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Are we conserving what we say we are? Measuring ecological integrity within p...  
Jeffrey D Parrish, David P Braun, Robert S Unnasch  
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Articles

## Are We Conserving What We Say We Are? Measuring Ecological Integrity within Protected Areas

JEFFREY D. PARRISH, DAVID P. BRAUN, AND ROBERT S. UNNASCH

*Managers of protected areas are under increasing pressure to measure their effectiveness in conserving native biological diversity in ways that are scientifically sound, practical, and comparable among protected areas over time. The Nature Conservancy and its partners have developed a 'Measures of Success' framework with four core components: (1) identifying a limited number of focal conservation targets, (2) identifying key ecological attributes for these targets, (3) identifying an acceptable range of variation for each attribute as measured by properly selected indicators, and (4) rating target status based on whether or not the target's key attributes are within their acceptable ranges of variation. A target cannot be considered 'conserved' if any of its key ecological attributes exceeds its acceptable range of variation. The framework provides a rigorous basis not only for measuring success but for setting conservation objectives, assessing threats to biodiversity, identifying monitoring and research needs, and communicating management information to nonspecialists.*

*Keywords:* monitoring, ecological integrity, protected area effectiveness, measures of success

**A**re we conserving what we say we are? This question is increasingly asked of and by protected area managers worldwide. The answers, unfortunately, remain ambiguous at best. Conservationists and protected area managers around the world spend millions of dollars each year to conserve biodiversity (Castro and Lesker 2000, WRI 2000). Although efforts aimed at measuring the amount of conservation activity are increasing, the ability to measure the conservation impact of these investments and to document the true effectiveness of conservation actions has not greatly improved (Hockings et al. 2000, Salafsky et al. 2002). Without objective measurement, conservationists cannot claim successes, learn from failures, or work effectively and efficiently toward the conservation of the remaining biological diversity of the planet (Redford and Haber 2000, Salafsky et al. 2002).

For protected areas that focus on the conservation of biological diversity, the impact of conservation investment on biodiversity status is being questioned by donors and policymakers alike. Yet few parks have established systems to evaluate management effectiveness or to determine whether they are conserving the biodiversity they say they are (Brandon et al. 1998, Hockings et al. 2000). This widespread inability to measure progress, to learn through adaptive management, and to hold organizations accountable for conservation has led to

a growing skepticism among policymakers and funding agencies about the long-term value of these conservation efforts (Senge 1994, Salafsky and Margolis 1999a, Salafsky et al. 2001).

In response, several institutions have developed systems for measuring the efficiency and efficacy of protected area management (e.g., Hockings 1998, TNC 1998, Courrau 1999, Dudley et al. 1999, Hockings 2003). Most of these systems fit within an overall framework promoted globally by the IUCN (World Conservation Union) World Commission on Protected Areas (Hockings et al. 2000, Hockings 2003). This management effectiveness framework provides a system for identifying the information protected area managers should evaluate to determine whether management processes and conservation impacts are progressing as desired. The frame-

Jeffrey D. Parrish (e-mail: jparrish@tnc.org) is the Director of conservation planning for the Global Priorities Group, The Nature Conservancy, 3368 West 37th Avenue, Denver, CO 80211. David P. Braun is a senior biologist for the Freshwater Initiative, The Nature Conservancy, 230 Seventh Avenue, Suite 601, New York, NY 10018. Robert S. Unnasch is a senior ecologist for the Adaptive Management Program, The Nature Conservancy, 1109 Main Street, Suite 303, Boise, ID 83702. © 2003 American Institute of Biological Sciences.

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