The Relationship between

Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs) and Protected Areas

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(http://www.keybiodiversityareas.org/kba-partners)

Introduction

In the world of nature conservation, there are many terms, designations and definitions that may be confusing for decision makers, policy developers and the general public. The following note seeks to clarify the differences and overlap between sites that are managed as protected areas and sites identified as Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs).

> **What does the KBA Standard[1] say about the Relationship between KBAs and Protected Areas?**

> *"The identification of a site as a KBA on the basis of the criteria and thresholds presented here is unrelated to its legal status; however, such status will often inform site delineation (Section V3.2). Many KBAs overlap wholly or partly with existing protected area boundaries, including sites designated under international conventions (e.g. Ramsar and World Heritage) and areas protected at national and local levels (e.g. national parks, indigenous or community conserved areas). However, it is recognised that other management approaches may also be appropriate; the identification of a site as a KBA simply implies that the site should be managed in ways that ensure the persistence of the biodiversity elements for which it is important. It is also understood that many protected areas are established for other conservation purposes and will not be identified as KBAs unless they also hold biodiversity elements meeting the criteria and thresholds."*

What is a Key Biodiversity Area?

Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs) are sites contributing significantly to the global persistence of biodiversity. KBAs are identified by applying the criteria and thresholds included in the *"A Global Standard for the Identification of Key Biodiversity Areas"* approved by the Council of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) in April 2016[1]. This standard applies to all

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[1] IUCN (2016) A Global Standard for the Identification of Key Biodiversity Areas, Version 1.0. First edition. Gland, Switzerland: IUCN. (https://portals.iucn.org/library/sites/library/files/documents/Rep-2016-005.pdf).

taxa and all levels of biodiversity (genetic, species and ecosystems). There are 11 criteria grouped under five categories:

- Threatened biodiversity
- Geographically restricted biodiversity
- Ecological integrity
- Biological processes and
- Irreplaceability through quantitative analysis.

The Standard and its criteria were developed through extensive consultation[2] and build on four decades of experience in identifying sites of biodiversity importance including Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas[3,4] identified by BirdLife International, as well as efforts to identify Important Plant Areas, Alliance for Zero Extinction sites[5], KBAs under previous criteria[6], and related approaches.

Data on KBAs are held in the World Database on Key Biodiversity Areas™ (www.keybiodiversityareas.org), and include KBAs identified under the Standard as well as existing KBAs (e.g. Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas, Alliance for Zero Extinction sites, KBAs identified through the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund). KBAs identified under previous criteria are in the process of being assessed using the new Standard. Those that do not meet the global criteria and thresholds in the KBA Standard, but do meet previously established regional criteria and thresholds, will be recognized as Regional KBAs.

What are protected areas?

The International Union for Conservation of Nature (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"*.[7]

An alternative definition can be found in Article 2 of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) according to which *"protected area means a geographically defined area which is designated or regulated and managed to achieve specific conservation objectives".* There is tacit agreement

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[2] See http://www.keybiodiversityareas.org/what-are-kbas

[3] BirdLife International (2014) Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas: A global network for conserving nature. and benefiting people. Cambridge, UK: BirdLife International. Available at http://datazone.birdlife.org/sowb/sowbpubs#IBA

[4] Donald et al (in review) Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas (IBAs): the development and characteristics of a global inventory of key sites for biodiversity. *Bird Conserv. Internat*.

[5] http://www.zeroextinction.org

[6] Langhammer et al. (2007). Identification and Gap Analysis of Key Biodiversity Areas: Targets for Comprehensive Protected Area Systems. Gland, Switzerland: IUCN.

[7] Dudley, N. (Editor) (2008). Guidelines for Applying Protected Area Management Categories. Gland, Switzerland: IUCN. x + 86pp for the Identification of Key Biodiversity Areas, Version 1.0

between IUCN's World Commission on Protected Areas and the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity that these two definitions can be treated as identical[8]. For this note, we use the IUCN definition.

The IUCN has identified 6 protected area management categories and 4 governance types (see Table 1 below). This matrix allows for a range of management approaches, and governance arrangements. All governance mechanisms apply to any management category.

Table 1: IUCN Protected Area Management Categories and Governance Types
(Adapted from Dudley, N. (Editor) (2008[7])

Protected Area Category	Governance Type			
	A. Governance by government	B. Shared governance	C. Private governance	D. Governance by indigenous peoples and local communities
Ia. Strict Nature Reserve	x	x	x	x
Ib. Wilderness Area	x	x	x	x
II. National Park	x	x	x	x
III. Natural Monument	x	x	x	x
IV. Habitat/ Species Management	x	x	x	x
V. Protected Landscape/ Seascape	x	x	x	x
VI. Protected Area with Sustainable Use of Natural Resources	x	x	x	x

In the last few years a new phrase has been heard increasingly in conservation circles – '*other effective area-based conservation measures'*, which comes from Target 11 of the Convention on Biological Diversity's Strategic Plan for Diversity. This phrase – often shortened to 'OECMs' - sits alongside protected areas as a potential complementary avenue by which countries can achieve area-based conservation of biodiversity. Work is under way to define this term. Guidance on the definition and criteria for OECMs is being developed by an IUCN World Commission on Protected Areas Task Force which will provide recommendations to the Convention on Biological Diversity.

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[8] http://parksjournal.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/PARKS-18.1-Editorial-Lopoukhine-Dias-10.2305IUCN.CH_.2012.PARKS-18-1.NL_.en_.pdf

For the purposes of this paper and until there is clear guidance, we consider OECMs as potentially important spatial tools to conserve KBAs, among others.

The Relationship between KBAs and Protected Areas

Within the KBA Standard, it is expressly stated that the identification of a site as a KBA is done scientifically, solely on the basis of the criteria and thresholds. As such, KBA status is a scientific identification process and therefore unrelated to legal status or governance type. In identifying a KBA, it is implicit that the values are significant and thus it is important that those values be maintained. However the identification of a site as a KBA does not imply that the site should necessarily become a protected area. This is in recognition of the fact that, although many KBAs should indeed become protected areas, there are more tools than protected area designation that can be applied to maintain the KBA values at the site. For example, community-managed areas, indigenous reserves, locally managed marine areas, fisheries management zoning, land use planning zones, forest management plans, and similar mechanisms may be the most appropriate form of effective management for a given site. It is noted that decisions on conservation actions, including where to establish protected areas, are set through complex processes, such as systematic conservation planning (which typically take into account factors such as threats and costs), broad stakeholder consultations, and in consideration of political realities.

However in practice, many KBAs are indeed conserved within protected areas since well-managed and well-designed protected areas are used globally as the key tool for site-based conservation. In some countries and regions (e.g. the EU), existing KBAs have been particularly influential in informing the establishment of protected areas[9]. Globally, more than half of the over 15,000 currently identified KBAs overlap wholly or partly with existing protected area boundaries, including sites designated under international conventions (e.g. Ramsar and World Heritage) and areas protected at national and local levels (e.g. national parks, state or provincial parks, wildlife reserves, private protected areas, indigenous or community conserved areas)[10]. Because of the matrix of management categories and governance types (Table 1), protected areas can provide a range of possible arrangements for effective conservation of KBAs. Data are currently being compiled to estimate the coverage of KBAs that are conserved by other types of conservation management which might qualify as "Other effective area-based conservation mechanisms" (OECMS) once the definition is clarified.

Protected areas are established for many reasons. The consistent element from the IUCN definition is that nature conservation is always the dominant purpose of the site. In many cases protected areas have been established to conserve the exact values identified by a KBA identification process. In other cases, the biodiversity elements triggering a site as a KBA may be only one of a range of nature conservation values identified for the site and used by the

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[9] Waliczky et al (in review) Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas (IBAs): the impact of IBAs on conservation policy, advocacy and action. *Bird Conserv. Internat*.

[10] Analysis of 2017 KBA and protected area datasets by BirdLife International, IUCN and UNE-WCMC showed that 20% of KBAs are completely covered by protected areas, 45% are partially covered, and 35% have zero coverage. On average, each KBAs has 46.1% of its area covered by protected areas.

designating authority in establishing a protected area. It is also understood that protected areas are established for many other conservation purposes (e.g. ecological representation, bio-cultural landscapes, connectivity, national and regional conservation priorities) and will not be identified as KBAs unless they also hold biodiversity elements meeting the KBA criteria and thresholds. If a protected area does not qualify as a KBA, it in no way implies that the site is not important for conservation. Protected areas have a far broader conservation purpose and focus than the 5 categories used to identify KBAs.

One area of potential confusion is over the way that KBAs are delineated. As previously indicated, KBAs are identified based solely on biological criteria and thresholds. However the delineated boundaries of KBAs are meant to be based on practical and manageable units. For example, take the case of a population of a rare plant located in a section of a private ranch. It might be most appropriate to use the ranch boundary as the KBA boundary because there is one owner and manager. Another example might be a population of a threatened bird species found in part of a national park. In this example, the best delineation for the KBA might be the entire park boundary because that is the unit that is actually being managed for conservation. KBAs may be delineated only based on the boundaries of the biological feature, but in many cases they are delineated on a larger, practical manageable unit. Where KBAs are also protected areas, or wholly within a protected area, there are often advantages in using the same boundary. KBA delineation is done in consultation with stakeholders having expertise relevant to KBA identification and delineation. As the extent to which KBA boundaries inform active management increases, more extensive consultation will be needed, for example with land owners, managers, and local and indigenous communities living in or near the site."

The strong alignment between sites managed as protected areas and sites designated as KBAs is useful for tracking progress on achieving global conservation targets. Aichi Target 11, under the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity of the CBD, uses the percentage of KBAs in protected areas as an indicator of progress (https://www.bipindicators.net/indicators/protected-area-coverage-of-key-biodiversity-areas). This same indicator is also used for three targets of the United National Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs 14.5, 15.1 and 15.4 - https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2017/storymap/index.html). These indicators will also take into account coverage of KBAs by OECMs once the definition of OECMs has been finalised and the relevant data compiled.

For conservation planning, KBAs should provide an important primary biodiversity layer to inform establishment and expansion of protected areas. It is also understood that priorities for conservation actions resulting from systematic conservation planning are set using a range of factors, including ecological threat and available resources.

In summary: not all KBAs will be protected areas and not all protected areas will be KBAs, but there is generally strong overlap between the two. KBAs derive from scientific identification while protected areas are a conservation tool with legal recognition and governance arrangements.

Information on the KBA Partnership, the KBA Committee and the WCPA

The KBA Partnership[11] is a collaboration of independent organizations (the KBA Partners) leading, coordinating or supporting a process to identify, document, update and/or monitor KBAs, to communicate, promote and position this information to enable the achievement of the KBA vision and providing support in cash or in kind to implement the KBA Programme. The KBA Partnership currently includes the following organizations: American Bird Conservancy, Amphibian Survival Alliance, BirdLife International, Conservation International, Critical Ecosystems Partnership Fund, Global Environment Facility, IUCN, NatureServe, Rainforest Trust, Re:wild, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, WWF, and Wildlife Conservation Society.

The KBA Committee is the governance body of the KBA Programme, charged with providing oversight of the implementation of strategic plans, priorities and work plans, making strategic decisions and taking actions to enhance the implementation of the KBA Programme[12].

The World Commission on Protected Areas (WCPA)[13] is the world's premier network of protected area expertise. It is a voluntary network administered by IUCN's Global Programme on Protected Areas and has over 2,500 members, spanning 140 countries. WCPA works by helping governments and others plan and manage protected areas, 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 including the relevance of protected areas to sustainable development.

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[11] http://www.keybiodiversityareas.org/kba-partners
[12] For further information on governance structures, see http://www.keybiodiversityareas.org/kba-partners
[13] https://www.iucn.org/theme/protected-areas/wcpa