

**Press release 09-07-2016**

**Cultural and Spiritual Significance of Nature Key to Protected Area Governance and Management**

Cultural and spiritual bonds with nature are among the strongest drives and motivators for nature conservation yet they are not often taken into account in the governance and management of protected areas.

From 4 to 7 July 2016, a group of internationally recognized conservation and heritage experts discussed how the cultural and spiritual significance of nature should be integrated and strengthened in protected areas and World Heritage sites across the world. Their aim: developing guidance for those working in the governance and management of protected and conserved areas. The guidelines will be part of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) world leading series of Best Practice Guidleines.

Led by the IUCN World Commission on Protected Areas Specialist Group on Cultural and Spiritual Values of Protected Areas (CSVPA) the first steps towards the IUCN Best Practice Guidelines were made, their scope, aim and structure were explored, case studies are now being collected and a roadmap for their further development is being drawn up. A wide participatory process has now started to gather inputs from around the world, representing the diversity of protected and conserved areas, as well as the diversity of cultures and spiritualities, secular as well as religious.

The guidelines will include cultural, spiritual, aesthetic, and historical importance that nature has for people in in nearly all societies, from traditional to modern. They are deemed necessary for creating positive synergies and broader support for protected and conserved areas worldwide. Those people and organisations that have valuable experiences, case studies or guidelines to share are requested to contact CSVPA.

Key recommendations of the workshop include:

1. All stakeholders should recognise that the diversity of experiences, values and beliefs on the cultural and spiritual significance of nature can support reaching better nature conservation outcomes.
2. Local outlooks and expertise on the cultural and spiritual significance of nature needs stronger recognition and respect of all stakeholders involved, from local to the international level.
3. Integrated holistic approaches to nature and culture should serve the integration of cultural and spiritual significance of nature in the governance and management of protected and conserved areas.

The workshop took place at the International Nature Conservation Academy on the Isle of Vilm, Germany, and was organised in collaboration with the German Federal Agency for Nature Conservation. Vilm Island proved an ideal location for the workshop as its remote setting and rugged beauty allowed the participants to fully experience and connect with nature.

Contact details for the press release.

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