and recorded.

The outcomes from Sydney will follow on from these achievements with a new agenda, ideas and solutions.

### *Durban highlighted the role of indigenous people and drove policy inclusion*

## Durban Vision: Congress Drives Policy and Protected Area Coverage

The President of Madagascar, Marc Ravalomanana, made a commitment to protect 10% of the national territory at the WPC in Durban. This has driven a considerable increase in the coverage of protected areas in Madagascar

Protected area coverage in Madagascar has increased significantly, from 2.6% in 2000 to 8.3% in 2013 (WDPA Nov 2013; existing & proposed sites).



Image: Baobab trees in savannah Madagascar © Pierre-Yves Babelon licenced shutterstock.com

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