Key Biodiversity Areas and environmental safeguards
Critical biodiversity knowledge to inform regional development

Environmental safeguard definitions aim to maintain and improve the status of biodiversity while allowing sustainable development that benefits national economies. The Key Biodiversity Area (KBA) approach uses national experts to identify sites where globally significant biodiversity is known to occur, providing practical information to guide development.

Contacts

Alliance for Zero Extinction
Mike Parr: mparr@abcbirds.org

BirdLife International
Leon Bennun: leon.bennun@birdlife.org

Conservation International
Matt Foster: m.foster@conservation.org

IUCN
Jane Smart: jane.smart@iucn.org

IUCN Freshwater Biodiversity Unit
Will Darwall: william.darwall@iucn.org

IUCN Global Marine Species Assessment
Kent Carpenter: kent.carpenter@iucn.org

Plantlife International
Elizabeth Radford: liz.radford@plantlife.org.uk

UNEP—World Conservation Monitoring Centre
Jon Hutton: jon.hutton@unep-wcmc.org

Biodiversity and development

Leading development banks and financial institutions recognize that the conservation of biodiversity, including the services and products that natural habitats provide to human society, is fundamental to their vision of long-term sustainable development. Loss of natural habitats — land, freshwater or marine — is acknowledged as the major threat to biodiversity, in turn undermining the wellbeing of vulnerable communities directly dependent on these resources. With the help of their clients, these banks actively support and promote the protection, maintenance and rehabilitation of natural habitats and their ecological functions. This is achieved through careful application of safeguards which reward projects that mainstream conservation needs into national and regional development priorities. As part of these environmental screening and assessment processes, development banks need to be able to identify and map critical natural habitats at a scale sufficiently fine to inform investments on the ground.

A practical definition for critical natural habitats

While global priority regions, such as biodiversity hotspots, have been critical in directing attention to the most biologically important regions of the planet, they lack the necessary detail to guide action on the ground. The Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs) approach is a consistent methodology for identifying and mapping important natural habitat at this site scale — the scale of individual protected areas, concessions and land management units. These sites are identified at a national level by local stakeholders using a set of transparent and globally standardized criteria, most notably building from the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species™, BirdLife International's Important Bird Areas, Plantlife International's Important Plant Areas, IUCN's Important Sites for Freshwater Biodiversity, and sites identified by the Alliance for Zero Extinction. To meet the KBA criteria, a site must contain:

- One or more globally threatened species;
- One or more endemic species which are globally restricted to the site or surrounding region;
- Significant concentrations of a species (e.g. important migratory stops, nesting sites, nurseries or breeding areas); and/or
- Globally significant examples of unique habitat types and species assemblages.

These characteristics are already integrated into numerous laws, policies and environmental safeguards, such as the World Bank's Operational Policy 4.04, the International Finance Corporation's (IFC) Performance Standard 6 and the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB) Policy Directive B.9, and others, which have

Alliance for Zero Extinction (AZE)

An alliance of nearly 100 international, national and local conservation partners that have come together to identify the highest priority KBAs for immediate action at the global level. AZE sites hold at least 95% of the population of one or more Critically Endangered or Endangered species, meaning that if they are lost, at least one species will become extinct.
See: www.zeroextinction.org

Important Bird Area (IBA)

A site identified for bird species and populations that trigger KBA criteria. Pioneered by the BirdLife International partnership, the IBA methodology provides the original basis for the KBA concept. IBAs have been identified across most of the world, with over 10,000 sites documented in the World Bird Database and more than 100 national directories published. Updating these sites to include other biodiversity, in addition to birds, is an ongoing process.
See: www.birdlife.org/action/science/sites

Important Plant Area (IPA)

A site identified for plant species and populations that trigger KBA criteria, through the work of Plantlife International and partner organizations.
See: www.plantlife.org.uk

Important Sites for Freshwater Biodiversity

A site identified for freshwater species and populations that trigger KBA criteria, through the work of the IUCN Species Program Freshwater Biodiversity Unit and partner organizations.
See: cms.iucn.org/about/work/programmes/species/our_work/about_freshwater

IUCN Red List of Threatened Species™

The accepted authority and database on the global conservation status of the world's species. The List is informed by a network of specialist expert groups that categorize species based on a set of explicit quantitative criteria and standards which are subject to review and continuous appraisal.
See: www.iucnredlist.org.

converged on one or more of these criteria when defining important natural and critical habitats. For example, the IFC definition for critical habitats states:

> *"Critical habitat is a subset of both natural and modified habitat that deserves particular attention. Critical habitat includes areas with high biodiversity value, including habitat required for the survival of critically endangered or endangered species; areas having special significance for endemic or restricted-range species; sites that are critical for the survival of migratory species; areas supporting globally significant concentrations or numbers of individuals of congregatory species; areas with unique assemblages of species or which are associated with key evolutionary processes or provide key ecosystem services; and areas having biodiversity of significant social, economic or cultural importance to local communities."*

KBAs have been identified in over 170 countries to date—two thirds of these in the developing world—with continuous refinement occurring as new information on biodiversity becomes available from key national and international sources. This is especially urgent in marine and freshwater environments, where these criteria are actively undergoing testing and refinement to identify globally important sites for aquatic biodiversity.

In addition to the species and habitats triggering these criteria, KBAs will always contain many other species, some of which would be recognized as conservation priorities in their own right if there was more information on their status. This is particularly the case for many plants and invertebrates, where knowledge of distributions is often poor and patchy. These sites represent priorities for protection at local, national and international levels and are likely to possess significant social, economic or cultural value to local communities. These factors contribute to a strong foundation for ensuring sustainable management of natural resources through practices that integrate conservation needs and development priorities.

As a result of this value, conservation organizations (currently BirdLife International, Conservation International, and UNEP–WCMC, with IUCN as an observer) have formed a partnership to promote access by decision-makers to this critical information. The Integrated Biodiversity Assessment Tool (IBAT), currently aimed at business users, represents a potential model for informing the implementation of environmental safeguards with critical site-scale information, including KBAs. Access to this information early in the development cycle would create opportunities to accommodate biodiversity concerns as efficiently as possible.

Sources

IUCN World Commission on Protected Areas: Best Practice Protected Areas Guidelines Series No. 15. (2007) Identification and gap analysis of Key Biodiversity Areas: Targets for comprehensive protected area systems. IUCN, Gland, Switzerland. Available electronically at: http://www.iucn.org/dbtw-wpd/edocs/PAG-015.pdf