

Assessing protected area management effectiveness



ASSESSING AND IMPROVING MANAGEMENT EFFECTIVENESS

What is protected area management effectiveness?

Protected area management effectiveness is the degree to which protected area management protects biological and cultural resources, and achieves the goals and objectives for which the protected area was established ([Hockings et al, 2006](#)).

Assessing protected area management effectiveness is a key step in developing a protected area system master plan. Such assessments can also reveal management gaps in a protected area system, guide protected area strategy and capacity development, enable adaptive management, guide effective resource allocation, promote accountability and transparency among key stakeholders, and build support for protected area management.

What are the elements of management effectiveness?

The World Commission on Protected Areas has developed a framework for developing management effectiveness assessment methodologies ([Hockings et al., 2006](#)). While any particular assessment methodology will have an array of indicators, the framework identifies the following elements for categorizing these indicators:

- Context – protected area significance, threats and policy environment
- Planning – protected area design and planning
- Inputs -- the resources needed to carry out protected area management
- Processes – the way in which management is conducted
- Outputs – the implementation of management programs, actions and services
- Outcomes -- the extent to which objectives have been achieved

What are different approaches to assessing management effectiveness?

There are many different approaches to assessing protected area management effectiveness, but these generally fall into four categories ([Ervin, 2007](#)):

- An in-depth evidence-based approach uses the results of monitoring and stakeholder surveys to assess the degree to which management actions have achieved management objectives. Such assessments typically involve the creation of a detailed baseline of key desired outcomes, and the assessment is designed to measure changes in these outcomes over time (see for example [Parks and Wildlife Service, 2004](#)).
- A system-wide peer-based approach includes most or all of the protected areas within a given system (see for example [Ervin, 2003b](#); [Goodman, 2003](#)). Participants assess a range of indicators related to key threats and critical management needs, typically in participatory workshops with peer review by protected area managers and others to reduce biases.
- A rapid scorecard-based approach uses a scorecard to elicit expert opinions about protected area management (see for example [Stolton et al., 2003](#), [Corrales, 2004](#)), usually with a set of four or five pre-defined thresholds for each indicator. Such assessments can be very rapid, and require few resources to implement.
- A categorical assumption-based approach draws on available data and develops assumptions to determine potential management effectiveness (see for example [Supples et al., 2006](#)). Usually there is little interaction with field staff to corroborate results, but there is often some review of the assumptions by administrative staff. This approach, which applies to an entire category of protected areas, should not be treated as equivalent to a more comprehensive assessment.

Which approach is the most appropriate?

The choice of assessment approach and methodology will depend on several factors, including the available time, financial and human resources, and the specific purpose of the assessment. In general,

an in-depth, evidence-based approach is best suited for a comprehensive assessment of a few important protected areas and for setting thresholds for adaptive management, a site-level scorecard-based approach for tracking progress related to conservation investments, a system-level approach for developing system-wide strategies, policies and capacity needs, and a categorical approach for a cursory assessment of the major management gaps within a protected area system ([Ervin, 2007](#)). In many cases, planning teams may want to use a mix of approaches within a single protected area system, and adapt existing indicators and methodologies to suit local circumstances.

What are the most common protected area management weaknesses?

Based on the results of management effectiveness assessments across multiple protected area sites and systems ([Dudley et al., 2007](#); [Ervin, 2003a](#)), the following are some of the most common management weaknesses: staffing, management planning, community relations, threat assessment and abatement, research and monitoring, law enforcement, and natural resource management.

[References and resources on protected area management effectiveness](#)