



A MEETING OF *minds*

Field practitioners recently exchanged views on the challenges of conservation in ecosystems that cross international borders. They agreed that transboundary conservation is a powerful concept, able to help protect biodiversity, reunite divided peoples, strengthen peace, protect catchments – and much more. The challenge, they said, is to make the concept work.



IUCN
The World Conservation Union

An ITTO/IUCN paper summarizing the findings of the International Workshop on Increasing the Effectiveness of Transboundary Conservation Areas in Tropical Forests, held 17–21 February 2003 in Ubon Ratchathani, Thailand

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In the great savannahs of Africa, herds of animals sweep across international borders on their annual migrations, as their ancestors have been doing for millennia. In the Americas, birds and even butterflies make epic journeys each year along the continental spine, seeking widely dispersed feeding and breeding grounds. In the rainforests of Asia, rare and endangered mammals such as orang utan, rhinoceros and elephant range over habitats often bisected by international boundaries, and countries share water catchments crucial to local and national water supplies.



Increasingly, land managers are realizing that what happens outside protected areas can affect the integrity of the protected areas themselves. Successful conservation initiatives, therefore, need to influence land management across the broader landscape and empower local communities to improve their livelihoods.



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One way of doing this is through **transboundary conservation areas** (TBCAs), in which two or more countries cooperate in the management and conservation of ecologically important areas straddling borders. The number of TBCAs has grown sharply in recent years, from 59 in 1988, mainly in Europe and North America, to 169 in 2001, spread all over the world. The International Tropical Timber Organization (ITTO), for example, supports TBCA projects spanning ten million hectares of tropical forest in eight countries.

A workshop run by ITTO and IUCN – The World Conservation Union in February 2003 in Ubon Ratchathani, Thailand, was the first international forum to review experiences in transboundary conservation. The workshop benefited from high-level representations from Thailand, Malaysia (Sarawak) and the Republic of Congo, and participants had a chance to learn from people actively involved in transboundary conservation initiatives. Working examples of TBCAs (several supported by ITTO) were described from Sarawak and Kalimantan in Borneo; Thailand, Laos and Cambodia in Indochina; Cameroon, Gabon and the Republic of Congo in the Congo Basin; the Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda and Burundi in the Great Lakes region; South Africa and Lesotho; and Peru and Ecuador. More examples and insights came from UNESCO's Man and the Biosphere and World Heritage programs, the United Nations Forum on Forests, IUCN's Environmental Law Centre, and the World Bank.



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What is transboundary conservation?

Transboundary conservation can include a wide variety of conservation approaches, linked by the common theme that they extend across international borders. Examples range from coordinated management of two protected areas in different countries sharing a common border, to a mosaic of land uses in three or more countries contributing to biodiversity conservation. The workshop defined five main types of TBCA (while noting that the definitions are not precise):

- **two or more contiguous protected areas across a national boundary**, such as Park W, which is shared by Benin, Burkina Faso and Niger and is being managed cooperatively for common conservation aims;
- **a cluster of protected areas and the intervening land**, such as in a new World Bank project in the West Tien Shan Mountains of Central Asia, which will focus first on four protected areas and later extend over parts of Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and the Krygyz Republic;
- **a cluster of separated protected areas without intervening land**: for instance, Kibiri National Park in Burundi, Virunga National Park in the Democratic Republic of Congo and Volcanoes National Park in Rwanda have common management aims (including mountain gorilla conservation) but no control over intervening farmland;
- **a trans-border area including proposed protected areas**, as in the Pha Taem trans-border initiative between Thailand, Laos and Cambodia, which is developing a complex including both existing and proposed protected areas; and
- **a protected area in one country aided by sympathetic land use over the border**, such as in Borneo, where improved forest management on the Malaysian side of the border is helping preserve populations of large animals in the adjoining Kayan Mentarang National Park in Indonesia.



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Cloud forest between the Comainas and Kusu Nutmpatkaim rivers, Condor Mountain Range

In **Peru** and **Ecuador** the Cordillera del Condor Transboundary Protected Area is being developed on a mountain chain with cloud forest habitat rich in rare and endemic species.

The region has long been a site of border disputes between the two countries; peace and reconciliation is being pursued via the twin vehicles of joint protected area management and promotion of sustainable development for indigenous communities.

A package of protected areas, reserved zones and development schemes were agreed in a Presidential Pact between the two countries in 1998 and two ITTO projects – one on either side of the border – have been initiated to help implement the TBCA.

Conservation International, the National Institute for Natural Resources (INRENA), Ecuador's Ministry of Tourism and the Environment, the NATURA Foundation and indigenous organizations are cooperating in the implementation of the projects, the total area of which is about 2.42 million hectares.

Why bother with transboundary conservation?

Managing a transboundary conservation project involving two or more countries is proving to be more complicated than running a protected area in one country, but a convincing case can be made for making the extra effort. Transboundary conservation makes sense – and may be essential – when:

- ecological processes or management needs depend on factors operating in neighbouring countries. Combining two or more protected areas increases the total area protected and thus helps ecosystems, environmental services, resilience and buffering. A range of sites allows integrated conservation through the coordinated management of landscapes, which can include different categories of protected area and other land uses;
- the use of conservation as an entry point to sustainable development can help poverty reduction and increase human wellbeing, especially in marginal areas far from markets and centres of economic development;
- traditional cultures have been divided in the past into different countries by political decisions outside their control and still have cross-border cultural needs that can be helped by the development of shared conservation aims. Experience shows that joint conservation efforts can help heal political and cultural conflicts in sites of war or disputes or, by building regional cooperation, maintain friendly relations across borders;

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- the TBCA concept can attract political support for conservation and sustainable development in border areas. The commitment of political leaders to a conservation and sustainable development initiative can be strengthened when their peers in neighbouring countries also voice support;
- developing a TBCA in an area subject to conflict can help precipitate international support and attract funds from outside the 'usual' sources of conservation funding. Shared costs, pooled resources and increased visibility to donors can also help in financing the endeavour; and/or
- cross-border cooperation can help managers in the coordination of environmental security operations, monitoring and research.



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The Mekong River winds its way through the PPFC in northeastern Thailand

The management of the Pha Taem Protected Forests Complex (PPFC) in northeastern **Thailand**, which covers an area of about 174 000 hectares and comprises four protected areas, is being strengthened by an ITTO project. The project area is situated in a triangle between Thailand, Laos and Cambodia and is drained by the Mekong River. The three countries have agreed to improve conservation cooperation and Cambodia has also requested an ITTO project to assist its efforts. The Complex has some special protection needs that require close cross-border cooperation – in particular, rare wildlife in the PPFC is experiencing increased pressure due to cross-border poaching and trade in plants and animals. Also, many of these areas are scattered with land-mines: eliminating these in the context of the TBCA would remove the risks to local communities and give them a strong reason to support the TBCA.

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What are the prerequisites for transboundary conservation?

Box 1 lists some of the factors that, taken together, give transboundary conservation a good chance of success. Before starting an initiative, the cooperating bodies also need to know:

- the **objectives** of transboundary conservation, including specific needs for cross-border cooperation;
- **existing incentives** that will help achieve conservation;
- the **legal status** of the land involved;
- the **best available natural and social science information** about the area;
- **financial requirements** and possible sources of funding;
- **stakeholders** involved in the area;
- the relevant agents and agencies for **implementation**; and
- the level of **harmonization** being aimed for (ie full legal status or various levels of cooperation).

Box 1. Enabling factors that help make transboundary conservation useful or viable

- **Political commitment** throughout government and community: to develop the common goals, vision and strategy that will create favourable conditions for a TBCA
- **Sustainable finance**: proven socioeconomic benefits in cooperation can help long-term viability such as increased tourism or opportunities for trade
- **Incentives** and other compensation mechanisms (eg payment for ecological services or long-term commitment of funds): to help secure finances and maintain commitment
- **An appropriate management framework**: including shared standards or harmonization over issues of laws, policies, security, decentralization, participation, communication and management techniques
- **Effective, flexible management**: can also help to address potential conflict with communities within and around transboundary conservation areas and allows two or more countries to cooperate effectively
- **Partnerships**: including with local people and government, non-government organizations and the private sector
- **Security**: conditions where current security or safety issues do not cause major problems for protected areas
- **Capacity building**: can develop skills for TBCA management including staff training
- **Poverty alleviation**: developing TBCAs in a way that helps rather than hinders sustainable development
- **Learning framework**: planning and implementing ways of exchanging experiences and lessons learned

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People are ferried across the border in Africa's Park W

Working groups

Getting started with TBCAs requires early establishment of cross-border working groups addressing technical, social and legal issues and, if possible, helping to synchronize work programs. In particular, the working groups need to identify ways to actively involve local stakeholders and to harness political support, particularly with respect to legal issues. In some cases, international organizations can help catalyse this process.

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UNESCO's **Man and the Biosphere program** has six TBCAs in its portfolio, including : the Tatra Mountains between Poland and Slovakia; the Vosges du Nord/Pfälzerwald between France and Germany; the Danube Delta between Romania and Ukraine; the East Carpathians between Poland, Slovakia and Ukraine; and Park W between Benin, Burkina Faso and Niger.

What is likely to hamper transboundary conservation?

Transboundary conservation initiatives inevitably face many challenges. Protected areas in different countries will probably have different legal structures, tenure approaches and goals and there will also often be different levels of capacity, making management more complicated, more time-consuming and possibly more expensive. The participatory approaches that are increasingly seen as vital for effective protection are made more difficult by the sheer scale of most TBCAs: large numbers of people from many socioeconomic and cultural groups are often involved, challenging planners to ensure that the poorest are not excluded.

There are also technical challenges: for example, the monitoring and evaluation needed to assess progress will be more difficult across borders, while identifying biodiversity and social targets remains a key challenge. Opening borders can sometimes lead to an increase in poaching and smuggling – but a TBCA may also help combat these by providing a greater management presence and by increasing cooperative cross-border programs.



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In the **Great Lakes Region**, ten years of sporadic armed conflict have created enormous problems for protected areas in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Rwanda and Burundi. The areas play a critical role both in gorilla conservation and also in providing environmental services such as watershed protection. But major problems remain, including poaching, incursions and the



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impact of people displaced by war. For example, over three million people passed through Virunga National Park between 1994 and 2002; as well as being a social and human catastrophe, the refugee crisis had a serious impact on biodiversity in the area. Park managers at Kibara National Park in Burundi, Virunga National Park in DRC and Volcanoes National Park in Rwanda are cooperating on monitoring key species such as the mountain gorilla and on implementing codes of conduct for protected areas in times of war.

Box 2. Tasks for organizations and groups to catalyse the TBCA program

- **World Parks Congress:** contributing to workshops and the launch of a global program on transboundary conservation initiatives
- **ITTO and other international organizations:** catalysing political support, undertaking field projects and sharing experiences
- **Convention on Biological Diversity:** discussions at the ninth meeting of the Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice and the 7th Conference of the Parties – both of which include important protected area issues on the agenda
- **World Commission on Protected Areas:** including TBCA issues in various themes and task forces – such as the management effectiveness theme
- **Existing protected area groupings:** consolidating the TBCA concept in forums – such as ITTO, World Heritage and Man and the Biosphere – that are already involved in practical examples of transboundary conservation
- **Existing protected areas** (especially those involving TBCA initiatives): sharing experiences and lessons learned

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Who can help?

Despite the many challenges, TBCAs can play a very important role in biodiversity conservation and sustainable development and should be promoted energetically. The workshop in Thailand identified likely initiatives and organizations that could help catalyse a comprehensive TBCA program (Box 2). It also agreed on a general set of tasks that will help in the development of such a program (Box 3).

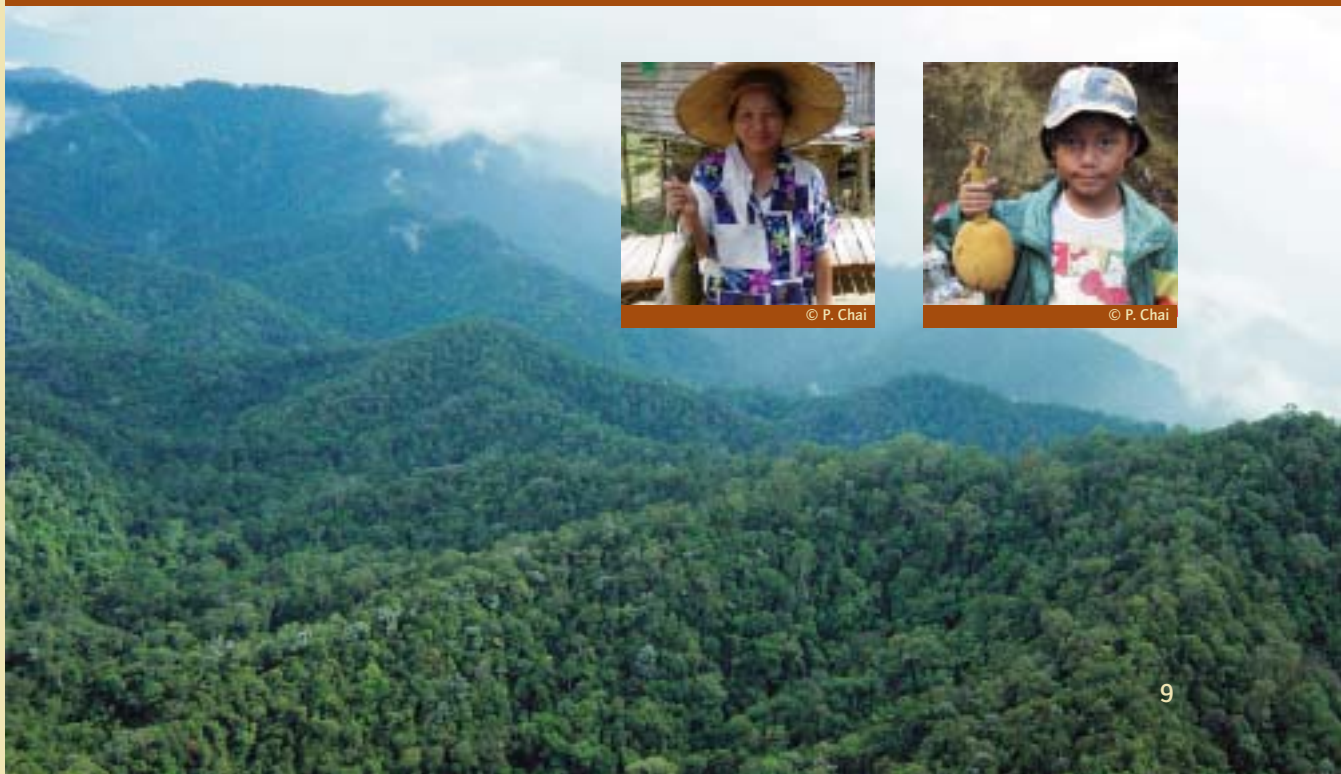
It is increasingly clear that conservation is about much more than endangered species: it is also about improving livelihoods, empowering local people, maintaining the ecological integrity of landscapes, and strengthening peace and cooperation between nations. During the last decade, TBCAs have progressed from idealistic beginnings to the mainstream of natural resource management. According to workshop participants (see statement in Box 4), TBCAs deserve the fullest support.



The TBCA that comprises Lanjak Entimau Wildlife Sanctuary in Sarawak, **Malaysia** and the adjoining Betung Kerihun National Park in **Indonesia**, on the island of Borneo, covers about 1.1 million hectares of tropical rainforest. It was established in 1994, when ITTO projects implemented by government and non-government agencies on both sides of the border began developing and implementing management plans, conducting joint biodiversity expeditions to document the biological riches, and assisting communities to find alternative sources of income to reduce the need for hunting in the TBCA.

Scenes from the Lanjak-Entimau Wildlife Sanctuary and its buffer zone

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Box 3. Tasks to be accomplished to encourage the creation and development of TBCAs

- **Typology:** agree on a typology based on land use
- **Terminology:** agree on definitions and ways of distinguishing TBCA initiatives
- **Mapping:** create maps of biodiversity opportunities for transboundary conservation overlaid with other relevant issues (social, political, threats, border disputes, etc)
- **Participation:** understand the implications of community involvement across boundaries and develop and test new skills, approaches and institutions
- **Cost-benefit analysis:** agree on methodologies for identifying the need for transboundary conservation and the correct degree of engagement (ranging from signing a memorandum of understanding to full legal recognition of joint protection)
- **Finance:** develop strategies for sustainable financing (and compensation), including a role for the private sector. Creative incentives are needed to attract private landowners to TBCA initiatives
- **Capacity building:** encourage managers to use existing technical advice and experience, including about legal frameworks or traditional management regimes, and create and finance long-term training and support programs
- **Monitoring and evaluation:** draw up a methodology for assessing the effectiveness of new and existing TBCA initiatives

The World Commission on Protected Areas TBCA Task Force should take on some of these activities. Others, particularly those requiring additional financial resources, will need the commitment of large organizations and governments.

Box 4. Workshop statement*

This meeting recognizes the value of transboundary conservation areas as an essential mechanism for the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity, especially in tropical forests and other vulnerable ecosystems.

TBCAs are more likely to be successful in the long term if they meet social and economic as well as biodiversity objectives. Social benefits can include securing communities' land tenure, strengthening local cultures, building mechanisms for participatory decision-making and helping to promote reconciliation and cultural links in post-conflict situations.

TBCAs can embrace a range of conservation initiatives involving protected areas and intervening lands that establish appropriate ecological linkages and development opportunities in the local and national contexts.

The meeting commends ITTO for its role in supporting transboundary conservation in over 10 million hectares of tropical moist forest and recommends that ITTO and other organizations

raise the level of commitment to transboundary conservation to ensure biodiversity conservation and the equitable sharing of benefits with local and national communities in border regions.

Working across boundaries demands unique tools and strategies to ensure that the benefits of cooperation outweigh the costs. The meeting recommends that IUCN furthers its support for the WCPA TBCA Task Force work program, and that the protected areas community develops a learning network of regional TBCAs to develop experience, capacity and methodologies relevant to effective TBCA management. Lessons should be disseminated to a broad audience including professional protected-area managers, land-use planners and policy-makers as well as communities that play a role, or could play a role, in TBCA management.

Further development of TBCAs requires strong public support, continued discussion at regional levels and, perhaps, an international enabling framework.

*made by participants at the International Workshop on Increasing the Effectiveness of Transboundary Conservation Areas in Tropical Forests, held 17–21 February 2003 at Ubon Ratchathani, Thailand



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