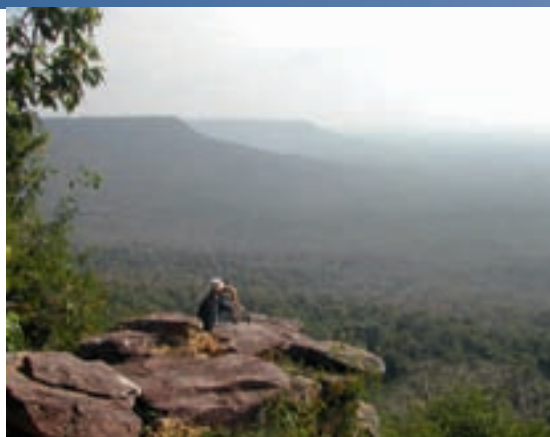


# A guide to TBCAs

## ASEAN is developing guidelines for transboundary conservation

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**Big view, complex issues:** Tourists enjoy the view over Thailand's Ta Phraya National Park on the border with Cambodia. TBCA managers are often inexperienced and under-resourced, but they are expected to contribute to and implement plans for complex biological, social and economic interventions.

Photo: B. Jefferies

**T**ransboundary conservation manifests itself in a variety of forms depending on the national, regional, cultural, political, economic and institutional contexts as well as the objectives of a transboundary initiative. Nevertheless, there are also many commonalities between TBCAs, and, if managers can be encouraged to think laterally and outside the square, the lessons learned in one context can often be adapted and applied elsewhere.

It is easy to underestimate the complexity of the task faced by the managers of protected areas in general and TBCAs in particular. They are often inexperienced and under-resourced, but they are expected to contribute to and implement plans for complex biological, social and economic interventions. We need to put tools at their disposal that make it easier for them to do their jobs.

In 2008, therefore, the nine countries of the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) initiated a process managed by the ASEAN Centre for Biodiversity (ACB) to develop guidelines that would provide practical and realistic guidance on the planning, establishment, management, monitoring and evaluation of TBCAs in the ASEAN region.

In the draft guidelines, potential management actions are divided into three categories: formative actions; delivery actions; and cross-cutting actions.

Formative actions include:

- undertaking feasibility and scoping studies
- establishing a shared vision
- undertaking preplanning
- establishing governance and administration
- establishing strategic management priorities and requirements.

Delivery actions include:

- managing finances, human resources and assets
- site management
- providing and managing research opportunities.

Working and communicating with partners and stakeholders can be considered to be a cross-cutting action.

Each action is addressed in the draft in tabular form—management action, description and notes. The table presents examples of the sorts of management actions that might be associated with feasibility and scoping studies.

## Context

Examples of possible management actions, TBCA feasibility and scoping studies

Management actions	Description	Notes and other considerations
Understanding context		
Identify and document the key natural, social and managerial contexts of the area(s) considered suitable for the TBCA project.	Undertake literature reviews; interviews with key informants and stakeholders; and primary data-gathering to identify the important context topics and to develop a working knowledge and understanding of them.	Topics likely to be important include: – the distribution, requirements and threats to significant animal and plant species and ecosystems
Develop and apply participatory biodiversity assessment methods.		– identifying the significance, values and needs of a TBCA
Specific question(s) that this step will address include: “What important biodiversity targets are we trying to conserve or restore?”		– international status – current land uses, tenures and governance arrangements – socioeconomic and cultural conditions, values, concerns and aspirations of people living in and around the TBCA.
		Spend time field checking and verifying information.

The guidelines are still in draft form. On the basis of comments received from participants at a workshop held in Luang Prabang, Laos, in 2009, a revised draft will be produced by ACB, which will then be submitted to the focal or lead agencies in each ASEAN country. Those agencies will discuss the draft with stakeholders and provide input, which will be returned to ACB for compilation and further revision.

# The sub-continental search for TBCAs

## India has taken a systematic approach to identifying and prioritizing TBCAs

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TBCAs take many forms, such as:

- two or more contiguous protected areas across a national boundary (Type 1)
- a cluster of protected areas and the intervening land (Type 2)
- a cluster of protected areas without intervening land (Type 3)
- a trans-border area including proposed protected areas (Type 4)
- a protected area in one country aided by sympathetic land use over the border (Type 5).

To date, India has established a network of 662 protected areas. We looked at all of them to identify the potential for creating TBCAs (Anon. 2008). India has many next-door neighbours: there is potential to form TBCAs with Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Pakistan and China. Twenty-one of India's protected areas lie along or adjacent to the Indian border and could be considered for declaration as TBCAs. Of those, eight can be categorized as Type 1, four as Type 3 and nine as Type 5.

To decide which ones were most suited to a transboundary initiative we conducted a process of prioritization using five ecological criteria and 24 indicators. The five criteria were:

- ecosystem resilience—size, connectivity and threat (five indicators)
- life-support systems—ecosystem services provided by the systems (five indicators)
- unique biodiversity—the number of species of conservation concern and ecosystems vested with endemism, rarity and representativeness (eight indicators)
- protected areas with entities of cultural, aesthetic and religious significance (four indicators)
- economic potential—in the context of specific resources to be conserved (two indicators).

For each indicator, threshold values and weightings were assigned. We also looked at the number of ecosystems that were represented. From the resulting assessment, the 21 candidates were reduced to twelve, in order of priority (Table 1). The next step was to look at geopolitical considerations, and for this we sought opinion from relevant ministries. From this process a set of seven candidates was selected for initial TBCA implementation (Table 2).

The framework for implementing these TBCAs is based on best-practice, including the following elements:

- identifying and promoting common values
- involving and benefiting local people
- obtaining and maintaining the support of decision-makers
- promoting coordinated and cooperative activities

- achieving coordinated planning and protected-area development
- developing cooperative agreements
- working towards funding sustainability
- monitoring and assessing progress
- dealing with tension or armed conflicts.

## High-priority dozen

Table 1: Twelve high-priority candidates for TBCA approaches

Site	Ecosystem	Neighbouring country	Ranking
Dibang	Mountain	China	1
Kanchandzonga	Mountain	Bhutan	2
Changthang	Mountain	China	3
Buxa	Forest	Bhutan	4
Manas	Forest	Bhutan	4
Valmiki	Forest	Nepal	5
Sunderbans	Mangrove	Bangladesh	6
Dudwa	Forest	Nepal	7
Katerniaghat	Forest	Nepal	8
Karakoram	Mountain	Pakistan	9
Deserts	Desert	Pakistan	10
Deserts WLS	Desert	Pakistan	10

## Magnificent seven

Table 2: Seven sites selected for initial TBCA implementation

Site	Ecosystem	Neighbouring country
Kanchandzonga	Mountain	Bhutan
Buxa	Forest	Bhutan
Manas	Forest	Bhutan
Valmiki	Forest	Nepal
Dudwa	Forest	Nepal
Katerniaghat	Forest	Nepal
Sunderbans	Mangrove	Bangladesh

India has adopted a pragmatic approach that includes obtaining high-level policy agreements among governments through memoranda of understanding covering a range of biological, economic, social and political aspects. This is complemented by a 'bottom-up' process for improving cooperation at the ground level, such as by organizing cross-border meetings at the park level, especially with Nepal and Bhutan.

## Reference

Anon. (2008). *A Proposal for the Identification of Potential Transboundary Protected Areas of India*. Wildlife Institute of India, Dehradun, India.