

CONSERVATION AND PROTECTED AREAS – CHALLENGES IN A CHANGING WORLD

Stig Johansson

IUCN World Commission for Protected Areas (Pan-Europe)

Since the national parks were first established in Europe 100 years ago, their number has increased rapidly. Today, 12.2% of the terrestrial world is located within protected areas; however, much remains to do in marine protection. The establishment of the Natura 2000 network covers 17% of the European Union. The aim has been to conserve our European natural heritage, yet we have failed to halt the loss of biodiversity by 2010. There is a growing pressure on natural resources. Both in Europe and around the world, economic and social changes lead to polarization of land use, leaving biodiversity within protected areas, while increasing intensification results in accelerating loss in the surrounding landscapes. Moreover, climate change will demand a completely different future outlook. The paradigm of protected area management has been dominated by a site focus. Our thinking must shift from sites to systems, from mere representation to include ecosystem services, and we need management of this green infrastructure from a broader angle. The target to stop the loss of biodiversity must be re-integrated with the efforts to combat climate change. Preserving our natural capital must be raised to an overarching political goal. Biodiversity and protected areas must be integrated into those indicators, which will have to complement GDP as our only measure of progress. Climate change will require a focus on nature's resilience, and the potential of species and habitats to adapt to change. While species, habitats and representation are still the basic elements of conservation, we need to view protected areas in the future more from the perspectives of the ecological, social and economic functions and services that they deliver to our societies.