

Sacred Natural Sites

Reviewing and Testing the IUCN-UNESCO Sacred Natural Sites Guidelines for Protected Area Managers

Key Points

- The Guidelines help conservation professionals and the custodians of sacred sites to conserve and revitalise sacred natural sites and ensure their long-term survival.
- The Guidelines were launched in 2008 and are now available in English, Spanish, Russian, Estonian and soon also in French and Japanese.
- You can help review the Guidelines by taking a survey, testing them in the field, translating them into your local language or through developing a case study on your sacred natural site and management experience.
- Get the Guidelines and support the conservation of sacred natural sites, go to www.sacrednaturalsites.org

Summary

The IUCN-UNESCO Sacred Natural Sites (SNS) guidelines aim to help conservation professionals and support custodians of sacred sites and their communities to ensure the long-term survival of such valuable sites.

The Sacred Natural Sites Initiative (SNSI), as part of the Specialist Group on Cultural and Spiritual Values (CSVPA), the World Commission on Protected Areas, IUCN, and UNESCO are calling for your contribution to review and test the IUCN-UNESCO Sacred Natural Sites Guidelines for Protected Area Managers.

This document explains what you can do and why your help is important. For more information on specific elements of this call or to download the Guidelines and other related documentation please go to www.sacrednaturalsites.org

Purpose of reviewing and field testing

In 2008 CSVPA launched the IUCN-UNESCO, Protected Area Best Practice Guideline 16; "Sacred Natural Sites Guidelines for Protected Area Managers" (Wild & McLeod 2008). The aim of testing the Guidelines is to;

- a) Gain knowledge on the functioning of the Guidelines, their strengths and weaknesses, through review and testing by protected area managers, conservation professionals as well as custodians and their communities.
- b) Make recommendations for the improvement of the Guidelines, revise the Guidelines and disseminate the revised guidance and learning experiences.
- c) Establish a learning or pilot network of sacred natural site conservation areas and protected area managers, conservation professionals and custodians with their communities.



Indigenous Rangers from North East Arnhem Land Australia launch the Guidelines and present a musical instrument named Yidaki, to the IUCN Director General. In Australia 27% of the national reserve system consists of Indigenous Protected Areas containing many sacred sites.

The aim of the Guidelines is to help protected area managers to not only conserve the natural aspects, but also to better recognise and engage with cultural, spiritual and religious aspects of sacred natural sites within protected areas. They guide protected area managers on what actions and are appropriate and make suggestions for creating an enabling environment for custodians, local communities and other stakeholders. Because sacred natural sites have been managed by custodians, communities or faith groups, particular attention is needed to the development of additional custodian-led conservation guidance.

This is important in the light of the CBD 2020 target of covering 17% of terrestrial and 10% marine areas, conserved through equitable and effectively managed systems of protected areas and other effective area based conservation measures. It adds to the recognition of existing cultural and spiritually embedded conservation approaches.

Reviewing and Testing Brochure

How you can help!

If you are a protected area manager, conservation professional, custodian, community person, scientist or a decision maker with knowledge on sacred natural sites then you can help improve the Guidelines. Your help will contribute to better understanding and management of sacred natural sites in and outside protected areas. You can access additional information to the points mentioned below at www.sacrednaturalsites.org.

The Guidelines are organized in two parts. Part I contains the supporting sections which include the preamble, introduction, background information and photo plates of sacred sites. Part 2 contains the 5 page essential guidelines which consist of 6 principles and 44 guideline points. The section also contains a discussion which covers the principles of the Guidelines illustrated by case studies and is supported by references and annexes.

Reviewing will help to get direct feedback on the relevance, wording, local applicability and adaptability of the Guidelines. It will also alert us to any gaps that may exist. The review has three parts; a) respondent, sacred natural sites and protected area information, b) review of principles and guidelines and c) general comments on the Guidelines as a whole. Regardless you used the Guidelines or not your experience, insights and recommendations will help to improve the Guidelines.

- a. Perform an **online review of the Guidelines** or download and print your hardcopy version and mail it to the address provided at the website,
- b. Do a **review in a group or workshop** setting between a number of stakeholders, protected area managers, custodians and/or other community members. You can print the questionnaire and use it as guidance to structure the



Hopi elder Dalton Taylor consults with US Forest Service Archaeologist Linda Farnsworth at a mining operation that has destroyed a pilgrimage route into the sacred San Francisco Peaks, near Flagstaff, Arizona, USA. In 2011 the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples filed a report regarding the San Francisco Peaks recommending that the United States Government engage in a comprehensive review of its relevant policies and actions to ensure that they are in compliance with international standards in relation to sacred sites, and that it takes appropriate remedial action.

outcomes which you can sent to us by post or email.

1. Field Testing the Guidelines.

Test the Guidelines in the field and help us by sharing your experience with us during and/or after the process. On completion you can also develop a case study or a report outlining your experience with the Guidelines. You can do field testing for example:

- a. as part of the Guidelines **implementation in an existing management plan** or management cycle or,
- b. when **initiating a new management plan** or cycle from the start.

2. Translating the Guidelines will help making them accessible to protected area managers and custodians around the world. Thus far

the full guidelines are available in English, Russian, Spanish and Estonian. Japanese and French are under development. In addition working versions of the essential guidelines are available in Italian and Persian with several more languages in progress.

- a. Translate the full guidelines following IUCNs publication protocol (contact info@sacrednaturalsites.org for details),
- b. Translate the 5 page essential guidelines into an appropriate local language and make them available to others at the website.

3. Case studies are valuable for sharing your experience on the management of sacred natural sites with other protected area managers and custodians. We especially aim to

02 Sacred Natural Sites are the oldest form of protected areas and many of them are very important biodiversity reservoirs and safeguard cultural diversity through social conservation networks of custodians, communities and faith groups.

have case studies from all the regions that have the Guidelines available to them in the appropriate language. Case studies can be systematically analysed to improve the Guidelines and to develop new guidance especially for custodians, communities and faith groups. Over 40 case studies have already been developed.

- a. Case studies or reports can be developed following a format outlined in the guidance provided at the website,
- b. Case studies can also be developed based on a reporting structure of your own preference.

What happens to the information we receive from you?

Most sacred natural sites are guarded by their custodians who determine the code of conduct for these places. Whilst respecting secrecy and protocol, local custodians and their (religious) communities can assist with documentation of their sacred natural sites but for any such development, the Sacred Natural Sites Initiative exercises Free and Prior Informed Consent (FPIC), respecting the rights of self-determination, religious freedom and cultural continuity including the right to refuse action.

Free and Prior Informed Consent

The Sacred Natural Sites Initiative and its partners are developing a body of information on management experiences related to sacred natural sites. Appropriate measures of FPIC and protocols for this are under development and will be out for consultation and testing before they will finally be adopted.

In most cases it is not needed to learn about the nature of culturally sensitive information. We respect secrecy and take care not to compromise the right to self-determination. For management and policy purposes it might be sufficient to know that such information exists and to have access to the appropriate knowledge holder in case management issues occur. Information will only be made public to the degree indicated by the party submitting the review, testing experience, translation or case study for the Guidelines.

Sponsorship:

We are looking for funding to sponsor

About the Guidelines:

Why are these guidelines important?

The WCPA Protected Area Best Practice Guidelines Series provide the global standard for protected area management. The series is well respected and IUCN is known for its quality work and has significant influence as the world's oldest and largest global environmental network with more than 1,000 member organizations, and almost 11,000 volunteer scientists in more than 160 countries. This way the Guidelines are widely disseminated amongst conservationists, government bodies and decision makers. These efforts will contribute to growing global understanding and recognition for sacred natural sites and help make a difference to their conservation on the ground.

How did the SNS guidelines come about?

The Guidelines were published in 2008 after some 7 years of consultation and process guided by the IUCN Specialist Group on Cultural and Spiritual Values of Protected Areas in collaboration with UNESCO and IUCN. The Guidelines were reviewed by indigenous leaders and members of the UNPFII. The Guidelines are lacking in the experience of sacred natural sites of mainstream faiths. Examples of sites enriched by cultural or 'folk' variants of mainstream faiths are also largely absent.

What has happened to date?

The complete guidelines and the 5 pages of Essential Guidelines have been translated into several languages and are available from www.sacrednaturalsites.org. Preliminary review by the Delos Initiative amongst the participants of their third workshop held in Inari, Finland has allowed a more in depth review and testing of the Guidelines that will help to improve the Guidelines for their use by custodians, communities and faith groups. (Mallarach 2011).

How are these guidelines supported?

IUCN Resolution 4.038 "Recognition and conservation of sacred natural sites in protected areas" was endorsed at IUCN's 4th World Conservation Congress with 99% support from all NGOs and 97% support from all government parties. The resolution now supports and mandates those working in conservation to act on the conservation of sacred natural sites. The book "Sacred Natural Sites; Conserving Nature and Culture" (<http://www.earthscan.co.uk/?tabid=102379>) informs policy briefs, supports a detailed Action Plan and includes a Custodians Statement in support of the conservation of sacred natural sites. For use outside protected areas the CBD has developed the "Akwé: Kon Voluntary Guidelines for the Conduct of Cultural, Environmental and Social Impact Assessment Regarding Developments Proposed to Take Place on, or which are Likely to Impact on, Sacred Sites and on Lands and Waters Traditionally Occupied or Used by Indigenous and Local Communities", <http://www.cbd.int/doc/book.aspx?id=7358>.

Where do we go from here?

We are looking for protected areas covering the full range of IUCN categories and governance types including Indigenous and Community Conserved Areas to test the Guidelines. These should ideally cover different geographical areas of the globe and feature a diversity of cultures, faiths, spiritualities and socio ecological systems. We also hope to gather a diversity of cases that deal with particular threats and challenges in their management, e.g. tourism, scientific research, fishing, mining, forestry and conservation management itself.

Reviewing and Testing Brochure



As a strategy to enhance protection, shaman Maria Amanchina and cultural expert Maya Erlenbaeva map sacred sites that occur outside formal protected area boundaries in the Altai Republic, southern Siberia, Russia. (Source: C. McLeod)

Sites Initiative

(www.sacrednaturalsites.org) itself. Please send your inquiries and comments to info@sacrednaturalsites.org.

The Sacred Natural Sites Initiative

The Sacred Natural Sites Initiative is an alliance with a wider network of custodians, traditional knowledge holders, conservationists, protected area managers, academics and other stakeholders that are working for the long term conservation and revitalisation of sacred natural sites and landscapes. The Sacred Natural Sites Initiative is part of the IUCN World Commission on protected Areas Specialist group on Cultural and Spiritual Values of Protected Areas (CSVPA) and based on some 14 years of conservation experience on sacred natural sites. As part of IUCN-CSVPA, The Sacred Natural Sites Initiative is facilitating the review of the Guidelines. The Sacred Natural Sites Initiative is institutionally housed with IUCN and preliminary ETC COMPAS.

The Sacred Natural Sites Initiative is currently under development. Your views and advice are welcome during the consultation process and beyond. We thank you for your help, please contact info@sacrednaturalsites.org

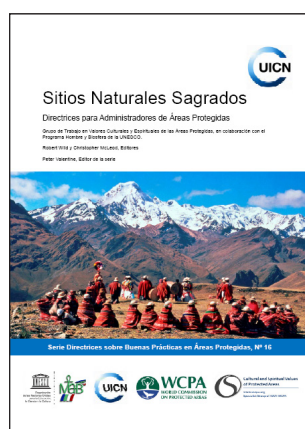
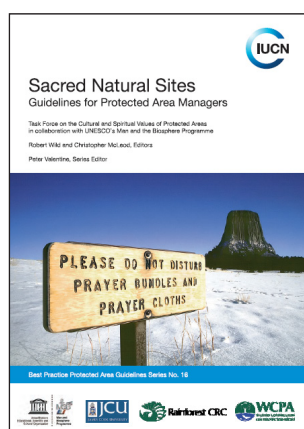
the review and testing of the Guidelines. We would like to:

1. convene regional workshops to bring together protected area managers, ICCA representatives and custodians that are testing the Guidelines,
2. organise further print runs of the Guidelines in all IUCN languages (English, Spanish and French) but possibly also other languages where the Guidelines can make a difference (e.g. Arabic, Chinese, Japanese etc.),

3. be able to support a network of field locations where the Guidelines are being implemented and where new and innovative conservation processes and guidelines can be developed for sacred natural sites and their custodians.

Your feedback and questions

We very much welcome any specific questions or expressions of interest regarding this specific call on the Guidelines but also in relation to the consultation on the Sacred Natural



More information on the Guidelines and the work on sacred natural sites can be found at the Sacred Natural sites Initiative; www.sacrednaturalsites.org and at IUCN; http://www.iucn.org/about/work/programmes/social_policy/sp_themes/sp_themes_sns/

This consultation document has been created by Bas Verschuuren, basverschuuren@gmail.com (Co-Chair of IUCN CSVPA, and Co-ordinator for the Sacred Natural Sites Initiative) and Robert Wild, robwild@gmail.com (Chair, IUCN CSVPA, and senior Co-ordinator for the Sacred Natural Sites Initiative).