

## GEF IN ACTION: SUSTAINING WILDERNESS AREAS

To promote the long-term conservation of wilderness ecosystems, the Global Environment Facility (GEF) supports projects that work at the level of national protected area systems to catalyze protected area sustainability. GEF-funded projects that do not directly target wilderness areas may have vital conservation components that help protect the larger wilderness landscape. The GEF believes that conservation efforts must expand to integrate communities and landscapes that reach well beyond formal protected area boundaries. Where these biodiversity-rich areas are located in centers of population pressure, a conservation approach is needed that reconciles the needs and aspirations of local and indigenous people while protecting these key biodiversity refuges. Keeping wilderness areas intact can provide sustainable economic returns for both local and remote human communities through such activities as ecological research, ecotourism, the harvesting of medicinal plants, and the provision of environmental services.

The following project examples show the range of work that the GEF supports in protecting wilderness areas.

### **DEMONSTRATING SUSTAINABLE CONSERVATION OF BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY IN RUSSIAN PROTECTED AREAS**

The Russian Federation's Kamchatka Peninsula provides a rich array of globally significant ecosystems. Many endemic species and subspecies of plants and animals inhabit the peninsula. For example, 10 percent of Kamchatka's 1,168 plants are endemic. As a result of its island-like environment, there is also an ongoing process of diversification among

the peninsula's endemic species and subspecies. As the area has become more open and accessible to outsiders, and as government protected area budgets have declined, these resources have come under increased threat from poaching and from unmanaged and unrestricted human use.

A recently approved GEF project seeks to demonstrate sustainable conservation of biological diversity in four representative protected areas in Russia's Kamchatka Oblast. Activities are designed to strengthen administrative and management capacity of protected areas, develop a more supportive legal foundation for protected areas, increase stakeholder awareness of biodiversity conservation, promote alternative livelihoods through micro-credit facilities, and improve collaboration between federal and regional protected area authorities.

### **CONSERVING THE DANA AND AZRAQ PROTECTED AREAS**

Jordan created the Dana Nature Reserve and the Azraq Wetland Reserve to protect some of the most important biological diversity in the nation. At the time this project began, little management had been undertaken at either site. The Dana Reserve is an arid and semi-arid area including 20 percent of Jordan's native floral species and small but viable populations of ibex, gazelles, and wolves. Unsustainable resource use by local communities had led to severe environmental degradation. A cement plant and planned copper mine posed added threats. The Azraq Oasis once supported rich biodiversity in an extensive system of spring-fed marshes and pools. The oasis provided critical habitat to millions of migratory birds, breeding habitat for waterbirds, and wintering habitat for water-

fowl. The Azraq constitutes the only significant tract of its type within a large arid region. Extraction of water for urban and agricultural use threatened to dry up the springs and render the aquifer useless as a source of drinking or irrigation water because of the intrusion of saline water into wells.

Two GEF projects were designed to maintain this and other important biodiversity in Jordan. The first, a pilot phase, began rehabilitating the two areas and provided institutional support to the Royal Society for the Conservation of Nature (RSCN), a nongovernmental organization (NGO) responsible for both reserves. The World Bank assisted with the Dana component in the pilot phase. The current project is building on these efforts, addressing new threats, and capturing new opportunities posed by rapidly increasing tourism and other pressures stimulated by the Middle East Peace Accord. This project is working to complete restoration of the Dana Reserve, while documenting its recovery to assist in other similar efforts worldwide.

### **SUPPORTING THE AMAZON REGION PROTECTED AREAS PROGRAM**

To protect the biological treasures of the Brazilian Amazon, the Brazilian government—in partnership with the GEF, World Wildlife Fund, the development bank KfW of Germany, the World Bank, and others—has launched the Amazon Region Protected Areas Program (ARPA). Brazil currently has approximately 12 million hectares of tropical forest under strict protection in the Amazon region. The largest joint initiative for the conservation of tropical forests in history, the ARPA would incorporate an additional 25 million hectares to reach the goal of 37 million hectares under protection. This will triple the existing extent of Brazil's protected areas by 2012 to an area equivalent to the size of Spain.

The support from GEF and the others is being used to establish an independent endowment, make targeted investments in alternative revenue-generating activities by local people, develop management and biodiversity monitor-

ing systems, and provide permanent trained staff for each area.

Local participation is the lynchpin of ARPA. The project committee includes scientists, local officials, rubber tappers, nut gatherers, fishing communities, farmers, indigenous peoples, and other stakeholders. Interacting with scientists, these stakeholders chose the new protected areas based on geographical and ecological representation, potential for partnerships with NGOs, and the degree of environmental threat.

### **CROSSING BOUNDARIES TO CONSERVE BIODIVERSITY**

The Western Congo Basin Moist Forest Ecoregion (WCBMFE) constitutes a large part of the tropical wilderness of Central Africa, the world's second largest expanse of rainforest. A GEF-supported project is focusing on this ecoregion, covering transboundary forests extending from Cameroon to Gabon to Congo. This area includes 35,968 km<sup>2</sup> of protected areas in various national parks. The long-term goal of the project is to conserve globally significant biodiversity in the Congo Basin through integration of conservation objectives into the national and regional sustainable development plans in the Trinational Dja-Odzala-Minkebe (TRIDOM).

To ensure long-term conservation of its protected area system, the project will promote integrated, sustainable, and participatory management in the interzone between the protected areas. The project will strengthen the wilderness area at both national and regional levels by designing and implementing a cost-effective model for the management of a mosaic of different uses that will not only increase the landscape resilience, but clearly consolidate the overall protected area system. Collectively, the activities undertaken will demonstrate cost-effective and replicable ways and means for facilitating the broad-based participation of communities, the private sector, and other key actors in the project area. Ultimately, it will improve prospects for sustainability of the protected area systems in a significant way at national and regional levels.

### **FOR MORE INFORMATION**

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