



**Concept Note on Development of
Certification Standards for Conservation Areas
(PROTECTED AREAS AND WETLANDS: PAWs)**

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1. Background

In 1988, India was recognised as one of the mega biodiversity country amongst the 17 globally identified countries (<http://www.biodiversitya-z.org/content/megadiverse-countries>) with a particular focus on endemic biodiversity and a disproportionate responsibility for conservation, preservation and biodiversity management. With the proposed and on-going 2012-2020 National Biodiversity Targets, Government of India aims to make biodiversity as an integral part of the “*national planning process via implementation strategies reflecting the equitable benefit sharing, conservation, traditional knowledge and sustainable management and use of biodiversity across sectors, ministries and programmes with adequate and where possible specific financial allocations.*” (A Quick Overview of the National Biodiversity Targets 2012-2020, National Biodiversity Authority)

In a country like India with an acute shortage of land- per capita land availability being...., there is always pressure of encroachment on areas including natural forests harbouring varied biodiversity of the country. Poverty is another factor that directly impacts the charismatic animal and plant species of the nation with poor local communities getting lured into being deadly poachers of these species at the hands of the international wildlife crime mafia. The situation tends to be worse when the government is not able to muster adequate financial, technological and skilled human resources to manage the habitats that are abode of the precious flora and fauna. With such negative elements affecting the biodiversity and its habitats comprising various categories of conservation areas, it is imperative that a mechanism to monitor the health of a protected area (PA) as a net result of the impact of management practices, *vis a vis*, the pressures of poaching, encroachment and degradation of the habitat of the PA, is in place and functional. This health monitoring mechanism could be regularly applied to a PA to assess the impact and efficacy of the government funding, management practices, and that of latest government policies and directives on the functioning of the PA.

To meet the need of a health monitoring mechanism of the PA, it is intended to constitute an SDG for development of suitable certification standards. The SDG will be serviced by an in-house working group called Technical Working Group (TWG). These standards will be general, and capable of being applied to a range of conservation areas clubbed as Protected Areas and Wetlands (PAWs). The proposed certification standards for PAWs will provide a tool to the managers of the relevant biodiversity habitats to enable them to assess the health of their respective project areas with a view to improving, and wherever necessary, for upgrading their management practices. The management practices of the PAWs will, *inter alia*, respect social, economic, environmental considerations as also relevant national and international legal obligations. For example, proposed standards will take into account the imperatives of benefit sharing, traditional knowledge and sustainable use of the resources with an eye on the rights and welfare of the local communities, and on the needs of the future generations as well.

2. Existing Conservation regimes in the country

With just 2.4% of the land area, India accounts for nearly 7% of the world’s recorded species (flora and fauna). The existing protected area network of India constitutes 4.93% i.e. an area of 16.2 mha with respect to the total Geographical Area of India. This network of 764 [Protected Areas of India](#) is grouped broadly as 103 [National Parks](#) (*IUCN Category II*), 543 [Wildlife Sanctuaries](#) (*IUCN Category IV*), 45 [Community Reserves](#) (*IUCN Category VI*) and 73 [Conservation Reserves](#) (*IUCN Category V*) (as in July 2017). There are also Biosphere Reserves (*IUCN Category V*), Reserved & Protected Forests

(IUCN Category IV or VI) and private protected areas and other conservation areas. (Source: *Protected Areas of India Vis-a-Vis the Six IUCN Categories*, KCA Arun Prasad).

In addition to the above-mentioned categories, there are conservation areas with a varying degree of legal or institutional protection. Expanse of many of such conservation areas overlap with those categorised above. Many of these areas have been constituted following government orders, and under existing national and international initiatives and programmes implemented in India (as on July 2017). These include:

- **50 Tiger Reserves** legally recognised (as on 20 December 2016)
- **32 Elephant Reserves** across 16 Indian states spread over ten landscapes
- **131 Marine Protected Areas**
- **18 notified Biosphere Reserves** (UNESCO's Man and the Biosphere (MAB) Programme),
- **26 Ramsar Wetland Sites** (RAMSAR Convention),
- **7 Natural World Heritage Sites** (UNESCO),
- **106 coastal and marine sites** identified and prioritized as **Important Coastal and Marine Areas (ICMBAs)** by the Wildlife Institute of India (National Biodiversity Target No 6 and Aichi Biodiversity Target No 11),
- **467 Important Bird Areas (IBAs)** (BNHS & Birdlife International),
- **531 Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs)** (IUCN, 2016)
- **9 Biodiversity Heritage Sites (BHS)** (National Biodiversity Authority)

The aforesaid list of PAs and conservation areas underlines the rich heritage of biodiversity that the country possesses, and at the same time, the obligation on its people and government to protect this rich natural heritage for the present and for posterity. This again amply explains as to why we need an adaptive set of guidelines and standards to preserve, conserve and protect our rich natural heritage.

3. Definitions

For the sake of uniformity in usage of terms during the entire process and course of development of the certification standard, it is imperative that the salient terms are explicitly defined. Definition of important terms relevant to the present exercise will be prepared separately, which will constitute an important technical document in the PAWs Certification Standard Development process.

4. Need for Conservation Areas Certification Standard

The conservation areas are perceived differently by different schools of thought. The reasons and imperatives advanced by these different thinkers for existence of these areas are

- Creating inviolate spaces for wildlife without presence of humans as already the cases of human-wildlife conflict are aplenty, and with an increasing trend
- Concept of co-existence of all living beings on the precept that nature is adaptive and resilient, and has the capability to, over the time, accommodate to a great extent the negative impacts of anthropogenic activities
- The precept of no management or minimal management interventions, letting the nature to take its own course.

There are existing issues in these areas such as poor health of the forest areas, large areas impacted by invasive species, human-wildlife conflicts, poaching, illicit fellings, encroachments, and other illegal and unauthorised activities, etc. Varying management regimes are existent in the country and are being applied with different degree of success to conservation areas, protected areas, and many other biodiversity habitats. Though all these regimes have common goal of protecting, preserving and conserving the PAs, they have different operational frameworks. Hence despite being robust, many of these sometimes fail to address all critical aspects related to conservation of different sites and

landscapes, and their specific attributes. Keeping in view all the above mentioned factors, the proposed standards will help

- To evolve a comprehensive and proficient guidance document taking into account the inputs from various existing standards to make it suitable for Indian conditions matching with the global standard of assessment criteria, comparable ratings and evaluation benchmarks. Assessment against the proposed guidance standards will facilitate to maintain or upgrade the existing level of management practices to let these deliver their best performance in respect of PAWs (refer to Classification Table 1)
- To help other potential sites of ecological and social importance to achieve the national and international benchmarks of management as per the eligibility criteria of the existing protection and conservation regimes in the country. This will enable them to qualify for the highest international standards, and compare with the best managed protected and conservation areas at the global level

5. Objectives of PAWs Certification Standard

- To encourage the standardization of the conservation and protection measures and expand the ambit of relevance of the conservation standards
- To establish local framework with international benchmarks for ease of assessment and a third party voluntary verification of the efficacy of the management practices being followed
- To serve as a baseline assessment tool for efficacy of management practices, as a tool to assess viability of a conservation project proposal along with its funding mechanism, and as a guidance for landscape level conservation
- To help PAWs managers with objective assessment of their project areas
- To adapt, mould and merge different standards existent in the domain and evolve a generally applicable M&E framework
- To develop a scoring system to quantify various assessment parameters and homogenise the evaluation system

6. Existing Standards for Conservation and Protected Areas

Some of the standard and evaluation tools currently present, and actively used in the Indian conservation setup are mentioned below:

- **IUCN Green List of Protected and Conserved Areas**, with an objective to encourage managers of protected and conserved areas to measure, improve and maintain their performance through application of globally consistent criteria that benchmark good governance, sound design and planning, effective management, and successful conservation outcomes
- A species-specific Conservation Assured (CA) standard as for the tiger (*Panthera tigris*). The **Conservation Assured | Tiger Standards (CA|TS)** scheme provides for incentive to those responsible for tiger conservation areas in the 13 tiger range countries to improve the effectiveness of management
- **M-STRIPES**
Monitoring System for Tigers- Intensive Patrolling and Ecological Status is a software-based monitoring system launched across Indian tiger reserves by the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA). The system's objective is to strengthen patrolling and surveillance devices to capture data relating to tiger sightings, deaths, wildlife crime and ecological observations while patrolling. Additional objectives are the evaluation of human pressure and ongoing monitoring of habitat change.

- **Management Effectiveness Evaluation** is the assessment of how well a protected area is being managed- primarily the extent to which it is protecting values and achieving goals and objectives of WCPA Guidelines (2006). WCPA works by helping governments and others plan protected areas and integrate them with other sectors, providing strategic advice to policy makers, strengthening capacity and investment in protected areas and by convening the diverse constituency of protected area stakeholders to address challenging issues.
- **Ramsar Convention Guidelines**
The Ramsar Convention on Wetlands focusses to invite attention to the rate at which wetland habitats have been disappearing. There is lack of understanding of the important functions of, and goods and services being offered by the wetlands. Being listed on the List of Wetlands of International Importance it brings an increased publicity and prestige for the designated wetland and hence increased possibilities of support for conservation.
- **Convention on Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS)**
CMS, an environmental treaty under the aegis of the United Nations Environment Programme, provides a global platform for the conservation and sustainable use of migratory animals and their habitats. It brings together the countries through which migratory animals pass, the range countries and lays the legal foundation for internationally coordinated conservation measures throughout a migratory range.

7. Benefits of PAWs Certification Standard

- Cost effective and affordable, being a domestic Standard
- Ease of application and use
- Applicability to conservation areas and important biodiversity habitats beyond network of common protected areas
- Possible multiple use, application, and assessment with one standard
- Suitable for assessment of conservation areas specific to the country
- Possibility of assessing viability of project proposal of a conservation area

8. Scope of Protected Areas and Wetlands Conservation Standard

While developing the standard, the SDG will consider and take into account all the existing standards. The major emphasis will be on the following themes:

- Performance and Management of the Conservation Area
- Health Assessment of the Conservation Area
- Feasibility Assessment of Projects for External Funding
- Identification of Ecosystem Services in the Conservation Area

Based on the objectives, the scope of the standard can be broadly classified under the following two heads-

i) Certification Priority for Conservation

The different areas are prioritised as per their conservation importance. The application and implementation of the Standard for the identification of the level and status of conservation would be applied to assess some important specific attributes of PAWs. These attributes along with some more assessment indicators would form the basis of the evaluation. Along with these attributes, certain conservation values specific to each site would also be identified and assessed.

PAWs in the following categories will be assessed against the proposed standards

S. No.	Category	Example	Conservation Attributes	Ecosystem Services
1	Category I	Sites of High Ecological Importance Protected Areas, National Parks, WLS, TR, Elephant Reserves, Marine Reserves	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R-E-T biodiversity • Flagship and keystone plant and animal species • Habitat improvement • Eco-sensitive zone • ESS • Socio-cultural values • Species recovery • Wildlife corridor 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cultural services • Provisioning services • Regulatory services • Supporting services
2	Category II	Sites of Ecological Importance Non-PA wetlands including mangroves, swamps, tidal sea marshes, sea grasslands and Ramsar sites	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Migratory and non-migratory birds • Eco-sensitive zone • ESS • Mangroves, sea marshes, sea grasses • Criteria of Ramsar Site 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cultural services • Provisioning services • Regulatory services • Supporting services
3	Category III	Sites of Socio-Cultural, Importance Burial grounds, sacred groves, heritage sites, heritage gardens, etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Socio-cultural values • Religious sentiments • Traditional knowledge • Benefits to local communities • Community initiative in conservation • Recreational values • Eco-tourism 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cultural services • Provisioning services
4	Category IV	Sites of Landscape Importance Areas of conservation importance including intact forests, private forests, biodiversity hotspots, etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seasonal biodiversity • Artificial forests • Wildlife habitats outside protected areas • Special areas for instance maintained by security forces 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cultural services • Provisioning services • Regulatory services

ii) Project Assessment

Another important application of the proposed standard is project specific and time specific, and is to be based on the assessment of conservation values and objectives of the PAWs. The standard can be used for an overall assessment of any conservation site, and to enhance the conservation status of an existing site; for instance, if a non-Ramsar wetland site intends to achieve the status of a Ramsar Site, through application of the standard, it should be possible to do so by upgrading the conservation status of the candidate site through appropriate management interventions. Standard can also be used for financial assessment of a project to examine proper utilisation of funds and achievement of the conservation targets. It will also have application as a tool for sustainability assessment, fixing of baseline parameters and for assessing feasibility of a result based funding mechanism. The matrix below intends to explain the relationship between the project and the assessment attributes.

standard applicable to complete range of PAs and conservation areas including wetlands in the country. The conservation entities which could be assessed for their performance efficiency against the proposed standards are grouped under the term Protected Areas and Wetlands (PAWs). Thus, PAWs will comprise all PAs, conservation areas, important terrestrial, aquatic and marine biodiversity habitats across the country as detailed in paragraph 2 on page 1-2. The certification standard once developed will be ready for being applied to any of the PAWs of the country for assessing the management practices of the PAW against these standards. This organisation, which is developing these standards will have nothing to do about application of these standards. It is clarified that the exercise of certification of a PAW will be undertaken by a certification body (CB) duly accredited for the purpose. The accreditation procedure for CBs undertaking this kind of certification assessment is already well laid out and well known to all related organizations.

Also, the exercise being planned to develop the certification standards will not in any way affect the occasional assessments of the management efficacy of the PAs, including national parks, wildlife sanctuaries and tiger reserves undertaken by MoEFCC, Wildlife Institute of India (WII), State Forest Departments and other organizations using existing set of guidelines. Such assessments may continue as per existing practice. However, it will be their free choice to use or not to use the standards being developed for assessing the efficacy and efficiency of the existing management practices of the PAs as part of their usual mandate.

11. Generic Structure of the Proposed Certification Standard

The hierarchical order of the standard will comprise following elements:

Primary Principle

Principle

Criterion

Indicator

While using the standard to assess the management practices of any of the PAWs, the existing conservation tag, like the PA being a Ramsar Site or a recognised habitat or a transitory stopover of a migratory species in Appendix I (Threatened Migratory Species) or Appendix II (Migratory Species requiring international cooperation) of CMS will be taken due note of. Consideration of adherence to such national or international conservation regimes will be suitably incorporated in the standard and will be given due weightage at the time of assessment.

12. Stakeholders involved in the process

Stakeholders can be simply defined as an individual, group of individuals, or an organisation with a common interest, concerned with or affected by the operation of an organisation/system. The stakeholders' groups under the protected areas and wetlands (PAWs) conservation area regime including but not limited to, following listing are:



13. Roles and Responsibilities of the Parties Involved

- A Voluntary Sustainability Standard Setting Organisation is an organization which is involved with developing, coordinating, revising, amending, reissuing, interpreting, publishing and producing technical standards for assessment in an open and transparent manner, of the efficacy and efficiency of functioning of a conservation entity, or its management practices
- This voluntary sustainability Standard for PAWs being developed is to follow an open, transparent and participatory approach involving multiple stakeholders
- The developed sustainability standard would be accredited by a competent organisation
- A certification body, in the current context, will be a third party auditing entity that is competent to audit PAWs against a specific standard or code. The minimum audit performance criteria will need to be fulfilled by each of the PAWs to obtain the mandated certification
- The organizations like WII, IUCN-India, currently engaged in assessment of the efficiency of management practices of the PAs including national parks, tiger reserves, wildlife sanctuaries, etc. in India, may continue to do so using their preferred standards

14. About the Organisation

Network for Certification and Conservation of Forests (NCCF) is a ‘not for profit’ organization established under the Societies Registration Act, 1860 to evolve and promote a globally aligned forest certification programme developed within India and addressing the concerns for sustainable management of forests, biodiversity and the plantations, while at the same time making the Indian wood and forest fibre based industry globally competent. It is an institutional mechanism to ensure collaborative and streamlined efforts to develop national standard for Forest Management Certification in India. NCCF was officially registered in January 2015.

People’s participation is an important mandate in the organisation’s objectives, for which NCCF adopts a "bottom-up" approach to governance. It builds on national members whose local expertise is complemented by the experiences of internationally-active organizations. The organisation has a Governing Body and Standard Development Groups (SDGs). Each SDG comprises professional foresters, wildlifers, conservationists, NGOs- social and environmental, industry representatives, academicians, etc., and is the apex body constituted for developing the Standards. The SDG is serviced by an in-house working group called Technical Working Group (TWG).
