IUCN

Tourism and Visitor Management in Protected Areas

Guidelines for sustainability

Yu-Fai Leung, Anna Spenceley, Glen Hvenegaard, and Ralf Buckley, Volume Editors
Craig Groves, Series Editor

Developing capacity for a protected planet

Best Practice Protected Area Guidelines Series No. 27

WCPA WORLD COMMISSION ON PROTECTED AREAS

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IUCN WCPA's BEST PRACTICE PROTECTED AREA GUIDELINES SERIES

IUCN-WCPA's Best Practice Protected Area Guidelines are the world's authoritative resource for protected area managers. Involving collaboration among specialist practitioners dedicated to supporting better implementation in the field, they distil learning and advice drawn from across IUCN. Applied in the field, they are building institutional and individual capacity to manage protected area systems effectively, equitably and sustainably, and to cope with the myriad of challenges faced in practice. They also assist national governments, protected area agencies, nongovernmental organisations, communities and private sector partners to meet their commitments and goals, and especially the Convention on Biological Diversity's Programme of Work on Protected Areas.

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IUCN PROTECTED AREA DEFINITION, MANAGEMENT CATEGORIES AND GOVERNANCE TYPES

IUCN defines a protected area as:
A clearly defined geographical space, recognised, dedicated and managed, through legal or other effective means, to achieve the long-term conservation of nature with associated ecosystem services and cultural values.

The definition is expanded by six management categories (one with a sub-division), summarized below.
Ia Strict nature reserve: Strictly protected for biodiversity and also possibly geological/ geomorphological features, where human visitation, use and impacts are controlled and limited to ensure protection of the conservation values
Ib Wilderness area: Usually large unmodified or slightly modified areas, retaining their natural character and influence, without permanent or significant human habitation, protected and managed to preserve their natural condition
II National park: Large natural or near-natural areas protecting large-scale ecological processes with characteristic species and ecosystems, which also have environmentally and culturally compatible spiritual, scientific, educational, recreational and visitor opportunities
III Natural monument or feature: Areas set aside to protect a specific natural monument, which can be a landform, sea mount, marine cavern, geological feature such as a cave, or a living feature such as an ancient grove
IV Habitat/species management area: Areas to protect particular species or habitats, where management reflects this priority. Many will need regular, active interventions to meet the needs of particular species or habitats, but this is not a requirement of the category
V Protected landscape or seascape: Where the interaction of people and nature over time has produced a distinct character with significant ecological, biological, cultural and scenic value: and where safeguarding the integrity of this interaction is vital to protecting and sustaining the area and its associated nature conservation and other values
VI Protected areas with sustainable use of natural resources: Areas which conserve ecosystems, together with associated cultural values and traditional natural resource management systems. Generally large, mainly in a natural condition, with a proportion under sustainable natural resource management and where low-level non-industrial natural resource use compatible with nature conservation is seen as one of the main aims

The category should be based around the primary management objective(s), which should apply to at least three-quarters of the protected area – the 75 per cent rule.

The management categories are applied with a typology of governance types – a description of who holds authority and responsibility for the protected area. IUCN defines four governance types.
Type A. Governance by government: Federal or national ministry/agency in charge; Sub-national ministry or agency in charge (e.g. at regional, provincial, municipal level); Government-delegated management (e.g. to NGO)
Type B. Shared governance: Transboundary governance (formal and informal arrangements between two or more countries); Collaborative governance (through various ways in which diverse actors and institutions work together); Joint governance (pluralist board or other multi-party governing body)
Type C. Private governance: Conserved areas established and run by individual landowners; non-profit organizations (e.g. NGOs, universities) and for-profit organizations (e.g. corporate landowners)
Type D. Governance by Indigenous Peoples and local communities: Indigenous Peoples' conserved areas and territories – established and run by Indigenous Peoples; Community conserved areas – established and run by local communities.

For more information on the IUCN definition, categories and governance types see
Dudley (2008). *Guidelines for applying protected area management categories* which can be downloaded at: www.iucn.org/pa_categories
For more on governance types see Borrini-Feyerabend et al. (2013). Governance of Protected Areas–from understanding to action, which can be downloaded at https://portals.iucn.org/library/node/29138

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IUCN, International Union for Conservation of Nature, helps the world find pragmatic solutions to our most pressing environment and development challenges. IUCN's work focuses on valuing and conserving nature, ensuring effective and equitable governance of its use, and deploying nature-based solutions to global challenges in climate, food and development. IUCN supports scientific research, manages field projects all over the world, and brings governments, NGOs, the UN and companies together to develop policy, laws and best practice. Created in 1948, IUCN is now the world's largest and most diverse environmental network, with more than 1,300 government and NGO Members and over 10,000 volunteer experts. IUCN's work is supported by almost 1,000 staff in more than 50 offices and hundreds of partners in public, NGO and private sectors around the world. **www.iucn.org**

IUCN World Commission on Protected Areas (WCPA) The WCPA is the world's premier network of protected area expertise. It is supported by IUCN's Programme on Protected Areas and has over 1,400 members, spanning 140 countries. IUCN WCPA works: by helping governments and others plan protected areas and integrate them into all sectors; by providing strategic advice to policy makers; by strengthening capacity and investment in protected areas; and by convening the diverse constituency of protected area stakeholders to address challenging issues. For more than 50 years, IUCN and WCPA have been at the forefront of global action on protected areas. **www.iucn.org/wcpa**

The **France-IUCN partnership** aims to contribute to the Sustainable Development Goals and to the implementation of the Paris Agreement on Climate Change. It supports projects in countries of particular interest for France, in European overseas territories, and at the global scale. It provides technical expertise, both in mobilizing French organizations and experts, and by seconding senior staff to IUCN. The Partnership includes the ministries of Europe and Foreign Affairs, Ecological and Inclusive Transition, Agriculture and Food, and Overseas territories, as well as the French Development Agency (AFD). Created in 2005, the partnership builds on results achieved over time. From 2017 to 2020, it will reach nearly 9 Million Euros. **www.iucn.org/fr/partenariat-france-uicn**

Germany is engaged in intensive development cooperation with the international community to combat poverty, shape globalisation in an equitable manner, safeguard peace, freedom, democracy and human rights, and protect the environment and natural resources. **The German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ)** develops the guidelines and concepts of German development policy, determines the long-term strategies for cooperation with the various actors and defines the rules for implementation. The most important pillar of the German government's development cooperation work involves bilateral cooperation with the governments of other countries. BMZ develops joint projects and programmes with partner countries of German development cooperation which dovetail with national development strategies. The implementing organisations are responsible for the actual implementation of development policy concepts and strategies. In addition, BMZ works with actors from civil society, churches, foundations, the private sector and other areas. **www.bmz.de**

Convention on Biological Diversity
The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), which entered into force in December 1993, is an international treaty for the conservation of biodiversity, the sustainable use of the components of biodiversity and the equitable sharing of the benefits derived from the use of genetic resources. With 193 Parties, the Convention has near universal participation among countries. The Convention seeks to address all threats to biodiversity and ecosystem services through scientific assessments, the development of tools, incentives and processes, the transfer of technologies and good practices, and the full and active involvement of relevant stakeholders, including indigenous and local communities, youth, NGOs, women and the business community. The tenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the CBD, held in 2010, adopted a revised and updated Strategic Plan for Biodiversity for 2011–2020, comprising five strategic goals and 20 Aichi Biodiversity Targets. The Plan is the overarching framework on biodiversity, not only for the biodiversityrelated conventions, but for the entire United Nations system. **www.cbd.int**

The **IUCN WCPA Tourism and Protected Areas Specialist (TAPAS) Group** is a voluntary network of over 500 people. The mission of the TAPAS Group is to provide a platform for protected area practitioners and others, where expertise and knowledge is shared, sustainability awareness is enhanced, collaboration and dialogue is facilitated, leadership is developed, and innovative solutions are fostered, in order to support the oversight of sustainable tourism in protected area systems. **www.iucn.org/theme/protected-areas/wcpa/what-we-do/tourism-tapas**

Department of Parks, Recreation and Tourism Management (PRTM) is one of the three departments within the College of Natural Resources at North Carolina State University. Its mission is to advance scholarship concerning management and use of natural and cultural resources for recreation, tourism, and sport through innovative social science research, teaching, and public engagement. The department aspires to be a community of scholars dedicated to preparing students to be lifelong learners and leaders in a global society committed to developing parks, recreation, tourism, and sport resources that improve the quality of life and are environmentally, socially, and economically sustainable. **cnr.ncsu.edu/prtm**

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Foreword

Protected area managers need a wide range of skills and expertise to manage the complexities of protected area systems. The IUCN Best Practice Guidelines Series aims to address these needs, including sharing experience drawn from good practice around the world. Many protected areas are managed for tourism and visitation as one component of achieving their purpose, involving a wide range of stakeholders, including the private sector. The rapidly expanding demand for tourism development associated with protected areas emphasizes the need to provide clear guidance that will contribute towards sustainable tourism consistent with the primary conservation objectives of protected areas. The legal, political, economic and social contexts for tourism in and around protected areas vary widely across the globe, yet there are many common elements and a diversity of experiences that can enrich the understanding of those involved.

For many years, IUCN WCPA has had an active group of professionals contributing towards the distillation of best practices through the Tourism and Protected Areas Specialist Group (TAPAS). The IUCN WCPA Best Practice Protected Area Guidelines Series #8 by Paul Eagles, Stephen McCool and Christopher Haynes has provided a source of relevant information since 2002. Much has changed over the past decade and a half, however, hence the need for new and additional guidance. This volume seeks to provide it. Insights and cases from more than 50 contributors worldwide have been melded into the current volume, involving considerable consultation and peer review. The first draft was launched at the IUCN World Parks Congress 2014 in Sydney, has been available online for comments from professional practitioners and has benefited from many rounds of review and comment from IUCN experts.

From a conservation perspective, tourism and visitation present a complex set of challenges. Protected area agencies in countries worldwide are expected to make most of these areas available for visitors as well as for achieving conservation goals. Legal, political and economic contexts, as well as ecological considerations, determine how much flexibility the protected area agencies may have in encouraging, restricting, regulating or charging for entry and activities, and in determining whether infrastructure and services should be provided by the agency itself, or by communities, voluntary providers or commercial enterprises.

All forms of tourism create environmental impacts, but these differ by orders of magnitude. At one end of the scale are minimal-impact wilderness travellers, either on foot or by water. These are permitted in many protected areas worldwide, and there is a well-tested suite of management and monitoring tools, summarised in this volume, to provide benefits to visitors without compromising primary conservation goals.

At the other end of the scale are large-scale infrastructure, accommodation, and catering facilities, some of which can handle over a hundred thousand visitors a day. Heavily-visited protected areas need these facilities, but there are dilemmas as to how best to provide them. Tourism development entrepreneurs, tourism industry associations, and tourism portfolios in governments see large-scale fixed-site developments as providing profitable opportunities. Private tourism developments in public protected areas have not always proved successful, however, and in some cases have created major ecological, social, financial and legal problems for protected area agencies. Managing the expectations, design and operations of infrastructure in and around heavily visited protected areas can present a substantial technical and political challenge for protected area agencies. This volume aims to provide practical advice on how to address these issues.

Visitation and tourism can also create economic benefits for protected areas and surrounding communities and help to create greater support for conservation. In many developed countries, tourism in and around protected areas can encourage political support for protected areas and justify government budget allocations. The economic value of tourism and visitation, including social economic and welfare gains, as well as direct fees and revenues to protected area agencies, thus becomes a lobbying tool for conservation agencies and advocates. Most recently, this has expanded to include the benefits to human mental health and well-being from exposure to nature.

In many developing countries, commercial tourism brings international clients and foreign exchange earnings that can provide direct financial support for public, communal and private protected areas. To be successful, such tourism requires expert management, closely tuned and customised to local cultural contexts and international market conditions. Whenever possible, it should also facilitate the growth of a domestic market that values experiences in nature. Commercial tourism can provide significant and demonstrable net gains for conservation of entire protected areas and individual threatened species, often working in partnership with other stakeholders, including donors, trusts, NGOs, and local communities. Managing these projects and programmes for successful conservation, against a backdrop of fluctuating tourism fashions and foreign exchange rates, requires a remarkable set of skills.

As the world attempts to meet the Aichi Biodiversity Targets for more effective protected area systems, conservation managers will need to work more effectively with other sectors. Tourism and visitation can be key tools in this expansion, but need professional skills and expertise to manage and maintain the ecological and conservation values of the sites being visited. This volume provides an introduction to such skills, relevant for protected area agencies and managers of conservation areas worldwide.

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Chair, IUCN World Commission on Protected Areas

Trevor Sandwith
Director, IUCN Global Protected Areas Programme

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The project was an initiative of the IUCN WCPA Tourism and Protected Areas Specialist (TAPAS) Group. One of several voluntary groups convened under IUCN WCPA, the TAPAS Group is a network of over 500 volunteers who are committed to promoting sustainable tourism in protected areas as a tool in achieving the long-term conservation of nature and associated ecosystem and cultural values. The Tapas Group's work includes disseminating knowledge, case studies and best practices on tourism and protected areas.

This is the third edition on the subject of tourism in IUCN WCPA's Best Practice Guidelines series, following guidelines published in 1992 (McNeely, et al., 1992) and a decade later (Eagles, et al., 2002). The editors thank the authors of these earlier guidelines, Jeffrey McNeely, James Thorsell, Héctor Ceballos-Lascuráin, Paul Eagles, Stephen McCool and Christopher Haynes, who established a solid foundation for the current edition.

We adopted a collaborative approach to developing these Guidelines with an intention to foster a community of practice by engaging a wide range of practitioners and academics in sharing their knowledge and experience. To implement this approach, we sent out calls for participation through the TAPAS Group's social media sites and other professional networks. Workshops were conducted at the 2012 IUCN World Conservation Congress in Jeju, Republic of Korea, and the 2013 George Wright Society Conference in Denver, Colorado, USA, to solicit initial input on the Guidelines' organization, contents, and potential case studies. Over 32 participants from 16 countries participated in these two events. We were able to recruit 58 globally distributed contributors, including TAPAS Group members, technical experts, and protected area and tourism professionals, to serve as chapter coordinators, section authors, and/or case study authors. Their specific contributions are recognised in the list on the following page. A contributing authors table organised alphabetically is also available at the end of the document.

In the summer of 2014, the first review draft of the full manuscript was completed and it underwent an IUCN-mandated peer review process. Another round of input was sought from delegates at the 2014 IUCN World Parks Congress held in Sydney, Australia, where the second review draft was presented. The quality of this document was substantially enhanced as a result of the valuable input from these peer reviewers, which included Rajiv Bhartari, Adonia Bintoora, Paul Eagles, Janet Mackay, Marcello Notarianni, Stephen McCool, Sibylle Riedmiller, Eick von Ruschkowski, Diego Sberna, John Senior, and Alessandra Vanzella. Subsequent rounds of reviews and revisions were guided by the IUCN and IUCN WCPA leadership, including Craig Groves (IUCN Best Practice Guidelines Series Editor), Trevor Sandwith (Director of IUCN Global Protected Area Programme), Kathy MacKinnon (Chair of IUCN WCPA), and two additional WCPA-appointed reviewers, Penelope Figgis and Robyn Bushell. Individually and collectively, they provided valuable feedback on the later drafts of the manuscript and helped the editors improve the focus and messages contained here.

We are extremely grateful to David Harmon, who provided editorial and copy-editing support to craft the manuscript into this final form, including a painstaking job of restructuring the manuscript. His energy and fantastic editing skills provided much-needed momentum to move this project through the later stages of the elaborate review and approval process. We must also thank Thad Mermer for his patient and meticulous efforts in professional design service, as well as his copy-editing work on an early manuscript draft.

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A Community of Best Practice

We hope that these Guidelines will provide valuable information, stimulating ideas and sources of inspiration for protected area managers. Through these Guidelines, we envision that a community of practice on protected area tourism be formed in which best practices are shared and communicated globally through various platforms and media. To facilitate knowledge sharing in this community, a supporting Online Resources Directory is available at http://go.ncsu.edu/iucn-sustainabletourism-bpg, which currently points to a temporary prototype server but in the future will link to a permanent location hosted by IUCN. The purposes of this Directory are: (i) to provide additional online readings and detailed information, and (ii) to invite submission and sharing of new resources, such as guidelines, handbooks, manuals, and documentation of innovative practices.

We present these Guidelines and the Online Resources Directory as a dynamic and adaptive resource to support protected area managers with their sustainable tourism efforts.

Yu-Fai Leung, Anna Spenceley, Glen Hvenegaard, Ralf Buckley

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A trail through an area of high biodiversity in Hawaii Volcanoes National Park, USA. © Yu-Fai Leung

Tourism viewpoint in the Valley of Geysers in Kronotsky Zapovednik, Russia. © Elena Nikolaeva

Executive Summary

Tourism Supporting Protected Areas

Protected areas are a key component of any global conservation strategy. Tourism provides a crucial and unique way of fostering visitors' connection with protected area values, making it a potentially positive force for conservation. Visitor experiences can be transformative for an individual's personal growth and well-being, while instilling an increased sense of stewardship and support for protected area values.

Protected area tourism's economic benefits—which depend on beautiful natural areas, healthy wildlife and nature, and authentic cultures—can also be a powerful argument for conservation. Tourism in protected areas is a major part of the global tourism industry—an industry whose scale and impacts are enormous. Such a high volume of visitors implies certain needs for fundamental infrastructure and requirements for employment and human services, all of which have ramifications for the economy, society, culture and the environment.

Done sustainably, tourism can contribute directly to the objectives of global agreements such as the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011–2020 of the Convention on Biological Diversity, the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals, and the Muscat Declaration on Tourism and Culture (UNWTO and UNESCO, 2017). However, inappropriate and poorly managed tourism can cause negative impacts on the biodiversity, landscapes, and resource base of protected areas.

The target audience for these Guidelines is professionals working on tourism in protected areas, including administrators, managers, planners, government agencies, non-governmental organisations, community groups, private landowners and Indigenous groups. Building on two previous editions on the subject of tourism in the IUCN WCPA Best Practice Guidelines series, these Guidelines provide guidance on key issues to help managers achieve sustainable tourism in protected areas: that which is appropriate, well-managed, and contributes to conservation objectives.

These Guidelines introduce essential concepts of tourism and visitor management in protected areas. The following elements of the document are especially important:

1. A discussion of the Ten Principles of Tourism and Visitor Management;
2. The Case Boxes, which provide real-world examples of how sustainable tourism can be achieved under diverse circumstances;
3. The Spotlight Best Practices, which offer specific, transferable knowledge from selected case studies and are called out in the appropriate Case Boxes; and
4. The comprehensive lists of recommended Best Practices, at the end of each chapter (lists which include the Spotlight Best Practices).

Overview and Best Practices

Protected area managers are under growing pressure to provide meaningful and educational visitor experiences and revenue for conservation management, while not allowing tourism to compromise the ecological integrity and associated conservation values of protected areas. Managing protected area tourism is a complex technical task requiring high levels of skill and knowledge. These Guidelines share best-practice examples from around the world and promote their broader application. This document advocates only sustainable tourism that contributes to the conservation of nature over the long term, with the goal of making protected area tourism a strong positive force for conservation at both global and local scales.

After introducing key concepts of sustainable tourism in protected areas in Chapter 1, Chapter 2 explores options for good governance, legislation and policies that are vital for management decisions to be made fairly, transparently and efficiently. A flexible approach is recommended to accommodate different protected area governance types as recognised by IUCN, and to ensure that stakeholders, especially Indigenous Peoples and local communities, have appropriate access to the decision-making processes for protected area tourism. Best practices include:

- Encouraging national tourism policies that fulfill the 'triple bottom line'.
- Ensuring that all site planning for tourism in protected areas follows a basic four-step process.
- Developing tourism management plans in collaboration with all relevant stakeholders.
- Giving tourists a wider context on management issues in the protected area by connecting them to similar issues globally.
- Following internationally adopted guidelines on tourism and biodiversity that provide a framework for policy, planning, management and monitoring of tourism and its impacts.

Tourism in protected areas generates many impacts on the environment, economy, local communities and the visitors themselves. Chapter 3 summarises the positive and negative impacts of tourism, which can be perceived differently by stakeholders with different values. Best practices include:

- Supporting community-based delivery of tourism services that is market related.
- Building training in business development and management skills into community-based delivery of tourism services.
- Re-imagining recreational activities in protected areas as a way to meet community needs and address larger societal goals.

Lessons learnt from research and practical experiences have yielded ten principles of tourism and visitor management that, if applied, improve effectiveness and increase public and community support. Chapter 4 outlines Principles 1 through 6 with an emphasis on aligning protected area management objectives with tourism's positive and negative impacts. This chapter illustrates the benefits of proactive planning and management of tourism infrastructure, commercial tourism and management of visitation and visitor use. Best practices in this area are:

- Choosing materials for site design and construction based on sources that minimise damage and exhibit properties such as durability, recyclability, availability and sustainability.
- Applying standards-based management frameworks driven by protected area values, management objectives, and their associated indicators and standards.
- Employing a combination of visitor use management tools and techniques that reinforce and complement each other.

Chapter 5 explores Principles 7 through 10, which relate to adaptive management for sustainable tourism. They focus on innovative methods for monitoring visitor use, experience and impacts; citizen engagement, partnerships, education and communication; information technologies; and marketing. Best practices in adaptive management are:

- Harnessing the skill and enthusiasm of volunteers through citizen science.
- Coordinating and integrating monitoring of environmental and social impacts, with appropriate technologies and sufficient funding.
- Understanding what values are being protected and the operational context prior to selecting a visitor management tool or practice.
- Being strategic about which protected area values are highlighted in environmental education and interpretation programmes.
- Using environmental education and interpretation programmes to emotionally engage visitors, and connect them with the values the area is protecting.
- Achieving a strong understanding of different constituents through research and analysis prior to engaging in marketing strategies.

Marine iguanas (*Amblyrhynchus cristatus*) and tourists sharing a beachside trail on Galápagos Islands, Ecuador © Yu-Fai Leung

Chapter 6 focuses on the critical issues of developing the capacity of managers, communities and other stakeholders to manage visitors, partnerships and the revenues generated through tourism. Effective capacity development efforts benefit from thorough assessment of skills and knowledge, clear training goals and expectations among all stakeholders, creative partnerships for delivery, and incorporation of appropriate technology. Capacity-building best practices include:

- Assessing the capacity of local communities to deliver tourism services.
- Making sure all partnership-related work is officially accounted for and recognised.

Chapter 7 illustrates examples from around the world of protected areas that are sustainably financed through tourism, and describes the conditions under which this is possible. Common elements include systematic financial assessment; consideration of the full range of fees, concessions and licences; and a transparent, fair and efficient revenue-sharing mechanism. Best practices include:

- Undertaking a systematic financial assessment of the protected area (or broader protected area system) before setting entrance fees.
- Stipulating support for sustainable practices, and for the conservation objectives of the protected area, as part of contracts with tourism operators.
- Forming agreements with concessionaires to employ a certain number of local staff, spend locally where possible, and contract out services to local businesses.

Chapter 8 examines how global changes such as population growth and climate change are shaping tourism demand, activity type and use patterns in protected areas, challenging managers to identify appropriate adaptation, mitigation and communication strategies.

Autumn walk at Parco Nazionale Foreste Casentinesi, Italy © Yu-Fai Leung

Tourism and visitation in protected areas: The sustainability challenge

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communication, providing evidence that the desired message was received and understood. Stakeholder meetings, in-person consultations, use of social media, and online discussion groups are all essential communication tools. Clear and tailored messages are essential for written communication tools, such as park signage, websites, newsletters and brochures. Indirect communication also takes place through such channels as protected area employee conduct and appearance, and the maintenance condition of tourism infrastructure. Done well, communication can build public support for protected area conservation and management (see Box 5.8).

Table 5.2. Types of community participation in tourism management for protected areas

Types	Characteristics
Manipulative participation	Participation is a pretence: people have no power in decision making.
Passive participation	People participate by being told what has been decided or has already happened.
Participation by consultation	People participate by being consulted or by answering questions. Process does not allow any shared decision making. Professionals are not required to include people's views.
Participation for material incentives	People participate by contributing resources (e.g. labour) in return for food, cash or other material incentives. People have no stake in prolonging practices when the incentives end.
Functional participation	Participation seen by external agencies as means to achieve project goals; may include shared decision making, but only after major decisions have already been made by external agents.
Interactive participation	People participate in joint analysis and development of action plans. Participation is a right, involving structured learning processes.
Self-mobilisation	People take initiatives independently of external institutions. They retain control over resource use and decision making.

Source: Pretty, 2005

Box 5.8

The role of Almaty Nature Reserve in changing the perception of a protected area among a local population in Kazakhstan

Almaty Nature Reserve occupies an area of 71,700 ha on the northern slope of Transili Alatau, one of the Northern Tien Shan mountain ranges. The reserve contains 1,100 species of higher plants and more than 50 of rare plants, including 26 listed in the Red Data Book of Kazakhstan, a publication similar to an endangered species list.

For decades since its establishment in 1931, the nature reserve had no public access, and only allowed visits from research scientists and some educational visits for schools to the reserve's museum. The protectionist approach led to negative attitudes among the local population, because prior to the reserve's establishment, berry-, mushroom- and fruit-picking took place, and these activities had contributed significantly to family incomes.

A Reserve educator shows children rare plant species in the Nature Museum. © Alexandra Vishnevskaya

To promote more positive local perceptions about the protected area the reserve staff adopted a strategy including environmental, educational and public components.

The *environmental* component of the strategy focuses the protection of the natural mountain complexes of the Transili Alatau, including its flora and fauna. The *educational* component includes close collaboration with the local schools in Talgar. The *public* component consists of important initiatives such as "March for Parks", close collaboration with the media and public bodies, and production of publications, leaflets and brochures.

Following 10 years of this approach, local perceptions about the reserve are more positive, with more than 50% of the population speaking favourably of the Almaty Nature Reserve. Future plans include developing responsible ecotourism, continuing educational work and building partnerships with the protected areas and higher education institutions worldwide.

Source: Dzhanyspayev, 2006