

## Making the cultural and spiritual significance of nature work for protected areas

The IUCN World Commission on Protected Areas' Specialist Group on Cultural and Spiritual Values of Protected Areas is developing a programme entitled *Promoting and Integrating the Cultural and Spiritual Significance of Nature in the Governance and Management of Protected and Conserved Areas*. The objective is to broaden the scope of protected area governance and management to include the cultural and spiritual significance that nature has for diverse societies and cultures, by engaging and seeking support from local communities, indigenous traditions, mainstream religions, and the general public. Through the recognition and integration of cultural and spiritual values, protected areas will be more effective, sustainable and socially equitable.

The programme was launched at the 2014 IUCN World Parks Congress. The IUCN resolution on 'Recognising cultural and spiritual significance of nature in protected and conserved areas' provides institutional legitimacy and has the potential to influence policies and activities of IUCN members and beyond. The programme comprises five complementary and interrelated projects: (1) the development of IUCN Best Practice Guidelines, (2) the collection and dissemination of case studies, (3) a peer reviewed book, (4) the development of training modules, and (5) the creation of a network of practitioners. Parts of the programme have been funded by the World Commission on Protected Areas, The Christensen Fund and the German Federal Ministry for Nature Conservation.

The Best Practice Guidelines Series, published by the IUCN World Commission on Protected Areas, is primarily meant for protected area managers but also for those involved with governance. The volume on the cultural and spiritual significance of nature engaged over 300 experts from a diversity of backgrounds, expertise and regions, and consists of general principles, and guidelines for engaging rights-holders and stakeholders, creating common ground, dealing with conflict, and integrating cultural and spiritual significance of nature throughout protected area management. Each guideline is illustrated with an example of its implementation, and case studies demonstrate the potential for application to different management categories and governance types. The guidelines are available for review from <http://www.csvpa.org> and will be published in late 2018.

The peer reviewed book *Cultural and Spiritual Significance of Nature: Implications for the Governance*

*and Management of Protected and Conserved Areas*, edited by Bas Verschuuren and Steve Brown, covers conceptual and philosophical underpinnings, conservation programmes and specific conservation policies, and practical case studies on the role of the cultural and spiritual significance of nature. The book is available for presale from Routledge and will be published in June 2018.

Training modules and workshops are being developed for protected area managers, conservation practitioners, and students. Various formats have been developed and tested (available from <http://www.csvpa.org>), and an online training module and university course is under development.

Case studies representing different ecosystems, cultures and religions provide an online reference for the development of the guidelines and training modules, demonstrating how the cultural and spiritual significance of nature is integrated in protected area designation, governance, management strategies, conservation approaches, tourism development and visitor interpretation. A recent addition shows the work on greening pilgrimage in India, a collaborative approach between pilgrims, faith leaders and protected area authorities.

The network of practitioners extends beyond Specialist Group members and includes people interested in the role of the cultural and spiritual values of protected areas. The aim is to establish connections with practitioners interested in implementing the Best Practice Guidelines and having workshops or modules as part of their training programmes.

Please visit <http://www.csvpa.org> or contact the Specialist Groups Co-chairs, Edwin Bernbaum and Bas Verschuuren, if you interested in reviewing or field testing the Best Practice Guidelines, supporting or financing the development and application of dedicated training modules, or joining the projects' network of practitioners.

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