Guidance on other effective area-based conservation measures (OECMs)

Harry D. Jonas, Pete Wood and Stephen Woodley, Volume Editors

IUCN WCPA Good Practice Guidelines Series No. 36

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Foreword

Dr. Grethel Aguilar
Director General,
International Union for
Conservation of Nature

The establishment of a global network of protected areas has been a cornerstone of international efforts to conserve biodiversity, as outlined in the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). This commitment, embraced by Parties that ratified the Convention, reflects a global consensus on the need to safeguard our planet's natural heritage.

However, the evolution of global conservation strategies has extended beyond protected areas alone. Aichi Biodiversity Target 11, adopted under Decision X/25 of the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011–2020, emphasises the importance of conserving biodiversity through "effectively and equitably managed, ecologically representative, and well-connected systems of protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures (OECMs), integrated into the wider landscapes and seascapes." This marked the formal recognition of OECMs as crucial components of a comprehensive approach to biodiversity conservation.

Further reinforcing this mandate, Decision XI/24 of the Conference of the Parties specifically invited the IUCN Global Protected Areas Programme, the IUCN World Commission on Protected Areas (WCPA), IUCN regional offices, and other partners to align their capacity-building initiatives and technical guidance efforts to support the full realisation of Aichi Biodiversity Target 11. This task, undertaken in collaboration with the Secretariat of the CBD and supported by key donors, including Switzerland, underscored the added-value of IUCN in advancing global conservation goals.

The phrase "other effective area-based conservation measures" is firmly anchored in Target 3 of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF). This continuity highlights the ongoing relevance of OECMs in achieving our collective vision for a more sustainable future.

The world now has an opportunity to better recognise *de facto* conservation that is taking place outside currently designated protected areas implemented by a diverse set of actors, including Indigenous peoples, local communities, the private sector and government agencies.

Identifying, reporting, monitoring and strengthening OECMs provides the opportunity to contribute to halting and reversing biodiversity loss, to engage and support rightsholders and stakeholders, and to promote more equitable partnerships in global conservation efforts. In doing so, OECMs contribute to the conservation of biodiversity in many ways, such as: conserving important representative ecosystems, habitats and wildlife corridors; supporting the recovery of threatened species; maintaining ecosystem functions and securing ecosystem services; enhancing resilience against threats; and contributing to improved management and restoration of areas that could usefully support long-term in situ conservation of biodiversity.

OECMs provide an exciting opportunity to enhance the equity, effectiveness and coverage of the conservation estate, under a range of governance and management regimes. Yet maintaining the full value of OECMs in promoting inclusive, equitable and effective conservation requires substantial efforts to build capacity at national and regional levels to identify, monitor and maintain their biodiversity values. Doing so will contribute meaningfully to local needs and global conservation targets, including under the GBF and the Sustainable Development Goals.

This document not only reflects the latest thinking in conservation policy but also ensures alignment with IUCN's overarching mission to conserve the integrity and diversity of nature. As we move forward, this guidance will serve as a critical tool for practitioners and policymakers alike, ensuring that OECMs continue to play a central role in our global conservation efforts.

Message from Ms. Astrid Schomaker, Executive Secretary of the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity

Ms. Astrid Schomaker
Executive Secretary of the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity

Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity adopted the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework in 2022. It is an ambitious global agreement to halt and reverse biodiversity loss and put nature on the path to recovery by 2030 for the benefit of people and planet.

Target 3 commits Parties to conserve 30% of terrestrial, inland water, coastal and marine areas by 2030 through protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures (OECMs), recognizing indigenous and traditional territories where applicable. OECMs play a critical role in achieving the goals of the Framework by complementing protected areas and safeguarding biodiversity outside traditional reserves.

OECMs contribute to Goal A of the Framework by conserving ecosystem functions and species diversity, and to Goal B by supporting sustainable use and equitable management. Their integration into national biodiversity strategies and action plans (NBSAPs) enhances national commitments to area-based conservation targets, including Target 3, and promotes coherence in land and sea management. By recognizing diverse governance and management approaches, OECMs foster partnerships and engage stakeholders in broader biodiversity conservation efforts.

The OECM criteria were agreed in 2018, and Parties to the Convention and other actors have been experiencing challenges in identifying, reporting, monitoring and strengthening these important sites. In decision 14/8, Parties requested IUCN to provide additional guidance on OECMs and this publication provides a strong basis for supporting broad engagement with the OECM framework in ways that deliver inclusive, equitable and effective conservation.

I congratulate the authors and members of the IUCN World Commission on Protected Areas Specialist Group on OECMs for delivering this publication. This is a significant achievement that will greatly enhance global efforts to implement the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework and empower countries to integrate these crucial conservation measures into their National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans.

Executive summary

The Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, adopted in 2022, provides a framework for the effective implementation of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) through four goals and 23 targets. Target 3 calls on Parties to effectively conserve at least 30% of terrestrial, inland waters, and coastal and marine areas by 2030.

Known colloquially as the '30x30 target', Target 3 is incentivising government agencies and other actors to advance diverse kinds of inclusive, equitable and effective area-based conservation. This guide focuses on 'other effective area-based conservation measures' (OECMs). An OECM is a site that delivers the long-term in situ conservation of biodiversity, complementing protected areas within conservation networks.

While protected areas must have conservation as a primary objective, OECMs may be managed for many different objectives but *must* deliver effective conservation outcomes. OECMs may be managed with conservation as a primary or secondary objective, or long-term conservation may simply be the ancillary result of management activities.

Identifying, reporting, monitoring and strengthening OECMs offers a significant opportunity to promote and support de facto effective long-term conservation that is in addition to that provided by designated protected areas. Like protected areas, OECMs can occur under a range of governance regimes, including those of Indigenous peoples and local communities, the private sector and government agencies. OECMs contribute to ecologically representative and well-connected conservation systems, integrated within wider landscapes and seascapes, and in doing so, generate a range of positive conservation outcomes, such as:

- Conserving important ecosystems, habitats and wildlife corridors;
- Supporting the recovery of threatened species;
- Maintaining ecosystem functions and securing ecosystem services;
- Enhancing resilience against threats;
- Retaining and connecting remnants of fragmented ecosystems within developed landscapes;
- Strengthening linkages between local communities and ecosystems that provide benefits derived from biodiversity.

These guidelines are designed to promote good practices relating to identifying, reporting, monitoring and strengthening OECMs. They are intended for use by a wide range of rightsholders and stakeholders to promote understanding of whether a site meets the CBD criteria for identifying an OECM, how to report OECM data at the national and global levels, and how to monitor and strengthen OECMs. The IUCN World Commission on Protected Areas (WCPA) Specialist Group on OECMs will revise this guidance as further good practice emerges.

These guidelines contain eight sections.

- **Section 1** provides background on the emergence of the term 'other effective area-based conservation measures', and underscores the importance of identifying, reporting, monitoring and strengthening OECMs.
- **Section 2** sets out the definition of an OECM and provides clear explanations of each element of the definition as well as criteria for an OECM.
- **Section 3** discusses reasons to identify, report, monitor and strengthen OECMs, underscores the importance of participation and transparency to OECM-related processes, provides guidance on laws and policies pertaining to OECMs, and offers examples of potential OECMs.
- **Section 4** introduces the IUCN *Site-level tool for identifying other effective area-based conservation measures (OECMs)*, including the requirement of rights-based approaches and consent.
- **Section 5** presents the three steps for identifying an OECM, namely, screening, consent and full assessment, and discusses the application of the eight criteria used in the site-level tool.

- **Section 6** elaborates the processes relevant to reporting OECMs, with a focus on the global Protected Planet databases managed by the UN Environment Programme World Conservation Monitoring Centre.
- **Section 7** provides guidance on monitoring OECMs.
- **Section 8** focuses on opportunities to strengthen OECMs, including those relating to management mechanisms, deepening knowledge and developing capacity of supportive actors, enhancing legal recognition, increasing finance and defending OECMs and their stewards when under threat.

Threatened species such as the Iberian lynx can benefit from the conservation efforts associated with OECMs.
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Acknowledgements and additional information

These guidelines have been produced by the IUCN WCPA Specialist Group on Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measures. The Specialist Group has over 450 members from around the world and advances work on OECMs through a number of regional and thematic working groups. These guidelines are an updated and expanded version of an IUCN WCPA technical report, *Recognising and reporting other effective area-based conservation measures* (IUCN WCPA Task Force on OECMs, 2019). These guidelines bring the 2019 guidance up to date with the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, include emerging good practice, and provide new case studies.

This publication was edited by Harry Jonas, Pete Wood and Stephen Woodley. The publication manager was Ryan Zlatanova. The editors gratefully acknowledge the contributions of over 220 people who supported the publication of the 2019 publication and this one. A full list of contributors is provided in Annex 1. The World Wildlife Fund provided financial support and gave permission to use photographs that appear throughout the publication.

In addition to these guidelines, the Specialist Group has published the *Site-level tool for identifying other effective area-based conservation measures (OECMs)* (Jonas et al., 2023), and produced a range of supporting training materials, case studies, films, reports and journal articles. For more information, please visit the OECM Specialist Group website. Please refer any questions or feedback to oecm@wcpa.iucn.org.

Kathy MacKinnon co-authored the 2019 Technical Report on OECMs and the 2023 *Site-level tool for identifying other effective area-based conservation measures (OECMs)*, but passed away prior to the publication of these updated guidelines. In addition to her role as Chair of the IUCN WCPA, Kathy worked closely with Harry Jonas for almost a decade as co-chair of the IUCN WCPA Specialist Group on OECMs. This publication is dedicated to her memory, as well as to the ongoing efforts of the custodians and stewards of the extraordinary places that are now celebrated as OECMs.

Acronyms

CBD	Convention on Biological Diversity
COP	Conference of the Parties to the CBD
EBSA	Ecologically or Biologically Significant Marine Area
FPIC	Free, prior and informed consent
GBF	Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework
GD-PAME	Global Database on Protected Area Management Effectiveness
ICCA	Territories and areas conserved by Indigenous peoples and local communities
IP	Indigenous peoples
IUCN	International Union for Conservation of Nature
KBA	Key Biodiversity Area
LC	Local communities
NGOs	Non-governmental organisations
OECM	Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measure
PAME	Protected area management effectiveness
SDGs	UN Sustainable Development Goals
UN	United Nations
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
UNEP-WCMC	UN Environment Programme World Conservation Monitoring Centre
WCC	IUCN World Conservation Congress
WCPA	IUCN World Commission on Protected Areas
WDPA	World Database on Protected Areas
WD-OECM	World Database on OECMs
WWF	World Wildlife Fund

Glossary of terms

30x30: Widely used short-hand for referring to Target 3 of the GBF. Target 3 must be considered using both the elements of quantity (at least 30% coverage) and quality (e.g., ecological connectivity and representation), and any reference to '30x30' in this publication denotes consideration of both.

Biodiversity: The variability among living organisms from all sources including, *inter alia*, terrestrial, marine and other aquatic ecosystems and the ecological complexes of which they are part; this includes diversity within species, between species and of ecosystems (CBD Article 2, 1992).

Candidate OECM: A potential OECM (see next page) where the governing authority with claims over the land, including Indigenous peoples and local communities (see below), has consented to it being assessed against the OECM criteria. A candidate OECM has not yet been determined to meet the required criteria.

Conservation finance: As defined by the Conservation Finance Alliance, mechanisms and strategies that generate, manage, and deploy financial resources and align incentives to achieve nature conservation outcomes (Meyers et al., 2020).

Conserved areas: CBD Parties and other organisations are increasingly referring to 'protected and conserved areas' (see e.g. CBD decision 14/8 and the IUCN Green List of Protected and Conserved Areas). In this context, 'conserved areas' includes areas that satisfy the criteria for 'other effective area-based conservation measures', whether they are reported or not.

Cultural and spiritual values: Recreational, religious, aesthetic, historical and social values related to tangible and intangible benefits that nature and natural features have for people of different cultures and societies. The focus is on those benefits that contribute to conservation outcomes (e.g. traditional management practices on which key species or whole ecosystems have become reliant, or the general societal support for conservation), as well as intangible heritage, including cultural and spiritual practices (adapted from Verschuuren et al., 2021).

Ecologically and Biologically Significant Marine Areas (EBSAs): Special areas in oceans that support their healthy functioning and the many services they provide. EBSAs are identified on the basis of a range of scientific criteria including uniqueness, fragility, importance for threatened species, productivity and diversity (https://www.cbd.int/ebsa/).

Ecological Monitoring: The systematic collection, analysis and reporting of ecological data in a standardised manner at regular intervals over time in order to understand the condition of a species, ecological process or ecosystem.

Ecosystem: A dynamic complex of plant, animal and micro-organism communities and their non-living environment interacting as a functional unit. (CBD, Article 2, 1992).

Ecosystem approach: A strategy for the integrated management of land, water and living resources that promotes conservation and sustainable use in an equitable way. Application of the ecosystem approach will help to reach a balance of the three objectives of the CBD. It is based on the application of appropriate scientific methodologies focused on levels of biological organisation that encompass the essential processes, functions and interactions among organisms and their environment. It recognises that humans, with their cultural diversity, are an integral component of ecosystems. (https://www.cbd.int/ecosystem/).

Effective conservation: That which results in successfully conserving native ecosystems and their components, including species, genetic diversity, and ecological processes.

Financial sustainability: "The ability to secure sufficient, stable and long-term financial resources, and to allocate them in a timely manner and in an appropriate form, to cover the full costs of conservation and to ensure that they are managed effectively and efficiently" (Emerton et al., 2006).

Free, prior and informed consent (FPIC): A prerequisite to the OECM assessment process if the site is used, owned or claimed by Indigenous peoples or local communities. In such cases, their free, prior and informed consent to the assessment process must be obtained and documented, with the involvement of legitimate representatives of the group. If they give their consent, they can withdraw it at any stage. Furthermore, FPIC enables them to negotiate the conditions under which the project will be designed, implemented, monitored and evaluated. This is also embedded within Indigenous peoples' universal right to self-determination (United Nations, 2007). Other groups (e.g. Afro-descendant communities) may also have a right to FPIC under local regulations (United Nations, 2018).

Governing authority: A government institution, individual, Indigenous government or organisation, not-for-profit organisation, corporation, communal group, or other body or combination of bodies acknowledged as having authority and responsibility for decision-making about the objectives and management of an site. Four governance types and nine subtypes are recognised by the IUCN.

Habitat: The place or type of site where an organism or population naturally occurs (CBD Article 2, 1992).

Indigenous and traditional territories: GBF Target 3 refers to the need to "recognize indigenous and traditional territories where applicable." The term has not been defined by the CBD. The definition of an ICCA, set out by the ICCA Consortium and referenced by the ICCA Registry, relating to territories and areas conserved by Indigenous peoples and local communities, is a useful reference point.

Indigenous peoples and local communities: These guidelines follow the CBD's uses of the terms 'Indigenous peoples' and 'local communities'.

Inland waters: The CBD adopts the definition of wetlands used by the Ramsar convention: "Areas of marsh, fen, peatland or water, whether natural or artificial, permanent or temporary, with water that is static or flowing, fresh, brackish or salt, including areas of marine water the depth of which at low tide does not exceed six metres." 'Inland waters' are wetlands located within land boundaries. Inland waters include those located in coastal areas, even where adjacent to marine environments. Like wetlands, inland water systems can be fresh, saline (salt) or a mix of the two (brackish water) (CBD, 2008).

In situ conservation: The conservation of ecosystems and natural habitats and the maintenance and recovery of viable populations of species in their natural surroundings or, in the case of domesticated or cultivated species, in the surroundings where they have developed their distinctive properties (CBD Article 2, 1992). This is in contrast to ex situ conservation at zoos, aquaria, botanic gardens, and the like.

Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs): Sites contributing significantly to the global persistence of biodiversity in terrestrial, freshwater and marine ecosystems. They are identified by a standard set of criteria against scientifically defined thresholds (IUCN, 2016).

Law: The body of rules that regulates the relationship between governments, the government and its citizens (including natural and juristic persons), between the citizens themselves, and between governments and citizens with nature.

Long term: Refers to the idea that an OECM is expected to deliver in situ conservation of biodiversity in perpetuity, and not be temporary or time limited.

Management authority: The organisation or entity responsible for the ongoing management of a site. The management authority may or may not be the same as the governing authority.

Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measure (OECM): CBD Decision 14/8 defines an OECM as "a geographically defined area other than a Protected Area, which is governed and managed in ways that achieve positive and sustained long-term outcomes for the in situ conservation of biodiversity, with associated ecosystem functions and services and where applicable, cultural, spiritual, socio-economic, and other locally relevant values."

Policy: 'Policy' is distinct from 'law' in that it is generally informative (guides actions and decisions) with law being prescriptive or normative (controls and enables actions and decisions). Policy can take the form of 'policies', guidelines, strategies, frameworks and standard operating procedures.

Potential OECM: A site that has been identified as having OECM-like characteristics, or could possibly have OECM-like characteristics if it were suitably restored.

Protected area: The CBD defines a protected area as: "A geographically defined area which is designated or regulated and managed to achieve specific conservation objectives" (CBD Article 2, 1992). IUCN has a more detailed definition: "A clearly defined geographical space, recognised, dedicated and managed, through legal or other effective means, to achieve the long-term conservation of nature with associated ecosystem services and cultural values" (Dudley, 2008). The CBD and IUCN recognise the two as being equivalent in practice (Lopoukhine and Dias, 2012) as in both cases these areas are intended to achieve in situ conservation.

Rightsholders: In the context of protected areas and OECMs, rightsholders are persons, groups or organisations who have legal or customary rights with respect to land, water and natural resources.

Stakeholders: In the context of protected areas and OECMs, stakeholders are persons, groups or organisations who possess direct or indirect interests and concerns with respect to land, water and natural resources, but do not necessarily enjoy legal or customary rights with respect to them.

Sustainable use: The use of components of biological diversity in a way and at a rate that does not lead to the long-term decline of biological diversity, thereby maintaining its potential to meet the needs and aspirations of present and future generations (CBD Article 2, 1992).

Section 1.

Introduction

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Lowland tropical rainforest in the Harapan forest, Sumatra. Previously a logging concession, the forest is now managed for environmental services and to protect and restore the site's rich biodiversity. The OECM designation recognises sites which are not protected areas but which make an important contribution to biodiversity conservation.

1.1 Background

The Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF), agreed in 2022, is a framework for the effective implementation of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) through a strategic framework, comprising four long-term goals for 2050 and 23 targets for 2030. The 2030 mission of the GBF is to "halt and reverse biodiversity loss to put nature on a path to recovery for the benefit of people and planet." Target 3 aims to improve the status of biodiversity by safeguarding ecosystems, species and genetic diversity through the conservation and management of sites of particular importance for biodiversity. It calls on the Parties to the CBD to:

> *Ensure and enable that by 2030 at least 30 per cent of terrestrial, inland water, and of coastal and marine areas, especially areas of particular importance for biodiversity and ecosystem functions and services, are effectively conserved and managed through ecologically representative, well-connected and equitably governed systems of protected areas and* ***other effective area-based conservation measures,*** *recognizing indigenous and traditional territories, where applicable, and integrated into wider landscapes, seascapes and the ocean, while ensuring that any sustainable use, where appropriate in such areas, is fully consistent with conservation outcomes, recognizing and respecting the rights of indigenous peoples and local communities, including over their traditional territories (CBD 2022; emphasis added).*

Target 3 challenges a wide range of actors to enhance existing efforts related to protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures (OECMs), and explore what this means in the context of recognising Indigenous and traditional territories. Target 3 builds on Decision 14/8 of the Parties to the CBD, which defines OECMs as sites outside of protected areas where biodiversity is effectively conserved (see Section 2.1).

The OECM framework is designed to enable the identification, reporting, monitoring and strengthening of conservation efforts outside of protected areas (CBD, 2018). It promotes equitable partnerships for conservation by enabling a diversity of actors to be recognised and supported for their contributions to the conservation of biodiversity and ecosystem functions. It broadens the kinds of sites that can contribute to global biodiversity targets from sites dedicated to conservation, to those that are primarily managed for other outcomes but nevertheless deliver the long-term in situ conservation of biodiversity. By delivering the effective in situ conservation of biodiversity, OECMs can contribute to sustaining existing biodiversity and improving biodiversity conservation outcomes. They achieve this by conserving important ecosystems, habitats and wildlife corridors; supporting the recovery of threatened species; maintaining ecosystem functions and securing ecosystem services; enhancing resilience to threats; and retaining and connecting remnants of fragmented ecosystems in degraded landscapes (Jonas et al., 2024; UNEP-WCMC and IUCN, 2024). OECMs also contribute to ecologically representative and well-connected conservation networks, integrated within wider landscapes and seascapes. The OECM framework is also generating a range of challenges that these guidelines aim to help address (see Figure 1; Claudet et al., 2022; Gurney et al., 2021).

The recognition and/or creation of OECMs is not a substitute for more effective management of existing protected areas and the creation of new protected areas. It is critical to achieve Target 3 by using all available approaches. The equitable governance and effective management of protected areas remains an essential and proven approach to nature conservation and to achieving Target 3. More information about Target 3 is available on the 30x30 Solutions Toolkit website and in 30x30: A Guide to Inclusive, Equitable and Effective Implementation of Target 3 (WWF and IUCN WCPA, 2023).

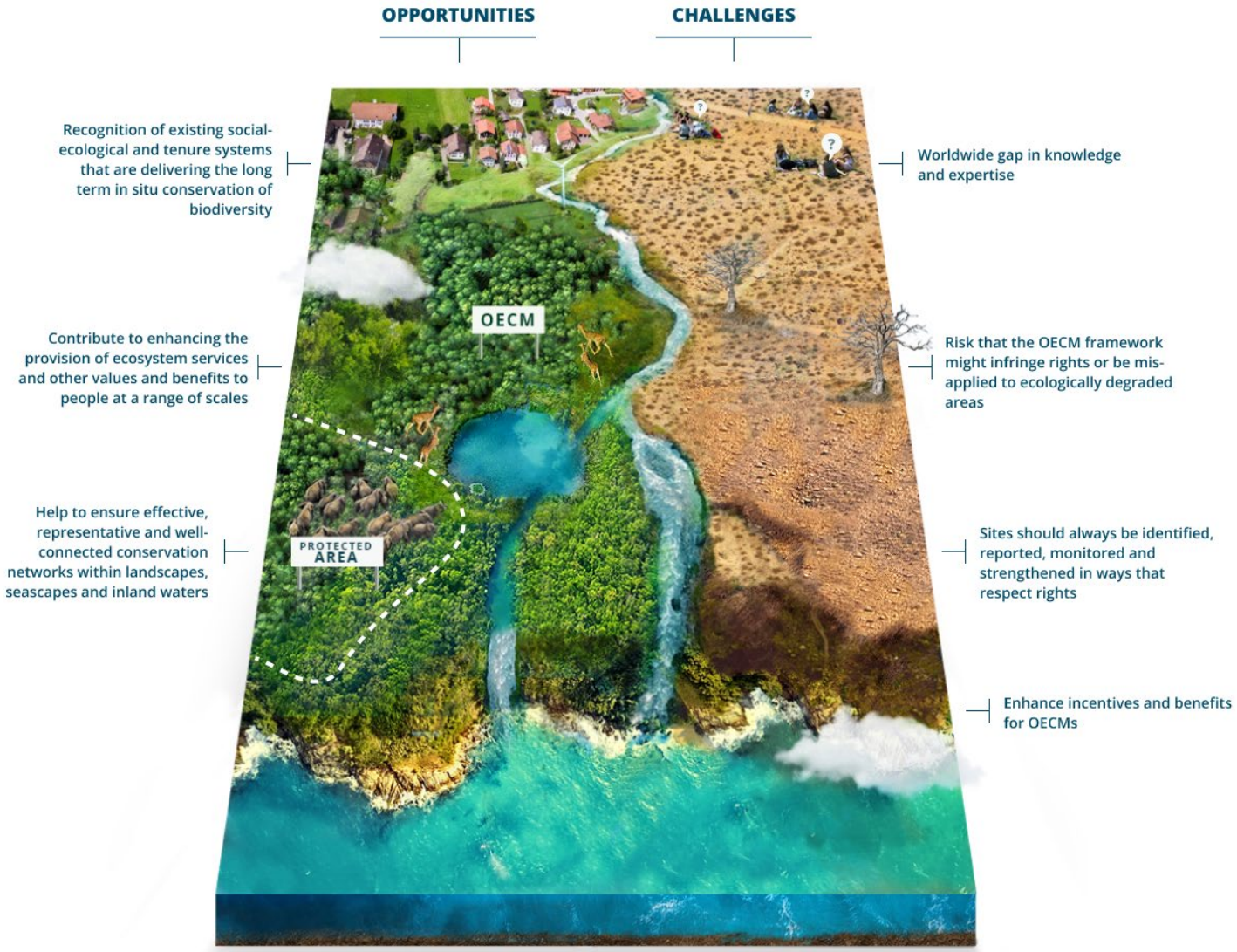

Figure 1. The OECM framework is generating a range of opportunities and challenges. (Source: Adapted from World Wildlife Fund, 2022)

1.2 These good practice guidelines

IUCN WCPA worked for two years to produce technical advice to inform CBD Parties' deliberations at COP 14 (Jonas et al., 2018; see a Special Issue of *PARKS* journal for case studies that informed that process: IUCN WCPA, 2018). The resulting CBD Decision 14/8 (paragraph 9) invites the IUCN and other expert bodies to assist Parties in identifying OECMs and applying the scientific and technical advice on criteria for their identification. In response, IUCN WCPA published a technical report on Recognising and reporting other effective area-based conservation measures (IUCN WCPA Task Force on OECMs, 2019) and the *Site-level tool for identifying other effective area-based conservation measures (OECMs)* (Jonas et al., 2023). These guidelines update the 2019 Technical Report and focus on OECMs as a key component of effective area-based conservation under Target 3.

- These guidelines explain the definition and criteria of an OECM and provide guidance on five elements that are critical to advance conservation beyond protected areas, namely: establishing enabling conditions for OECMs, identifying OECMs, reporting OECMs, monitoring OECMs, and strengthening OECMs. **Section 2** sets out the definition of an OECM, and provides clear explanations of each element of the definition as well as criteria for an OECM. **Section 3** discusses reasons to identify, report, monitor and strengthen OECMs, underscores the importance of enabling conditions, participation and transparency to OECM-related processes, and provides guidance on laws and policies pertaining to OECMs. **Section 4** introduces the IUCN WCPA *Site-level tool for identifying other effective area-based conservation measures (OECMs)*, underscores the importance of rights-based approaches

Figure 2. Five key elements related to OECMs that are addressed in these guidelines. (Source: Prepared by the report authors)

and consent, and provides examples of potential OECMs. **Section 5** details the three steps for identifying an OECM, namely, screening, consent and full assessment. **Section 6** elaborates the processes relevant to reporting OECMs, with a focus on the global Protected Planet databases managed by the UN Environment Programme World Conservation Monitoring Centre. **Section 7** provides guidance on monitoring OECMs. **Section 8** focuses on opportunities to strengthen OECMs, including deepening knowledge and developing capacity of supportive actors, enhancing management and monitoring, enhancing legal recognition, increasing finance and defending OECMs and their stewards when under threat.

1.3 Using these good practice guidelines

The primary audiences for these guidelines are Parties to the CBD, government agencies, United Nations (UN) agencies, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), private-sector organisations, Indigenous peoples, local communities, and other interested organisations, agencies and individuals involved in achieving biodiversity conservation and tracking progress towards GBF Target 3 and other conservation targets. These guidelines apply across the terrestrial, inland water and marine realms, both within and beyond areas of national jurisdiction. These guidelines are designed to foster the proper and consistent application of the CBD criteria for OECMs and therefore advance the identification, reporting, monitoring and strengthening of OECMs.

These guidelines should be read in conjunction with the *Site-level tool for identifying other effective area-based conservation measures (OECMs)* (Jonas et al., 2023) and other guidance and resources that embody and promote the OECM criteria set out by the CBD. More broadly, the application of the OECM framework should be consistent with principles set out by the CBD.

Section 2.

CBD definition and criteria

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Marine OECMs are one means by which to conserve critically endangered species such as the hawksbill turtle.

This section sets out the definition of an OECM (2.1) and provides guidance on the difference between OECMs and protected areas (2.2). It discusses the criteria for identifying OECMs that were agreed by Parties to CBD Decision 14/8 in 2018 (2.3), a simple typology of governance options for sites (2.4), the relevance of social and economic values in OECMs (2.5), and the distinction between OECMs and sites under sustainable management that might be reported under other targets of the GBF (2.6).

2.1 Definition of an OECM

Good practice: Be aware of the rationale for the OECM framework and understand the definition and criteria for identifying an OECM.

Many places that are important for the in situ conservation of biodiversity are not protected areas. The adoption of the concept of OECMs by the CBD (see Section 1) enables the contribution of sites that are not formally protected areas to be better identified, reported on, monitored and strengthened. An OECM is defined by the CBD in Decision 14/8 as:

> *A geographically defined area other than a Protected Area, which is governed and managed in ways that achieve positive and sustained long-term outcomes for the in situ conservation of biodiversity with associated ecosystem functions and services and where applicable, cultural, spiritual, socio-economic, and other locally relevant values. (CBD, 2018).*

The elements of this definition are described in Table 1.

The key characteristic of an OECM is that it **can be governed, managed and used on a sustained basis for a range of purposes, as long as this results in important biodiversity being effectively conserved, in situ, over the long term**. Biodiversity conservation may, or may not, be the main objective of the management of the site. There could also be other objectives (e.g. water source management), and in some cases biodiversity conservation will not be an objective of the management of the site at all, but just an incidental result of the way it is managed. An OECM can be governed and/or managed by a government agency, private group (e.g. a company, a university, or a non-profit organisation), by Indigenous peoples, local communities, or in a shared arrangement.

The identification and reporting of a site as an OECM is voluntary, and can only be done by or with the agreement of the site's governing authority. Reporting a site as an OECM does not change the ownership, land tenure or management of a site, nor does it change the governance. Identification of a site as an OECM does not mean that it becomes state owned or controlled.

Table 1. The elements of the OECM definition.

Element	Definition
A geographically defined area	A spatially delineated area with agreed and demarcated boundaries, which can include land, inland waters, marine and coastal areas, or any combination of these. In exceptional circumstances, boundaries may be defined by physical features that move over time, such as riverbanks, the high-water mark or extent of sea ice.[1]
other than a Protected Area	The CBD defines a protected area as "a geographically defined area which is designated or regulated and managed to achieve specific conservation objectives." Areas that are already designated as protected areas or lie within protected areas should **not** also be recognised or reported as OECMs.[2]
which is governed and managed	'Governed' means that the area is under the authority of a specified entity, or an agreed combination of entities.[1] 'Managed' means that actions are taken that have the effect of controlling threats to the natural values of the site, and of maintaining or enhancing those values. Note that 'managed' can include a decision to leave the area untouched.[3]
in ways that achieve positive … outcomes	**Positive conservation outcomes:** governance and management should result in the biodiversity of the site being maintained or enhanced. Environmentally damaging activities should be prevented or controlled. Biodiversity is always protected in situ, or as part of a whole-ecosystem approach to conservation.[1]
… sustained long-term outcomes	The positive outcomes are expected to continue for the long term. Governance and management should have the intent of continuing the practices that result in conservation of the important biodiversity values on a sustained basis. The practices may clearly express an intention of permanence and contain safeguards that make reversal or modification difficult. If permanence is not a stated intent, there should be a rationale that supports an expectation that conservation will continue indefinitely. Management that only results in short-term or temporary conservation outcomes does not constitute an OECM. Similarly, areas or practices that are clearly intended to be temporary in nature, or for which there is no evident commitment to the long term, do not constitute an OECM.[1]
for the in situ	The CBD defines in situ conservation as "the conservation of ecosystems and natural habitats and the maintenance and recovery of viable populations of species in their natural surroundings and, in the case of domesticated or cultivated species, in the surroundings where they have developed their distinctive properties."[2]
conservation of	Conservation means the maintenance of ecosystems and natural and semi-natural habitats and of viable populations of species in their natural surroundings.[2]
biodiversity	The CBD defines biodiversity as "the variability among living organisms from all sources including, inter alia, terrestrial, marine and other aquatic ecosystems and the ecological complexes of which they are part; this includes diversity within species, between species and of ecosystems."[2]
with associated ecosystem functions and services	Ecosystem functions and services are closely associated with biodiversity conservation. OECMs can protect ecosystem services, but management of these services should not interfere with the conservation of important biodiversity values of the site. Ecosystem services can include provisioning services such as the provision of food and water; regulating services such as regulation of floods, drought, land degradation, and disease; supporting services such as soil formation and nutrient cycling; and cultural services such as the delivery of recreational, spiritual, religious and other non-material benefits.[1]
and where applicable, cultural, spiritual, socio–economic, and other locally relevant values	Cultural and spiritual values include recreational, religious, aesthetic, historical and social values related to tangible and intangible benefits that nature and natural features have for people, with a particular focus on those that contribute to conservation outcomes (e.g. traditional management practices on which key species or whole ecosystems have become reliant, or the societal support for conservation of landscapes for their quality in artistic expression or beauty) and intangible heritage, including cultural and spiritual practices.[5]

[1.] Jonas et al., 2023. [2.] CBD, 1992. [3.] Borrini-Feyerabend et al., 2013. [4.] Dudley, 2008. [5.] Verschuuren et al., 2021.

2.2 Distinguishing OECMs from protected areas

Good practice: OECMs and protected areas do not overlap. Sites with important biodiversity values are identified and reported as either protected areas or OECMs, recognising Indigenous and traditional territories, taking into account the characteristics of the site, national regulations, and the wishes of rightsholders and stakeholders.

OECMs complement protected areas by encouraging conservation of biodiversity in sites which are not protected areas. OECMs and protected areas will often work together to achieve biodiversity conservation as a conservation network, within a landscape, riverscape or seascape.

The definitions of a protected area developed by the CBD (Article 2, 1992) and IUCN (Dudley, 2008) are equivalent. IUCN defines a protected area as:

> *A clearly defined geographical space, recognised, dedicated and managed, through legal or other effective means, to achieve the long-term conservation of nature with associated ecosystem services and cultural values.*

The defining feature of a protected area is that the site is recognised, dedicated and managed for conservation. Protected areas have conservation objectives as the primary objective of the site. The defining aspect of an OECM is the **biodiversity conservation outcome, regardless of the objectives of the site.**

An OECM is a site that delivers the effective in situ conservation of biodiversity. In this context, conservation can be the primary or secondary objective of management, or it may not be an objective at all (delivering ancillary outcomes)**.**

Protected areas and OECMs have some features in common. They should both:

- Be a clearly defined geographic space;
- Be governed and managed in ways that respect rights;
- Contribute to long-term, in situ conservation of biodiversity; and
- Depending on the site's context, integrate the conservation of ecosystem services as well as cultural, spiritual and other local values in their management.

Based on these definitions, a site where biodiversity conservation is the primary objective can be either a protected area or an OECM. Internationally agreed norms under the CBD, and IUCN recommendations, are that **areas that meet the definition of a protected area, and are recognised as such by the governing authority, should be considered a protected area**. However, in practice, there are many cases where sites that meet the definition of a protected area are not recognised and reported as such. For example, some privately protected areas are not reported as protected areas by national governments, even though they satisfy the IUCN criteria (see IUCN Guidelines for Privately Protected Areas, Mitchell et al. 2018, and Case Study 14). In these cases, reporting the site as an OECM (if it meets the OECM criteria, and has the agreement of the governing authority and any Indigenous peoples and local communities who are rightsholders) means that its biodiversity value is recognised, and that it will be included in the country's contribution towards GBF Target 3.

OECMs are not an alternative to or a replacement for protected areas, which are a critical part of Target 3. The identification and reporting of OECMs should be advanced as well as, not instead of, designating, equitably governing and effectively managing protected areas. OECMs should deliver biodiversity outcomes of comparable importance to, and be complementary with, protected areas. This includes OECMs' contribution to ecological representation, coverage of areas important for biodiversity and associated ecosystem functions and services, and connectivity and integration in wider landscapes and seascapes, as well as management effectiveness and equity requirements.

Case study 1.
Los Amigos Conservation Concession

Location: Madre de Dios, Peru | **Example of:** A reported privately managed OECM

Los Amigos Conservation Area was identified and reported as an OECM in 2022. Located in the Los Amigos watershed in Madre de Dios, Peru, it covers 145,700 hectares and is governed by Asociación para la Conservación de la Cuenca Amazónica (ACCA) Peru under a 40-year lease from the Peruvian government. Managed for research and education, it is home to diverse habitats such as terra firme forests, floodplains, oxbow lakes, bamboo forests and aguaje palm swamps, supporting 12 globally threatened species, 12 primate species, and over 550 bird species. Los Amigos is strategically located bordering the Manu National Park, the Indigenous Amarakaeri communities and the Madre de Dios Territorial Reserve, home to the Mashco Piro, an uncontacted Indigenous people who live in isolation.

Los Amigos has conservation as its primary management objective. Around the year 2000 the Madre de Dios Regional Government invited bids for leases to use the land. ACCA applied and was granted the land as a Conservation Concession for 40 years.

Since 2001 ACCA has implemented an integrated strategy to protect Los Amigos allowing early detection of illegal activities and a rapid and effective response to them, achieving zero deforestation in the concession. Meanwhile, ACCA has created the Los Amigos Biological Station to promote research into biodiversity, ecosystem dynamics and changes in the face of anthropogenic pressures such as climate change. More information.

Los Amigos Conservation Concession, Peru. © Carlos Castañeda - ACCA

2.3 CBD criteria for identifying OECMs

Good practice: Understand and apply all of the CBD criteria when identifying and reporting an OECM.

Decision 14/8 of the CBD includes a definition of OECMs (see Section 2.1). Annex III of the decision, on 'Scientific and technical advice on other effective area-based conservation measures', provides a list of 'guiding principles and common characteristics' for OECMs (Decision 14/8, Annex III, Section A). Annex III also sets out 4 criteria and, under 10 categories, provides 26 sub-criteria for identification of OECMs (Decision 14/8, Annex III, Section B). The key elements of the CBD criteria are described here (see Table 2), while their application, using the IUCN site-level tool, is covered in Section 4. A table in Annex 2 of these guidelines explains the links between the CBD decision and the IUCN site-level identification tool. Note that the tool re-organises and re-numbers the criteria to facilitate a clear process when being used.

Figure 3. The four CBD criteria for identifying an OECM. (Source: Prepared by the report authors)

Table 2. The CBD criteria and sub-criteria for identifying an OECM with explanatory notes.

4 Criteria and 10 categories of sub-criteria (CBD Decision 14/8)	Explanatory note
CBD Criterion A: Area is not currently recognised as a protected area	
• Not a protected area	OECMs can contribute to area-based targets for terrestrial, freshwater and marine conservation. This means that areas that are already established as or lie within protected areas **should not also be identified or reported as OECMs** (See Section 5.1).
CBD Criterion B: Area is governed and managed	
• Geographically defined space • Legitimate governance authorities • Managed	This criterion sets out key principles that further describe what an OECM is. OECMs are one of a set of *site-based* approaches to biodiversity conservation. As such, the boundaries of the site must be defined. Furthermore, the site must have sustained *governance and management* by a legitimate governing authority. The *type* of governance and management is not a factor in identifying an OECM – what is important is the effectiveness of governance and management in achieving conservation (Criterion C).
CBD Criterion C: Achieves sustained and effective contribution to in situ conservation of biodiversity	
• Effective • Long-term • In situ conservation of biological diversity • Information and monitoring	Criterion C establishes the impact of the governance and management of an OECM: it should result in the *effective and long-term in situ conservation of biodiversity*. In order to carry out these functions – and to be able to know that they are having the intended impact – *information and monitoring* are required Importantly, neither Criterion B nor Criterion C specifies that biodiversity conservation has to be the objective of governance and management. This means that sites that are managed for other purposes, but nevertheless achieve biodiversity conservation, can qualify as OECMs. This is one of the most important contributions of OECMs to broadening the recognition of important sites beyond protected areas.
CBD Criterion D: Associated ecosystem functions and services and cultural, spiritual, socio-economic and other locally relevant values	
• Ecosystem functions and services • Cultural, spiritual, socio-economic and other locally relevant values	Criterion D describes how OECMs relate to other values, in addition to the conservation of biodiversity. Ecosystem functions and cultural, spiritual and socio-economic values exist where people use the products and services from a site. The CBD decision stipulates that where these values exist for an OECM, management should achieve both biodiversity conservation and the maintenance or enhancement of these other values.

2.4 Management objectives for OECMs

Good practice: Identify the management objectives of the site and ensure there is a shared understanding of how they contribute to the long-term in situ conservation of the important biodiversity values.

As noted above (Section 2.1), the CBD decision on OECMs does not require that they be governed and managed with the objective of biodiversity conservation, as long as the sustained governance and management has the long-term effect of conserving biodiversity. This is a critical difference between OECMs and protected areas; protected areas are, by definition, managed with the objective of biodiversity conservation. To help decision-makers and OECM managers understand and describe the objectives of the site, IUCN WCPA has proposed a simple framing of OECM conservation objectives into three types: primary, secondary and ancillary (Box 1 and Figure 4 therein).

Box 1

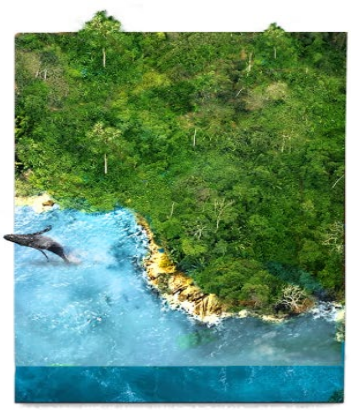
A typology of OECM objectives that lead to conservation

OECMs may have biodiversity conservation as a primary, secondary or ancillary objective.

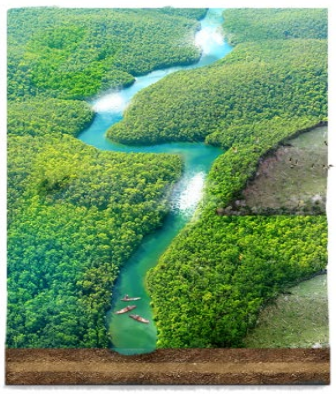
'**Primary conservation**' refers to sites where biodiversity conservation is the primary management objective. Such sites may be reported as OECMs because the governing authority does not want the area to be classified as a protected area. For example, Indigenous peoples and local communities may not want areas that they govern to be designated as protected areas or recorded in government protected area databases, preferring to be recognised for their conservation contributions via the OECM framework. Likewise, the government may not want to include private and community-managed sites in the official list of protected areas, but may accept OECM designation for these sites.

'**Secondary conservation**' refers to sites where biodiversity conservation is a secondary management objective; e.g. a site managed primarily for nature tourism or to protect a water catchment with a secondary objective of conserving biodiversity.

'**Ancillary conservation**' refers to sites that deliver in situ biodiversity conservation as a by-product of management activities, even though this is not a management objective; e.g. sites where access is limited for cultural or security



Primary Conservation
A site where the conservation of biodiversity is the primary management objective. Example: privately governed area where the rightsholders do not want the site classified as a protected area.



Secondary Conservation
A site where the conservation of biodiversity is the secondary management objective. Example: watershed protection area.

Ancillary Conservation
A site that delivers in situ biodiversity conservation as a by-product of management activities, even though this is not a management objective. Example: archeological site.

Figure 4. Conservation may be a primary, secondary or ancillary objective in the management of an OECM. (Source: Adapted from World Wildlife Fund, 2022)

Case study 2.
The North Tyndal Protected Water Area

Location: Nova Scotia, Canada | **Example of:** A reported OECM with conservation as a secondary management objective and which complements a protected area network

One important function of the OECM framework is to recognise the conservation value of sites that are managed primarily for another purpose. Part of Nova Scotia's Chignecto Isthmus is managed to ensure water supplies for a nearby town, and in doing so it makes an important contribution to biodiversity conservation. The isthmus is a narrow land bridge connecting Nova Scotia and New Brunswick. The town of Amherst, Nova Scotia, relies on ground water from the area, and created the North Tyndal Protected Water Area under provincial regulation in 1989 to ensure that this supply is sustained. This involves ensuring native vegetation is kept intact and harmful land uses are prohibited. This area is not listed as a protected area and was recognised as an OECM in 2018. In addition to the OECM, other parts of the isthmus are designated as formal protected areas and, together, the OECM and protected areas form the Chignecto Isthmus Wilderness Area, a network of lands that protect the rich biodiversity of the region, such as by providing a corridor for wildlife.

Case study 3.
Wits Rural Facility, South Africa

Location: South Africa | **Example of:** A candidate OECM managed for education that delivers long-term conservation outcomes

The Wits Rural Facility is an example of an OECM where educational and research objectives combine with achieving in situ conservation. This rural campus of the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits), in north-eastern South Africa, is used for high-impact health, social and environmental research and training on-site and in adjacent rural communities. The Wits Rural Knowledge Hub connects and integrates the research and teaching activities of the various academic programmes using the facility. The property spans 350 hectares within the Kruger to Canyons Biosphere Reserve, and falls within a Key Biodiversity Area (KBA), a provincial Ecosystem Support Area and the Kruger National Park Buffer Zone. Except for the research facility buildings and roads, the majority of the site is managed to maintain its intact savannah and river habitat. The site also includes ancestral grave sites that are protected.

The Facility is managed according to an overarching management plan developed by the University's Services Department, which is implemented by the site's operations manager. The academic objectives do not negatively impact on the biodiversity conservation of the site. Experimental plots are localised, and all engagement and research involving the local community follows ethical protocols and standards. External threats such as poaching, water pollution from upstream and a potential land claim are present; however the status of the site is unlikely to be easily changed. More information.

Other examples of primary, secondary and ancillary conservation objectives can be found in Section 3.8.

The rural campus of the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits) is an OECM which is used for high-impact health, social and environmental research and training on-site and in adjacent rural communities. © ReWild Africa

2.5 OECMs and other values

Good practice: Ensure that the site's importance for ecosystem services and cultural, spiritual, socio-economic and other locally relevant values and practices is understood and, where relevant, management for these values is harmonised with the conservation of biodiversity.

CBD decision 14/8 and the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) recognise that healthy and functioning ecosystems provide a range of ***ecosystem services*** including provisioning services (e.g. provision of food, drinking water); regulating services (e.g. climate regulation, flood control, mitigation of drought, land degradation and disease); and supporting services (e.g. soil formation, nutrient recycling). The importance of these services depends on how they are (or could be) used, but in some cases their management will be the main objective of a site. A key concept for OECMs is that the management of these services should be in harmony with the conservation of biodiversity – in other words, management of the ecosystem services should not impact negatively on the important biodiversity values of the site.

Potential OECMs may also include sites where there are ***cultural, spiritual, socio-economic and other locally relevant values and practices***. In such cases, it will be important to ensure the recognition and protection of the linkages between biological and cultural diversity, and the associated governance and management practices that lead to positive biodiversity outcomes, such as customary sustainable uses of biodiversity (CBD Article 10(c)). Conversely, OECMs should be sites where management for cultural, spiritual, socio-economic and other locally relevant values does not impact negatively on biodiversity conservation values.

Figure 5. The potential livelihoods, biodiversity, ecosystem and climate benefits of OECMs. (Source: Adapted from World Wildlife Fund, 2022)

When using the IUCN Site-level tool for identifying OECM (see Section 4), the relationship between the management of the site and the maintenance of ecosystem services and cultural, spiritual and socio-economic values, where applicable, should be considered in the assessment of candidate OECMs against Criterion 6 (governance and management achieve in situ conservation) and Criterion 8 (governance and management address equity considerations).

Further information on ecosystem services and conservation can be found in:

- **Tools for measuring, modelling, and valuing ecosystem services** (Neugarten et al., 2018). This document provides details on ecosystem services and available tools to determine the extent and value of ecosystem services.
- **Protected areas benefits assessment tool + (PA-BAT+)** (Ivanić et al., 2020). This document collates and assesses information about the overall benefits from conservation and protection in protected areas (also applies to OECMs).

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2.6 Distinguishing between Targets 3 and 10

Good practice: Report sites under the appropriate GBF target: Target 3 for protected areas and OECMs – recognising Indigenous and traditional territories, and Target 10 for sustainably managed production areas.

The GBF is composed of four goals and 23 targets. Halting and reversing biodiversity loss requires rigorous implementation of all 23 targets. Two of them, Targets 3 and 10, are especially relevant to sites where there is sustainable use of natural resources.

Target 3 focuses on protected areas and OECMs, as well as recognising Indigenous and traditional territories. Under Target 3, any sustainable use is expected to be "fully consistent with conservation outcomes." In contrast, **Target 10 is focused specifically on ensuring sustainable management of areas that are primarily for production,** with the sustainable use and maintenance of biodiversity undertaken to ensure "resilience and long-term efficiency and productivity of these production systems." It is important that sites are reported under the correct target (see Box 2).

Sites managed for industrial exploitation of natural resources will generally not qualify as OECMs because there are likely to have been major changes in the natural ecosystem and depletion of biodiversity values (see Site-level tool for identifying OECMs, Criterion 6). If production is ecologically sustainable, these sites may be appropriately reported under Target 10. However, if areas are permanently set aside from harvest within an area managed for industrial exploitation, it is possible that those permanent set-aside areas could qualify as OECM as long as they meet all the criteria (including that they have important biodiversity values, are of sufficient size, are governed and managed, and are long term in nature).

In general, therefore:

- A site where management is non-extractive or low impact, such that the site retains its important biodiversity values, is potentially an OECM under GBF Target 3.
- A site where the prevailing management approach is focused on maximum sustainable use, or causes the loss or depletion of the site's important biodiversity values, will not qualify as an OECM. In general, if the site is being harvested under sustainability standards, it should be counted under GBF Target 10.

Annex 3 sets out a table illustrating the contributions of OECMs to other targets in the GBF.

Box 2

Global Biodiversity Framework Targets 3 and 10 (CBD, 2022; emphasis added below)

Target 3: Ensure and enable that by 2030 at least 30 per cent of terrestrial and inland water areas, and of marine and coastal areas, especially areas of particular importance for biodiversity and ecosystem functions and services, are effectively conserved and managed through ecologically representative, well-connected and equitably governed systems of protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures, recognizing indigenous and traditional territories, where applicable, and integrated into wider landscapes, seascapes and the ocean, while **ensuring that any sustainable use, where appropriate in such areas, is fully consistent with conservation outcomes,** recognizing and respecting the rights of indigenous peoples and local communities, including over their traditional territories.

Target 10: Ensure that **areas under agriculture, aquaculture, fisheries and forestry are managed sustainably, in particular through the sustainable use of biodiversity**, including through a substantial increase of the application of biodiversity-friendly practices, such as sustainable intensification, agro-ecological and other innovative approaches, contributing to the resilience and long-term efficiency and productivity of these production systems, and to food security, conserving and restoring biodiversity and maintaining nature's contributions to people, including ecosystem functions and services.

Section 3.

Key considerations and enabling conditions for OECMs

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Inland water ecosystems, like this one in the Kruger to Canyons Biosphere Region in South Africa, are often under-represented in national conservation systems. With the right enabling conditions in place, OECMs offer a route to enhance the conservation of these and other under-represented ecosystems.

3.1 Introduction

In situ conservation of biodiversity is fundamental to stemming biodiversity loss (CBD, 1992). This is because in situ conservation entails stopping or reversing the habitat loss and degradation that is the largest driver of species population declines and endangerment (Hogue and Breon, 2022). Protected areas and OECMs are two critical tools for achieving in situ conservation under GBF Target 3. This Section reviews the benefits of identifying and reporting OECMs (3.2); underscores the importance of rights, participation and transparency in OECM-related processes (3.3); provides advice about elements of national OECM processes (3.4); discusses the importance of laws and policies as enabling conditions for OECMs (3.5); explains how new OECMs can be created (3.6); considers how ecological restoration might proceed in OECMs (3.7); gives examples of potential OECMs (3.8); and provides examples of sites that are unlikely to meet the CBD criteria for OECMs (3.9).

3.2 Why identify and report OECMs?

Good practice: Governing authorities are fully aware of the potential benefits, opportunities, challenges and costs of identifying and reporting a site as an OECM.

Identifying and reporting a site as an OECM recognises that it makes an important contribution towards the conservation of biodiversity, even though it is not a protected area. Once the OECM is reported to the World Database on OECMs (WD-OECM), it will be included in data on the country's biodiversity conservation efforts under international environmental agreements, in particular the CBD. However, it is important that, in addition to contributing to the global biodiversity conservation agenda, there is clarity on how local rightsholders and stakeholders might benefit from the site being identified as an OECM. Box 3 summarises some of the reasons different groups might want to identify a site as an OECM. Some of the benefits rightsholders and stakeholders might expect are a direct result of identifying and reporting a site as an OECM, while others depend on strengthening mechanisms put in place at local and national levels (see Section 8).

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Box 3

Potential benefits for people and groups of identifying and reporting a site as an OECM

Benefits for non-government groups, including Indigenous peoples and local communities governing a site and/or with a traditional/historical claim over a site; private owners such as a company or an NGO; or other civil institutions such as a university or a religious institution:

- Wider recognition of the group's role as the governing authority, and through this recognition of its presence and right to manage the site. This may be especially important for Indigenous peoples and local communities, who may not otherwise have secure ownership and management rights.
- Confirmation, validated by relevant experts/ stakeholders, of the importance of the biodiversity of the site.
- Confirmation, validated by relevant experts/ stakeholders, that the local management institutions and their practices have maintained the biodiversity of the site.
- Higher global profile for the site and the group managing it, e.g. through listing in the WD-OECM.

If appropriate support mechanisms are in place from government or other parties (e.g. conservation NGOs), benefits may also include:

- Inclusion in official lists of nationally/internationally important sites for biodiversity conservation in the country.
- Stronger legal protection for the site.
- Greater public awareness of and support for the site.
- The opportunity to secure assistance and political support, address pressures and future threats, and resolve management issues, such as boundary disputes.
- The opportunity for access to funding and technical assistance.
- The opportunity to share learning and form partnerships with similar groups at other sites.
- The opportunity to promote the site and its natural values as a basis for a sustainable business, or to attract ecotourism investment.

For government agencies mandated to achieve national conservation targets:

- The area of ecosystems and number of species recognised as being effectively conserved is likely to increase.
- The number and scale of conservation efforts taking place in the country is more accurately documented and recognised.
- National targets and objectives for biodiversity conservation are more readily met.
- The country's commitment to CBD Target 3, including the 30x30 target as well as other targets under the GBF, and to other international targets, including the SDGs, is boosted.
- Additional stakeholders and, potentially, additional resources are recognised as being part of national conservation efforts, especially where there is resistance (e.g. from private owners or Indigenous groups) to land being officially recognised as protected areas.
- Stronger legal protection and political recognition is achieved, assisting with mitigating pressures and future threats.
- The importance of biodiversity at sites that are not protected areas is highlighted to the sites' owners and managers, and may lead to new conservation efforts.
- Increased international profile for sites creates opportunities for access to funding and technical support for their conservation and management.

For other (non-conservation) government agencies that control/manage sites:

- The conservation value of sites managed/controlled by the agency is recognised.
- Opportunities for collaboration with conservation-related agencies and groups increase.
- Recognition of the importance of the involvement of other groups (e.g. communities, NGOs) in the conservation management of the site is enhanced.
- New business/funding opportunities emerge.

Case study 4.
La Ilusión Nature Reserve

Location: Colombia | **Example of:** A reported OECM that saw the emergence of various benefits as a result of reporting

The Nature Reserve *La Ilusión* has been conserving 45 hectares of Colombian cloud forest since 2007. Its owners, Natalia Laverde and Sergio Abauat, established the El Bosque y La Niebla Foundation in 2019 to promote the restoration of this critical ecosystem through socio-environmental research, ecological restoration, and educational programs. The Foundation was created with the goal of ensuring the long-term governance and protection of the area.

La Ilusión was reported as an OECM in 2021 by the Colombian Ministry of Environment to the WD-OECM. Since it was reported, the nature reserve has gained recognition in various scales:

- The local community's sense of connection to the site has increased, leading to greater engagement in restoration activities within the OECM and its surrounding areas.
- The municipal government now consults *La Ilusión* for environmental decision-making.
- Environmental authorities use the OECM for relocating rescued vulnerable species, such as the oncilla (*Leopardus tigrinus*).
- On regional and national levels, both the private sector and environmental authorities identified the OECM *La Ilusión* in the Protected Planet database as eligible for payments for environmental services, due to biodiversity loss caused for energy or infrastructure projects, as required by Colombian law.

3.3 Rights, participation and transparency

Good practice: OECM identification is carried out by (or with the consent of) the site's governing authority and any Indigenous peoples and local communities, and appropriately engages with all key stakeholders.

The identification, reporting, monitoring and strengthening of OECMs recognises the contribution made to biodiversity conservation by sites managed for a variety of purposes, and by any actors – government, Indigenous peoples, local communities, the private sector, civil society, or a mixture of these. As a result, the recognition of a site as an OECM is **not expected to result in any changes to ownership, management, or use**. There may be exceptions where new OECMs are created with a new governance and management structure (see Section 3.6) or where governance or management are strengthened to meet OECM criteria.

Both of the following two groups must agree that a site be assessed, identified and reported as an OECM, including accepting or rejecting such a proposal when made by another party:

- The governing authority, which is the group or groups that make decisions about the overall purpose, long-term management policies and sometimes also the day-to-day use of the site. In many sites the mandates and rights of two or more groups overlap, and the governing authority will be made up of representatives of all these groups working together. In some sites, dialogue and negotiation may be required before all rightsholders share the same understanding of which groups have governance rights and responsibilities (see also Sections 4.3 and 4.4 on the role of the governing authority in the OECM identification process).
- Indigenous peoples and local communities who have a customary or historical claim to rights over the lands and resources at the site. Under the CBD, Parties have agreed on principles that focus on recognising and protecting the rights of Indigenous peoples and local communities. Free, prior and informed consent (FPIC) is a mandatory component of the OECM identification and reporting process where such groups are present. Under FPIC principles, Indigenous peoples and local communities may withdraw their support for the process at any time.

Participation and transparency are important principles of good governance, including for protected areas and OECMs, and are crucial to ensure effective and equitable conservation outcomes (Borrini-Feyerabend, 2013; Verschuuren et al., 2021). Consistent with the CBD Scientific and Technical Advice on OECMs (Decision 14/8 Annex III, A (g) and (m)), consultation with relevant governance authorities, landowners and rightsholders, stakeholders and the public (which is distinct from obtaining FPIC; see above and Sections 4.3 and 5.2) should occur prior to areas being recognised as OECMs, and OECMs should be documented in a transparent manner, such as on a public website. This proactive engagement and open access to information will help build common understanding and broader constituencies of support for OECM recognition.

Case study 5.
Hutan Harapan

Location: Sumatra, Indonesia | **Example of**: A potential OECM where multiple stakeholders are involved in the governance and management of a high conservation value forest area

Hutan Harapan (which translates as 'Forest of Hope') is a forestry concession for environmental services (previously known as an ecosystem restoration concession) in Sumatra, Indonesia. It illustrates the complexity of governance and management arrangements that may be found at a site. The 98,000 hectare site consists of ex-logging concessions in lowland tropical forest. It supports rich, endangered biodiversity and the livelihoods of Indigenous groups, but is also under threat from illegal expansion of plantation agriculture and mining interests (oil, gas, coal).

The area is within the national forest estate, and the Ministry of Environment and Forestry is therefore the ultimate decision-maker on its use. However, the Ministry has delegated the right to restore and manage the forest to a private company, through two Ecosystem Restoration Concession licences, one valid for 100 years, the other for 60 years and extendable by another 35 years. Responsibility for many key decisions, such as agreements that allow other groups to use parts of the site, is split between the Ministry and the licence-holding company. The company has the primary responsibility for managing the site, but this is carried out following a zoning and management plan approved by the Ministry. The Ministry (and other government agencies, including local government) at times provide support to management, e.g. for law enforcement.

The company recognises the rights of Indigenous peoples in the area and has established agreements with various Indigenous and local community groups that allow them to manage or utilise parts of the concession, within the framework of social forestry schemes approved by the Ministry. The company also has to deal with individuals and groups occupying land illegally. With law enforcement alone unlikely to be effective or sustainable, the company combines action to prevent further expansion of illegal land use with negotiation on the long-term use of the land that has already been cleared.

In the case of the Hutan Harapan, the 'governing authority' includes the Ministry and the concession-holding company, while Indigenous and local communities, and illegal land users, are among the stakeholders. Meeting the OECM criteria that 'governance and management is effective' means demonstrating that the efforts of the governing authority, working with the stakeholders, delivers conservation impacts.

Hutan Harapan as a potential OECM has been further described in 2018 as part of the *Parks* Journal 24 Special Issue on OECMs.

Case study 6.
The Takitumu Conservation Area

Location: Cook Islands | **Example of:** A reported OECM whose recognition was initiated by Indigenous peoples through a process that included detailed assessment and FPIC documentation.

The Takitumu Conservation Area (TCA) spans 155 hectares of forest and is owned and protected by three tribal families. The primary goal of protection is to restore the population of the endemic Kākerōri bird, also known as the Rarotonga monarch, and preserve the natural area "for the benefit and enjoyment of present and future generations of the Cook Islands." Management of the area includes annual rat control efforts. TCA is flanked by signs that highlight important information about the boundary, biodiversity and cultural value of the site in Cook Islands Maori and English. The recognition of TCA as an OECM was the result of a national workshop on OECMs that inspired the site manager, also a landowner and traditional title holder, to approach the National Environment Service (NES) and initiate the site assessment. A working group made up of landowner family representatives was formed for the assessment, and this provided them with a deeper understanding of what the OECM recognition entails. FPIC was given at a community meeting. NES presented the landowners with a certificate commemorating the recognition of TCA as an OECM that can be passed down through the generations. Detailed documentation of the recognition process, including an FPIC letter and a completed Site-level tool, as well as a management plan, can be found on the Cook Islands NES website. (Cook Island News, 2024)

The assessment of the Takitumu Conservation Area included multiple community meetings to discuss, obtain consent, and, eventually, celebrate the OECM's recognition. © Cook Islands National Environment Service

3.4 National OECM processes

Good practice: Implement a participatory national OECM process to facilitate and support site-level OECM identification and reporting.

The identification, reporting, monitoring and strengthening of OECMs should take place at the site level. However, a national OECM process can assist the site-level work by building on the global guidance given in the tool, with reference to the legal, policy, cultural and ecological factors specific to each country.

A national process might also aim to ensure that (a) OECMs and the OECM identification process are understood by decision-makers, rightsholders and other stakeholders; (b) a full range of rightsholders, stakeholders and knowledge holders are involved in the OECM identification process; (c) there is consistency in applying the OECM identification criteria; (d) OECMs are effectively integrated within national plans and programs for biodiversity conservation; (e) a national approach to documenting and reporting OECMs is established,

Case study 7.
South Africa's national OECM process

Example of: A national OECM process to enhance enabling conditions for OECMs

A country-level assessment was undertaken in South Africa between 2018–2021 through a government and private partnership to determine the type and potential extent of OECMs (Marnewick et al., 2021). The study aimed to: (a) assist South Africa to institutionalise OECMs into its existing policy frameworks, and (b) align OECMs with the biodiversity stewardship community of practice, facilitating the full integration of all possible initiatives across South Africa that meet the OECM definition.

The study tested the CBD definition and IUCN WCPA Task Force on OECMs Technical Report (2019) within a national context. This process included a national policy and technical review of South Africa's legislative and policy frameworks and their interplay with the OECM definition, extensive stakeholder engagement through three workshops, and case study site assessments of potential OECMs.

While countries may follow different pathways to developing national OECM processes, South Africa integrated four principles that were considered central to an inclusive and robust process.

First, principal stakeholders, e.g. state ministries, environmental NGOs, and representative bodies of Indigenous peoples and local communities, were engaged one-on-one to familiarise them with the OECM concept. Second, stakeholder workshops were inclusive and representative of all affected stakeholders (especially previously marginalised groups). Third, a policy and technical review was undertaken by professionals (e.g. environmental lawyers) to better align the national legal frameworks so they can support meeting the OECM criteria. This step helped set a stronger foundation for meaningful dialogue during the second stakeholder workshop. Fourth, potential OECMs were identified and a sample assessed at ground level against the OECM definition using the IUCN site-level tool.

Figure 6. South's Africa's national approach to establishing enabling conditions for OECMs. (Source: Prepared by the report authors)

or that OECMs are integrated into an existing documenting and reporting mechanism; and (f) the identification of OECMs builds on any existing policies and plans concerning conservation outside of protected areas.

Activities under a national OECM process might include:

- Recognising areas of importance for biodiversity that are outside of formally protected areas, under any governance types, and assessing their potential as OECMs or protected areas.
- Establishing a list of potential OECMs to be included in the consultation, consent and identification processes, with reference to existing analysis, priority setting and policy. Sources of information might include national lists of threatened species and ecosystems, the National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan, protected areas network planning, KBAs, Alliance for Zero Extinction (AZE) sites, Ecologically or Biologically Significant Marine Areas (EBSAs) and others. A locally relevant category of governance – such as 'Indigenous territories' – might also be adopted as a starting point for a list of potential OECMs. IUCN guidance on connectivity (Hilty et al., 2020), privately protected areas (Mitchell et al., 2018), geoconservation (Crofts, 2020) and transboundary conservation (Vasilijevic et al., 2015) may also be relevant.
- Seeking consent from governing authorities and, where provided, supporting site-level assessments.
- Reviewing the results of site-level OECM identification to ensure consistent application of the criteria.
- Documenting OECMs in a national database, and coordinating the process of reporting OECMs to the WD-OECM.
- Coordinating planning and strategy for strengthening OECMs (see Section 8).
- Bringing together the institutions and expertise required for the identification, reporting, monitoring and strengthening of OECMs, including universities, other research institutes and NGOs.
- Identifying opportunities in national and subnational legislation and policy for the management and conservation of OECMs to be recognised and strengthened.

Annex 4 sets out a range of additional considerations to be integrated into national planning processes for OECMs.

Case study 8.
Japan's national process for OECMs on private lands

Example of: National process that includes multiple stakeholders and provides a systematic approach to identifying OECMs

As a first step towards identifying OECMs governed and managed by various stakeholders – including private sectors, local government and NGOs – Japan has started to identify 'nationally certified sustainably managed natural sites'. The scheme was piloted in 2022 and launched nationally in 2023, with 184 sites certified by February 2024. The criteria for certification were developed with reference to the IUCN site-level tool for identifying OECMs, meaning that the sites should have a strong chance of meeting the criteria and being reported under the CBD. The certification scheme is operated by the Ministry of the Environment, who works with the governance or management authorities of the proposed sites. A preliminary review to confirm eligibility is followed by an expert review. An important facet of the scheme is that the certification is for five years. If site managers wish to retain their status as a nationally certified site, they will need to demonstrate that they have retained or improved its biodiversity values, through adequate monitoring.

3.5 Laws and policies

Good practice: Review national and sub-national laws, regulations and policies, and revise them where necessary, to ensure legal and policy coherence for OECM identification, reporting, monitoring and strengthening.

This subsection focuses on the influence of laws and policies on managing, identifying, reporting, monitoring of OECMs. Section 8.4 builds on this section by focusing on how laws and policies can be used to strengthen the effective long-term governance and management of OECMs.

It is important to understand the role and influence of laws and policies on OECMs early in the identification and reporting process because they can have a significant positive or negative role relating to OECMs (Paterson, 2023).

Potential OECMs are subject to a variety of laws and policies. For example, an Indigenous territory may be recognised and governed under customary laws and simultaneously regulated by domestic and international laws and policies relating to basic rights, as well as laws and policies covering fiscal arrangements, land tenure, conservation, environment and climate change, exploitation of natural resources, spatial planning, and economic development.

Laws and policies can operate as enablers of OECM identification and reporting by:

- Recognising and supporting substantive and procedural human rights, including a requirement for free, prior and informed consent, as well as land tenure, resources use and management rights;
- Clarifying important definitions (such as what is and what is not a protected area);
- Recognising locally led planning and management;
- Recognising the legitimacy of local institutions; and
- Prohibiting ecologically harmful activities within and adjacent to sites important for biodiversity, including through robust social and environmental impact assessments.

Existing laws and policies can also hinder identification and reporting of OECMs. Weak human rights, land tenure or land use laws and policies may prevent governance authorities from managing their sites for positive social and ecological outcomes. Similarly, sectoral laws and policies on natural resources, agriculture, extractives, and energy can be framed in ways that work against management of sites to maintain their biodiversity values. For example, in many countries landowners do not have rights to the subsoil resources. As a result, mining permits can be issued to companies without landowners' consent, often leading to social harms and environmental degradation.

There is also a risk that new laws and policies on OECMs could be developed in ways that exclude rightsholders and stakeholders or set standards for identifying OECMs that are not in accordance with the criteria set out in CBD Decision 14/8. This might include laws and policies that result in overly centralised, restrictive and/or rigid approaches to the OECM framework. Examples of problematic laws and policies include those that:

- Give government agencies the power to identify and report OECMs without the necessary consent, thereby deepening procedural and substantive injustices;
- Make sites identified as OECMs subject to conditions that negatively impact existing governance, management or monitoring systems; or
- Develop national criteria for identifying sites that do not uphold the standards set out in CBD Decision 14/8.

These outcomes would be contrary to the stipulations in CBD Decision 14/8 that OECM identification and reporting should uphold rights, not require changes to local systems, and apply to sites that deliver the long-term in situ conservation of biodiversity.

A useful two-phase approach to assess the need for legal or policy reform is described below. Legal traditions, sources, and structures, as well as the substantive focus of potentially relevant laws and policies, naturally differ widely across countries and it is important to recognise this diversity and plurality during both phases. It is also important to ensure that both phases are undertaken in an open, participatory, respectful and transparent manner, given the range of

potential stakeholders and rightsholders involved or affected. Note that individual laws may be more or less relevant to specific kinds of OECMs, such as those governed by different kinds of authorities (government, private, Indigenous peoples, local communities) and across biomes (land, inland water, coastal and marine).

Phase 1. Review and assess the existing law and policy landscape.

Conduct an assessment of how applicable laws and policies influence, enable or inhibit identification and reporting of OECMs, including the involvement of rightsholders. This provides the basis for a participatory process of exploring whether any reforms are needed to better identify and report OECMs. The process should include a range of relevant rightsholders and stakeholders.

Phase 2. Respond to the outcome.

Once the relevant laws and policies have been reviewed and assessed, there may be a range of outcomes, which are not mutually exclusive:

- **Status quo is sufficient.** Existing laws and policies provide a strong basis to identify and report OECMs (see Sections 4 and 5).
- **Some amendments to laws or policies are required.** This may include strengthening laws that provide rights to the governance authorities of potential OECMs, or reforming laws that undermine local governance, management and effective long-term conservation outcomes. See Section 8.4 and Box 4 for further guidance.
- **New laws and policies are required**. One or more new laws or policies are necessary to support identification and reporting of OECMs. Reasons for this conclusion may include a need to provide clarity, consistency and certainty regarding the legal arrangements for potential OECMs (Paterson, 2023). Details of what a new law, policy or framework might address are set out in Box 4.

In sum, considering the clarity provided in CBD Decision 14/8 about the criteria for identifying OECMs, and the diversity of actors, legal issues, and laws and policies involved in identifying and reporting OECMs, it is important that legal issues are considered through an inclusive and transparent processes to ensure that any outcomes support rights-based, equitable and effective conservation outcomes.

Box 4

Issues that OECM-related laws and policies might seek to address

Any OECM-related laws and policies should be based on and promote the CBD criteria for identifying OECMs set out in Decision 14/8. Where it is deemed useful for these international criteria to be enabled through laws or policies, the following are issues to consider:

- OECM principles and objectives, outlining a range of core principles or objectives relevant to OECMs that would inform all decisions relating to them. This could include reference to CBD Decision 14/8 and underscore the human rights and ecological standards it sets out.
- The rules and process for identifying, reporting and monitoring OECMs in ways that accord with CBD Decision 14/8, including: modalities for how and by whom OECMs can be identified and reported; stipulating the rights-based and participatory nature of OECM identification and reporting; setting out how to comply with national and international FPIC requirements; clarifying who exercises authority over an area; detailing modalities for monitoring sustained and effective long-term outcomes for the in situ conservation of biodiversity; clarifying linkages between biodiversity outcomes, ecosystem services and cultural and other values.
- Actions that are necessary to integrate OECMs within planning frameworks, including conservation plans, spatial plans, land use management plans, strategic development and infrastructure plans.
- Locally appropriate names for OECMs. For example, the Republic of Korea created a new term for OECMs that can be better understood by the public, 'Nature Coexistence Areas' ('자연공존지역' / 'Jayeon Gongzone Jiyeok' in Korean; KNPS, 2023), and Brazil uses 'Effective complementary conservation measures' ('*Medidas Efetivas Complementares de Conservaçao*' in Portuguese).
- Rules about when to delist sites that become degraded over time, i.e. setting out the grounds and process should an area no longer satisfy the OECM requirements.
- Creation of rules for the continuation of recognition of OECMs.
- Penalties for those whose actions threaten OECMs.
- Actions and incentives to strengthen the governance and management of OECMs that have been identified and reported (see Section 8).

Case study 9.
Canada decision support tool

Example of: National policy on OECMs adapted from the IUCN Guidance

IUCN encourages the development of national adaptations of its guidelines on OECMs. Such adaptations make the guidance more relevant to each national context, create ownership of the process, provide clarity of language and are relevant to national legislation. Canada has developed a very detailed adaptation of national guidelines for identifying OECMs and protected areas in terrestrial ecosystems.

The Canadian decision support tool was developed with input from Federal, Provincial and Territorial Governments as well as civil society organisations and representatives from Indigenous peoples. The tool enables consistent and transparent evaluation and reporting of terrestrial protected and conserved areas in Canada. It allows for a common and trusted framework.

Case study 10.
The Philippines' draft administrative order on OECMs

Example of: National legislative reform to advance OECMs

The Philippines Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) has prepared a draft administrative order that provides guidelines for the identification, selection, recognition and registration of OECMs. Amongst the important features of the draft order are that it:

- Clarifies the relationship of OECMs to protected areas, which are already regulated through the country's National Integrated Protected Areas System (NIPAS) Act.
- Recognises that the 'governing authority' of an OECM is the institution, individual, Indigenous peoples or communal group, or other body acknowledged as having responsibility, accountability and authority in protecting, restoring and managing, including decision-making in their resource management unit.
- Adopts guiding principles on OECMs, including that they have a documented contribution to biodiversity conservation, that they are recognised through a rights-based process, and that their identification considers ecological representativeness and connectivity.
- Adopts a three-stage process for identification of OECMs, with a rapid screening process to identify potential OECMs, which may be confirmed as candidate OECMs with the consent of the relevant governing authority, and then subject to full assessment. The results of assessment are subject to review and endorsement.
- References the country's KBA inventory as a key source of potential sites.
- Establishes a national OECM registry, to hold information relevant to OECMs.
- Establishes a national institutional framework for implementation of the order, by expanding the role of the existing National NIPAS review committee to become the National NIPAS and OECM Review Committee (NNORC), including expanding the remit of the committee's technical working group.
- Provides for support to capacity-building, monitoring, evaluation and reporting for the governing authorities and the institutions involved in the assessment of OECMs.
- Addresses the need for on-going funding and support to recognised OECMs through an 'adopt an OECM' scheme to encourage private sector partnerships, and by mandating DENR to put in place programs to support recognised OECMs, including annual awards, technical assistance, certification and assistance to explore potential climate/carbon payments.

Important note: *At the time of publication, the draft order was being discussed with Indigenous peoples and coastal community representatives. As a result, the details of the final order may be different from those described here.*

3.6 Creation of new OECMs

Good practice: Newly established governance and management arrangements are identified and reported as OECMs once it is clear they will be sustained and have resulted in biodiversity outcomes that are expected to endure for the long term.

The original rationale and focus of the OECM framework was to promote the identification, reporting, monitoring and strengthening of **existing management arrangements**. However, there is nothing in the CBD definition or IUCN site tool that would prevent an OECM being newly **created**, through changes to the management arrangements or other aspects, as long as these changes were carried out by or with the consent of the governing authority and relevant rightsholders. Creation of an OECM might involve, for example:

- Changes to the management of a site to reduce pressures or ensure that management contributes to in situ conservation of biodiversity values.
- Creation of an institution to manage a site in a way that contributes to conservation of important biodiversity.
- Adoption of policies, regulations or other mechanisms to give a long-term basis for the management arrangements at a site.
- Restoration of a site in a way that restores or protects important biodiversity values.

An initial assessment (e.g. using the IUCN site-level tool) can assist to identify what changes are required before a site can meet the criteria as an OECM. Once the changes have been made, the site should be assessed again to confirm that it now meets the criteria.

3.7 Ecological restoration and OECMs

Good practice: Restoration areas should not be recognised as OECMs until they are delivering demonstrable and significant outcomes for the in situ conservation of biodiversity that are expected to endure for the long term.

Specific conditions apply in the case of the identification of a site where an ecosystem is being restored. During negotiation of Decision 14/8, qualifying phrases such as “have a significant biodiversity value, *or have objectives to achieve this*” and “achieve, or is ***expected to achiev***e, positive and sustained outcomes for the *in-situ* conservation of biodiversity” (emphasis added) were added to the guiding text for identification of OECMs. Governments proposing these caveats stressed that they were added to address sites where restoration was already taking place to acknowledge deliberate attempts at ecosystem recovery. Restoration of ecosystems is a vital conservation tool, but **restoration areas should not be recognised as OECMs until they are delivering demonstrable and significant biodiversity outcomes** (see Box 5). However, an initial assessment using the site-level identification tool could establish that the area is a candidate OECM, confirming the support of the governing authority, Indigenous peoples and local communities, and other stakeholders, and that many of the criteria other than the ‘important biodiversity’ criterion have been met. Sites that are being restored should also be reported under Target 2 of the GBF.

Box 5

Ecological restoration in OECMs

Ecological restoration is the process of managing or assisting the recovery of an ecosystem that has been degraded, damaged or destroyed, as a means of sustaining ecosystem resilience and conserving biodiversity (CBD, 2016). It is likely to become a more common and necessary conservation tool in the future.

IUCN's guidance is that **areas proposed for, or under active, restoration efforts should not be recognised as OECMs until they are delivering demonstrable and significant biodiversity outcomes**. In addition, any restoration efforts must:

1. Be taking place in an ecosystem of high biodiversity value so that the area, once restored, will qualify as an OECM by virtue of its conservation value and/or contribution to strengthening existing protected area networks;
2. Have reduced the threats that caused the original degradation and biodiversity loss;
3. Show successful ecosystem recovery based on the principles of ecological restoration;
4. Contribute to long-term maintenance of a resilient and evolving ecosystem; and
5. Demonstrate active ecological restoration or natural regeneration of a type and at a scale that is expected to regain and maintain ecological integrity and a full complement of species.

For further guidance on ecological restoration on protected areas (which also applies to OECMs) see IUCN WCPA's publication *Ecological restoration for protected areas: principles, guidelines and best practices* (Keenleyside et al., 2012).

3.8 Examples of potential OECMs

To illustrate the range of possible OECMs, this section lists **examples of sites that are likely to be potential OECMs.** Confirming a site as an OECM will always require assessment against all the OECM criteria, and appropriate consent from rightsholders and stakeholders. The examples cover a range of governance types and are divided into primary, secondary and ancillary conservation categories (see Box 1 and Figure 3), but are not meant to be exhaustive or without exception. Examples for which the citation has been marked with an asterisk (*) can be found in a Special Issue of PARKS journal on OECMs (IUCN WCPA, 2018).

Primary conservation examples:

- Areas that are important for biodiversity that are governed by Indigenous peoples, local communities or private entities, and managed for conservation, where the governing body wishes the areas to be recognised and reported as an OECM, rather than as a protected area (see Case Study 6).
- Privately conserved areas (see Case Study 25 and Mitchell et al., 2018).
- Natural ecosystems that are permanently set aside within an agricultural or forestry concession, such as old-growth, primary, or other high-biodiversity-value forests, and are effectively protected from threats (see Case Study 23).
- Natural areas managed by universities or governments for biological research.

Secondary conservation examples:

- Areas important for biodiversity that are managed for conservation by Indigenous peoples and local communities, combined with low levels of use of natural resources practised on a sustainable basis and in a way that does not degrade the area's biodiversity (e.g. many locally managed marine areas in the Pacific; Govan, 2009).
- Traditional management systems that maintain high levels of associated biodiversity. These could include certain agricultural or forest management systems that maintain native species and their habitat (e.g. selectively managed woodlands as described in Eghenter, 2018; traditional pastoral lands as described in Mwamidi et al., 2018).
- Areas managed primarily for public recreation but which are large enough and sufficiently natural to also effectively achieve the in situ conservation of biodiversity (e.g. wild grassland, wetlands) and which are managed to maintain these biodiversity values (e.g. Gray et al., 2018).

- Lands and waters controlled by military institutions where the overarching purpose is defence, but where specific portions are managed for secondary objectives focused on the conservation of biodiversity, enabling those portions to qualify as OECMs (e.g. the Canadian Forces Base Shilo).
- Watersheds or other areas that are managed primarily for water resource management but are also managed for in situ conservation of biodiversity (e.g. Matallana-Tobón et al., 2018).
- Permanent or long-term fisheries closure areas designed to ensure stock recruitment, with a secondary objective to conserve specialised ecosystems in their entirety, or conserve species at risk through the in situ conservation of biodiversity as a whole.
- Hunting reserves that are managed to maintain viable populations of hunted and non-hunted native species.
- Areas successfully restored from degraded or threatened ecosystems, to provide important ecosystem services but which are also managed for biodiversity conservation, e.g. freshwater and coastal wetlands restored for flood protection.
- Areas that contribute to conservation because of their role in connecting protected areas and other areas of particular importance for the conservation of biodiversity, thereby contributing to the long-term viability of larger ecosystems (e.g. Waithaka and Warigia Njoroge, 2018). Such connectivity areas are managed partly to achieve in situ conservation of biodiversity in their own right, as opposed to only movement zones.

Ancillary conservation examples:

- Sacred sites with high biodiversity values that are conserved in the long term by one or more faith groups (e.g. Matallana-Tobón et al., 2018).
- Areas protected for historical or cultural values, and in doing so achieve the in situ conservation of biodiversity e.g., historic wrecks, war graves.
- Permanent exclusion zones around defence or industrial installations where biodiversity thrives because other land uses and disturbance have been banned.
- Areas protected to ensure the provision of environmental services, e.g. to protect an important water catchment area, or to mitigate the impact of landslides, fires, volcanic eruptions or floods, which also support high biodiversity values.

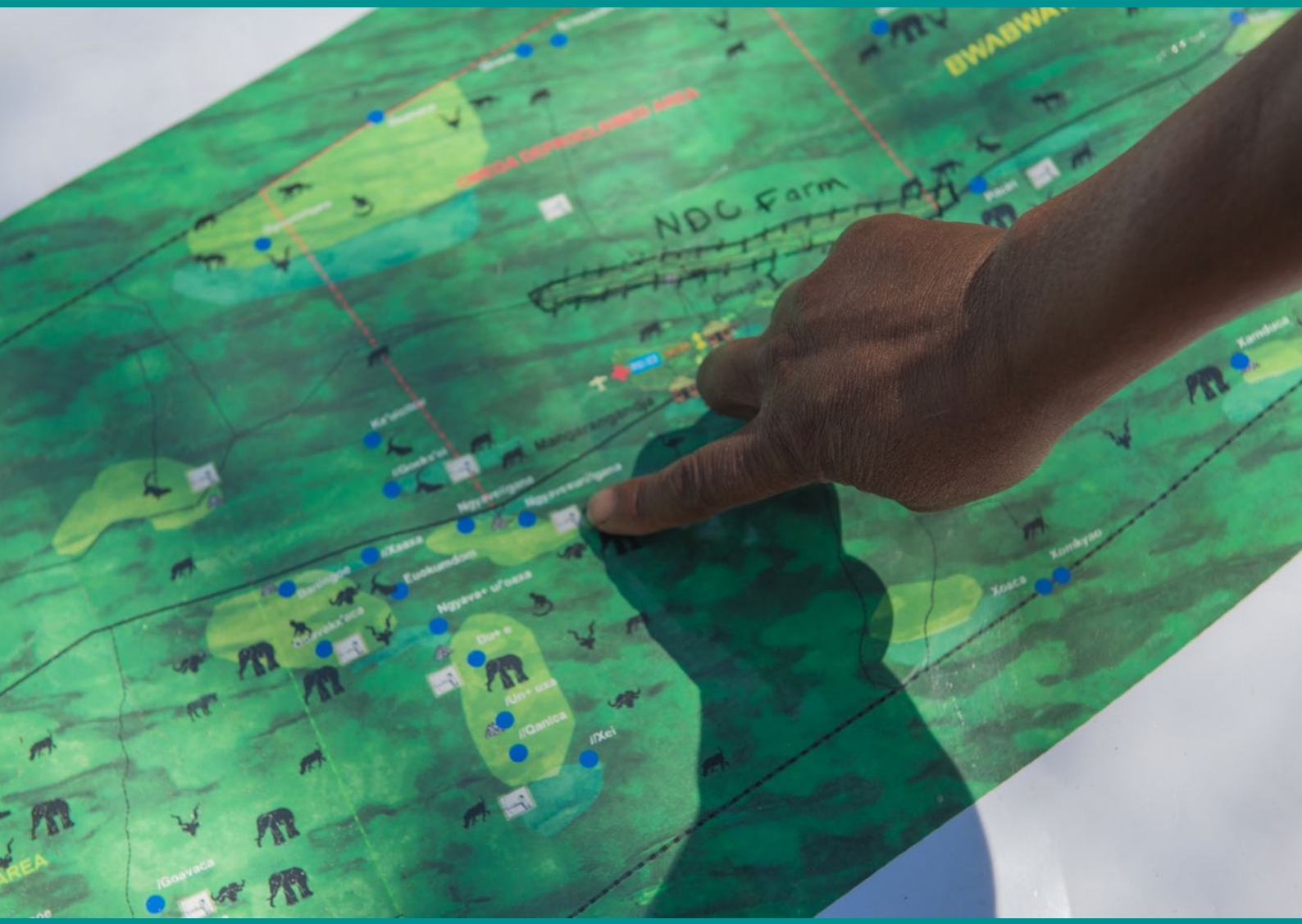
3.9 Examples of sites unlikely to meet the CBD criteria

The following areas and management regimes are **unlikely to qualify as OECMs**:

- Small, semi-natural areas within an intensively managed landscape with limited in situ biodiversity conservation value, such as municipal parks, formal/domestic gardens, arboreta, field margins, roadside verges, hedgerows, narrow shoreline or watercourse setbacks, fire breaks, recreational beaches, marinas and golf courses.
- Forests that are managed commercially for timber supply and are intended for logging, even though they may have some conservation values and support some species of interest. Such areas should be considered as contributing to GBF Target 10.
- Fishery closures, and other spatial fisheries management tools, including fishing quotas or catch limits, temporary set asides or gear restriction areas with a single species, species group, or habitat focus, that do not deliver long-term in situ conservation of the whole ecosystem. Such areas should be considered as contributing to GBF Target 10.
- Agricultural lands managed in a manner that limits the in situ conservation of biodiversity. This may include, for example, pastures that are grazed too intensively to support native grassland ecosystems or species, or grasslands replanted with monocultures or non-native species for the purposes of livestock production.
- Temporary agricultural set-asides, summer fallow and grant-maintained changes to agricultural practice that may benefit biodiversity but are not permanent.
- Conservation measures that apply to a single species or group of species over a wide geographical range such as hunting regulations or whale-watching rules.
- Areas with temporary conservation agreements and areas that are used for offsets and do not have a clear set of governance arrangements for conservation.

Section 4.

Introducing the site-level identification tool



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The IUCN site-level tool for identifying OECMs promotes participatory approaches to assessing sites as well as drawing on diverse knowledge systems that are relevant to the site's governance and management.

4.1 The site-level tool for identifying OECMs

Good practice: Assess sites against the CBD criteria using the relevant language version of the IUCN site-level tool, with the consent of rightsholders, and with involvement of other relevant stakeholders.

In 2023, IUCN published a *Site-level tool for identifying other effective area-based conservation measures (OECMs)* (Jonas et al., 2023), available here. The Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO) has augmented this guidance with a Handbook for identifying, evaluating and reporting other effective area-based conservation measures in marine fisheries (FAO, 2022), available here. This section of the guidelines outlines general principles on the use of the site-level identification tool, while Section 5 provides detailed advice on the application of the criteria. Both sections should be read in conjunction with the site-level identification tool.

The site-level identification tool guides users through a three-step process of initial screening, securing the consent of key stakeholders, and assessing the site against eight criteria (Figure 7). Users can be members of the governing authority of the site (in which case the process is a self-assessment), or external assessors who have consent from the governing authority.

Figure 7. The three steps towards identifying OECMs. (Source: Adapted from Jonas et al, 2023)

Step 1: Screening is a rapid exercise that can be carried out based on existing knowledge, without the need for expending time and resources on a comprehensive stakeholder consultation. The screening exercise is intended to exclude sites that are clearly not OECMs and is based on two criteria: the site is not a protected area, and the site is thought to have important biodiversity. The information used to assess these criteria will be re-examined during the full assessment stage. **The outcome of the screening stage is a decision on whether the site is a potential OECM or not**. Only sites that are deemed to be potential OECMs should move to Step 2.

Step 2: Consent. During this stage, the governing authority, Indigenous peoples and local communities and other rightsholders (as appropriate), have the right to provide or withhold consent to proceed with the full assessment. Step 2 can be carried out after or simultaneously with Step 1, as appropriate. However, Step 2 **must** be completed before the full assessment (Step 3) can be carried out. **Once the appropriate entities have given their approval for the process, the site moves from being considered a potential OECM to a candidate**

OECM. If they do not give their consent, the process should not proceed. Consent from Indigenous peoples and local community groups, even that secured through the required FPIC process, can be withdrawn at any time.

Step 3: Full assessment. During the full assessment, best available information is used to assess the site against six more criteria. The full assessment process leads to a 'yes', 'uncertain/partial', or 'no' response to the guiding question under each criterion.

At the end of the assessment process:

- A site with a 'yes' response to every criterion is confirmed as an OECM, subject to any rightsholder consent and approval by the governing authority.
- A site with a combination of 'yes' and 'uncertain/partial' responses, or with all 'uncertain/partial' responses, remains a candidate OECM until further information or other changes allow it to be confirmed.
- A site with one or more 'no' responses is not currently an OECM but might be reassessed in the future if information suggests that the situation has changed.

Case study 11.
The Canadian Border Services College's main campus

Location: Quebec, Canada | Example of: A site that initially did not meet OECM criteria, but after addressing key areas, did meet the criteria and was reported

When the forest on the main campus of the Canadian Border Services Agency (CBSA) was first assessed as an OECM, measures to control damaging recreational activities were judged to be inadequate to meet the requirement for effective management. However, the assessment resulted in recommendations for improvements to the management. Once these were implemented, the site passed a reassessment and was included in Canada's Protected and Conserved Areas database in 2022. The CBSA main campus has 8.4 hectares of maple grove forest, an important remnant of natural forest in a biodiversity-rich region. Several at-risk species of plants, mammals, reptiles, birds and fish have been found at the site. Initial screening by the relevant government agency, Environment and Climate Change Canada, concluded that there was inadequate communication of what activities were allowed or prohibited as part of recreational use of the site. In response, the CBSA put in place signage and monitoring to ensure the forest remains intact and retains its importance for biodiversity. The changes brought in as a response to the OECM assessment have led to further work with local consultants and Indigenous communities on the biodiversity value of the site. The results of this work will feed into future revisions of the site's management plan (Canada Border Services Agency, 2023; Government of Canada, 2023).

4.2 Data sources and working with incomplete data and uncertainty

Good practice: Use all available data sources, including local and Indigenous peoples' knowledge, to achieve better decisions in the face of incomplete data and uncertainty.

Information on a site's biodiversity, management, threats, legal status and other data will be required to apply the criteria in the site-level identification tool. If a national (or subnational/regional) OECM process is in place (see Section 3.4), this should provide useful guidance on questions such as 'what areas are identified as protected areas?', 'what constitutes an important biodiversity value?', 'what legal or other mechanisms are considered sufficiently robust to ensure that the site is managed for the long term?', and more.

Data collection is likely to include a combination of searches for published and unpublished data and reports, a review of the scientific literature, and consultation with stakeholders and others with relevant knowledge. The site-level tool includes suggestions on sources of information to apply each criterion.

In many cases, Indigenous and local knowledge and experience will be an important input to the OECM identification process, in addition to that of researchers, NGOs and officials. Additional actions may be required to ensure that the relevant knowledge holders are involved, FPIC is obtained, and that their input is documented.

In applying the site-level tool, assessors will be required to make judgements based on best available data and information. In many cases this information will be incomplete or may be open to different and possibly conflicting interpretations. Some criteria require assessors to make a judgement about the probability of future developments at the site. Examples of areas where such judgements will be required include (but are not limited to):

- Determining the boundaries of the site, which may require considering limits of legal or customary rights, conflicts and practical management considerations, and ensuring that representative and viable examples of the important biodiversity values are found within the site's boundaries.
- The extent to which the management of the site is maintaining its important biodiversity values, mitigating pressures, and ability to address likely future threats.
- The probability that the site will continue to effectively conserve important biodiversity values for the long term.
- The equity of the governance and management of resources at the site, and the probability that management outcomes will be increasingly equitable in future.

Good practice in working with uncertainty in the application of the criteria includes:

- Working with a multi-stakeholder group (see Section 4.3), which allows available data to be discussed and scrutinised from different perspectives, leading to a judgement that is widely supported. A typical process might use a series of meetings and interviews to collate key information, followed by a multi-stakeholder workshop where the information gathered is used to assess the site against the criteria. Such a process should consider evidence of past use and governance, and both written and oral sources.
- Documenting sources of uncertainty (e.g. key data missing, uncertainty in the interpretation of data) so that they can be addressed if further data become available.
- Documenting the reasoning behind decisions taken on the application of the criteria, so that others can understand how the group has reached its conclusions, and to support future reassessment.

4.3 Involvement of rightsholders and stakeholders

Good practice: Involvement of rightsholders and stakeholders is central to the OECM identification process, resulting in legitimate outcomes and improved understanding and support for the conservation of the biodiversity values of the site.

While the involvement of the governing authority and any Indigenous peoples and local communities is mandatory because their consent is required (through FPIC, in the case of the latter) for the identification of an OECM (see Section 3.3), the involvement of other stakeholders is also important because they can influence, or be impacted by, the management of the site, even if they do not have a direct role in its governance. The CBD emphasises the importance of involving these rightsholders and stakeholders. In particular, the GBF reinforces the importance of the role of Indigenous peoples and local communities as custodians of biodiversity and partners in its conservation (GBF section C, Para. 7(a), and Goal C), as well as the involvement of wider society (GBF section C, Para. 7(c)) and the importance of effective participation (e.g. GBF Target 22).

Most potential OECMs have a variety of stakeholders, including industry, government agencies that do not have a role in governance of the site, scientists and researchers, NGOs, community groups from outside the locality, nearby private landowners and individuals who use the site's resources. These stakeholders' interests may have a formal basis (e.g. extraction licences or legal mandates) or be informal or casual. Identifying these groups and deciding the appropriate level of involvement and consultation is a key part of identifying an OECM. Questions that may help to determine how important a particular group is and how deeply it should be involved in the OECM process include:

- Does it have legal rights/duties or other established rights/duties (e.g. customary) over the site or its resources?
- How big is the impact of its activities on the site, especially on important biodiversity values?
- How important is access to the site for the group? For example, is it at the core of its livelihood/business/activities, or only of minor importance?
- Does it have knowledge, data or experience relevant to the assessment?
- Can it show that it has a long-term relationship with the site?

The process will need to be designed to take into account the norms and regulations that apply at national and local levels, as well as the specific needs of the site's stakeholders. A collaborative, multi-stakeholder approach may be appropriate. Such an approach should:

- Allow for integration of data and knowledge on the site from a variety of sources, including ensuring that Indigenous and local knowledge and perceptions are given prominence;
- Lead to more informed discussion and better decisions on the application of the criteria, especially where there is an element of subjective judgement required (see Section 4.2);
- Build a shared understanding of the reasoning behind the outcome of the assessment process; and
- Raise awareness of the importance of the site and build shared commitment to the ongoing effective management of its biodiversity values.

Table 3 summarises the activities involved in a generic OECM site-level identification process.

Table 3. A generic process for involvement of stakeholders in site-level OECM identification.

Activity	Requirements
Rightsholder and stakeholder identification	• Includes the governing authority. • Includes Indigenous peoples and local communities. • Includes groups with relevant knowledge. • Includes groups with historical and or ongoing use or interest in the site. • Includes other stakeholders, e.g. government, private sector, communities neighbouring the site.
Rightsholder and stakeholder consultation	• Secures **formal consent** from the governing authority and **FPIC** from Indigenous peoples and local communities for the identification process. • Consults with stakeholders and others on the **idea of** identifying and reporting an OECM. • Consults with stakeholders and others in the **application** of the criteria in the OECM toolkit; where necessary, this might involve establishing separate forums/processes to consult on specific issues, such as assessment of biodiversity values, the boundaries of the site and management of the site.
Informing rightsholders and stakeholders of the outcome	• If the site meets the criteria to be identified as an OECM, secure **formal consent** from the governing authority and **FPIC** from Indigenous peoples and local communities for reporting it as such. • Inform other stakeholders of the establishment of an OECM, as appropriate.

4.4 Initiating and leading a site identification process

Good practice: OECM identification is led by the site's governing authority, or by another entity with the authority's consent, as well as with the consent of any Indigenous peoples and local communities if they are not the governing authority but have a claim to the site.

The assessment of a site against the OECM criteria may be initiated and led by the site's governing authority (see Section 3.3 on the definition of the governing authority), other stakeholders, or an institution or individual that is not a stakeholder in the site.

If the process is not led by the site's governing authority, then it is important that the authority gives consent for the process (see Step 2 of the tool). Where Indigenous peoples and local communities have a claim to land and resources in the site, their FPIC is also required for the process (see Section 3.3).

The tasks involved in the application of the identification tool, such as stakeholder consultation and identification of biodiversity importance, will in many cases be carried out by the organisation that initiates and leads the assessment, but the responsibility could be shared.

An OECM assessment will likely require resources. An initial assessment of what information is needed and which stakeholders need to be involved will help determine the level of resources needed, while availability of funding should also be assessed. Resources that may be required will vary widely by country and site. They can include such things as stakeholder workshops, studies on biodiversity, or a legal analysis to see how a supporting regulation might be modified.

Case study 12.
The Community Reserve for the Conservation of Grey Parrots

Location: Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) | **Example of**: A reported OECM whose identification was initiated by local communities

The Community Reserve for the Conservation of Grey Parrots in Kasongo, Maniema, DRC, was established by local communities who wanted to see the site recognised quickly, thus opting not to undergo the lengthy process for creating a new protected area. While it is possible that the Reserve may become a protected area in the future, for now it is one of the first OECMs in the country. The 32,800 hectares of forest, savannah, swamp forest and mountain is home to grey parrots (Psittacus erithacus), primates, antelopes, and more. The area also contains sacred sites and conserved medicinal and food plants. It is governed and managed by local community groups from the Wazimba Wa Mulu tribe with technical and financial support from a REDD+ (Reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation in developing countries) programme. These groups recognised the need to protect the area's biodiversity, which was under threat from illegal exploitation, and sought support from governmental agencies. The local communities took part in awareness and capacity-building sessions that influenced their decision to explore whether the site meets the OECM criteria and encouraged community engagement (Milenge, 2024).

Communities local to the Maniema area advanced the assessment of the Community Reserve against OECM criteria in order to see it recognised and protected quickly. © Héritier Milenge Kamalebo

Case study 13.
Playa Blanca

Location: Costa Rica | **Example of:** A potential OECM where the assessment process served as forum to bring together different parties interested in the long-term conservation of a site

Playa Blanca in Costa Rica is an example of using the OECM assessment process to bring together rightsholders and stakeholders and create new governance and management arrangements, building on ongoing efforts. The 5,000 hectare site consists of coastal and marine areas between Playa Bajamar and Playa Herradura. It supports endangered and commercially valuable species including fish, mollusks, crustaceans, isolated corals and echinoderms.

Separate efforts to conserve the area have been underway for some time, including tourist hotels undertaking coral reef restoration, a fishing cooperative that has declared a 'responsible fishing area', and local NGOs carrying out beach clean-up activities. Fish abundance and species richness increased significantly between 1995 and 2006.

In May 2021, Costa Rica started identifying and reporting OECMs, using an approach based on the IUCN WCPA site-level identification tool. At Playa Blanca, this tool was used to bring together stakeholders to discuss the site and its management, facilitated by conservation experts. Initial workshops (January–June 2024) led to support for the process from the municipal mayor, and to agreement among stakeholders to create a task force to consolidate the governance of the site, systematise all the initiatives around the sustainable use of marine resources and advise the Environment Committee of the Municipality of Garabito. Stakeholders also agreed to create an action plan based on prioritised threats to coastal and marine resources. Once a more integrated system for governance and management of the site is in place, the site will be assessed against the criteria as a potential marine OECM.

Section 5.

Identifying OECMs: Screening, consent and full assessment

Identifying OECMs is undertaken at the site-level, using the IUCN site-level tool for identifying OECMs. Assessments can be undertaken by the governing authority or be supported by external actors based on the governing authority's consent (free, prior and informed consent in the case of Indigenous peoples and local communities).

Good practice: Use the IUCN site-level tool for identifying OECMs to guide a process of screening, consent and full assessment. Adapt the tool to local circumstances but ensure respect for the CBD criteria.

This section provides practical guidance on the application of the three steps and eight criteria that are set out in the IUCN *Site-level tool for identifying OECMs (Jonas et al., 2023)*, adding further details and discussion of particular problems. It is recommended that users first review the tool, referring to this section for further information on specific criteria, as needed.

The steps and criteria set out in the site-level identification tool may be summarised as follows:

Step 1: Screening (two associated criteria)

Criteria:

1 The site is not a protected area

2 There is a reasonable likelihood that the site supports important biodiversity values

Step 2: Consent (no associated criteria)

Step 3: Full Assessment (six associated criteria)

Criteria:

3 The site is a geographically defined area

4 The site is confirmed to support important biodiversity values

5 Institutions or mechanisms exist to govern and manage the site

6 Governance and management of the site achieve, or are expected to achieve, the in situ conservation of important biodiversity values

7 In situ conservation of important biodiversity values is expected to be for the long term

8 Governance and management arrangements address equity considerations

5.1 Step 1: Screening

Good practice: Apply an initial screening step as part of a site assessment, to eliminate sites that are clearly not OECMs, thereby avoiding unnecessary use of resources and stakeholders' time.

Screening involves the application of Criteria 1 and 2. Criterion 1 is discussed here, while Criterion 2 is discussed together with Criterion 4 under the full assessment section (5.3).

Applying Criterion 1: Not a protected area

OECMs contribute in their own right to area-based targets for terrestrial, freshwater and marine conservation. This means that areas that are already designated as protected areas or lie within protected areas **should not be identified or reported as OECMs**.

Criteria:

1
The site is not a protected area

In many cases the application of this criterion will be straightforward. The following points may help if there are questions.

A site meets the IUCN criteria for a protected area, but the government does not classify it as such. This may occur, for example, when a site is owned and governed by a private, Indigenous or community group, and not by the government protected area authority. CBD and IUCN guidance is that, where possible, sites that meet the IUCN definition of a protected area should be reported as such to the United Nations Environment Programme World Conservation Monitoring Centre (UNEP-WCMC) who manage the World Database on Protected Areas (WDPA) (see Section 6). Therefore:

- The preferred option is for the relevant government authority to report the site to the WDPA as a protected area.

However, if this is not possible, there are two further options:

- A non-state entity can report the site directly to the WDPA as a protected area. The WDPA allows for reporting by non-state data providers. A non-state data provider needs to show that they have the permission of governing authority, and the FPIC of Indigenous peoples and local communities who claim or use any of the site. The data submitted will need to be verified (see Section 6).
- Report the site as an OECM, if it meets all the criteria and relevant stakeholders have given their consent. This option may be more acceptable to government agencies or other stakeholders who do not wish to report the site as a protected area. Reporting the site as an OECM means that it is recorded in the WD-OECM and included in national reporting under CBD targets.

A site meets the IUCN criteria for a protected area, but the community or private rightsholders do not want it to be reported as such. In some countries, private or community groups may be concerned that declaring a site to be a protected area will restrict their rights, access or control. CBD Decision 14/8 and the site-level tool make it clear that the views of the governing authority and Indigenous and local community rightsholders are paramount. Therefore, the site cannot be reported as a protected area without their agreement (see Sections 3.3 and 4.3). In this case, the option of identifying and reporting the site as an OECM (if it meets all the criteria) may offer a more acceptable alternative.

There is uncertainty about whether the site is a protected area. Many countries have land classifications that could be considered protected areas, such as forest reserves, fisheries closures, or hunting reserves. It is not possible to give definitive guidance, as the specific circumstances are different in every country. However, the following questions may help:

- Does the site meet the IUCN definition of a protected area? (see Section 2.2) Is it recognised, dedicated and managed for the long-term conservation of nature? If the site meets the IUCN criteria for a protected area, then it is a de facto protected area and should be reported as such, subject to the agreement of rightsholders (see above if rightsholders do not want to report the site as a protected area).
- Alternatively, is the site's main purpose to sustain the production of a product (such as timber or fish), a service (such as water supply or recreational value) or another use (such as military training or scientific research)? In these cases, the site is not a protected area according to the IUCN definition. If it has a high likelihood of delivering the long-term in situ conservation of biodiversity outside of a protected area, it is a potential OECM.

Other questions that may help clarify the status of a site are:

- Does national/sub-national legislation or the relevant institution recognise the site as a protected area, using language similar to the IUCN definition?
- Does the private or community governing body or owner of the site recognise the site as a protected area?

Because this issue is related to laws, policies and the official definition of a protected area that applies in a country, for consistency it may be useful to discuss this issue at national level to agree standards that can then be applied to all OECM assessments (see Section 3.4).

The site has been proposed as a protected area but not yet officially designated. If the process of designating the protected area is active and ongoing, then the site should be treated as a future protected area and therefore not a potential OECM. However, if there is little chance that the site will be designated as a protected area soon, and especially if there are immediate pressures and threats, then the best outcome for conservation may be to designate it as an OECM (assuming the site meets all the criteria). If the status of an OECM later changes to a

protected area, then the governing body or national data provider can inform UNEP-WCMC and the information on the site can easily be transferred from the WD-OECM to the WDPA.

The site has been listed under the Ramsar Convention, World Heritage Convention or the Man and Biosphere Programme. The criteria for listing a site under these conventions and programme are broad, and they often include protected areas as well as other areas that might qualify as OECMs. Therefore, the fact that a site is listed under an international convention does not, on its own, make it a protected area. However, in some countries, legislation recognises such sites as protected areas. The applicable laws and regulations need to be checked (perhaps as part of a national OECM process, Section 3.4) to determine if a site's listing under an international convention automatically makes it a protected area.

The site is listed in the WDPA, but does not meet the protected area definition. Some sites have been included in the WDPA, even though they are not protected areas, because they are listed under an international convention relevant to area-based conservation. Ramsar Sites and UNESCO Biosphere Reserves (Man and the Biosphere Programme) may have buffer or transition zones (or sections of them) that align with the OECM definition but usually do not meet the protected area definition. In countries where international designations are not automatically managed as protected areas, there may be value in governments reviewing whether sites should continue to be reported as protected areas or should be re-classified as OECMs.

The site is within the buffer zone of a protected area. The status and definition of a buffer zone vary between countries, and even between types of protected area. Where a buffer zone is within the boundary of a protected area, or governed in a way that conforms with the IUCN definition of a protected area, then it should be treated as such and not, therefore, as an OECM. However, where a buffer zone is outside the boundary of a protected area and is not managed with the primary objective of biodiversity conservation, then it is potentially an OECM. The applicable laws and regulations need to be checked (perhaps as part of a national OECM process, Section 3.4) to determine the status of a buffer zone.

Criteria:

1
The site is not a protected area

Case study 14.
The Freshima Wild Bird Protected Area

Location: Japan | **Example of:** A potential OECM in privately conserved area that is not listed as an official protected area

The Freshima Wild Bird Protected Area is managed for conservation and meets the IUCN definition of a protected area. However, it is privately owned and managed by a conservation NGO, and as such is not included in the Japanese Government's list of protected areas. OECM recognition would allow this site to count towards Japan's contribution to GBF Target 3. The site holds 203 hectares of marshland that support rare bird and plant species, including a breeding population of red-crowned cranes and wintering sea eagles. The site was purchased in 1986 by the Wild Bird Society of Japan, and has been managed to conserve and enhance its biodiversity values, including through grazing, limiting disturbance and monitoring. The site contributes to the conservation of a wider landscape of wetlands and grasslands, and is included in a 'nationally important wetland' recognised by the Ministry of the Environment.

Applying Criterion 2: Reasonable likelihood that the site supports important biodiversity values

Criteria:

2
There is a reasonable likelihood that the site supports important biodiversity values

To pass the screening stage, it should be determined that there is a **reasonable likelihood** that the site supports important biodiversity values. The description of Criterion 4 – the site is **confirmed** to support important biodiversity values (Section 5.3.2) — provides detailed information about important biodiversity values to support a full assessment. To test Criterion 2, the assessor(s) should answer the following question: does available information suggest that the site supports at least one of the following important biodiversity values?

- Rare, threatened or endangered species and ecosystems.
- Natural ecosystems that are under-represented in protected area networks.
- High level of ecological integrity or intactness.
- Significant populations/extent of endemic or range-restricted species or ecosystems.
- Important species aggregations, such as spawning, breeding or feeding areas.
- Importance for ecological connectivity, as part of a network of sites in a larger area.

5.2 Step 2: Consent

Good practice: Apply global best practice (including FPIC) to enable rightsholders and stakeholders to take informed decisions and engage with the identification process on the basis of clear, independent advice and information.

Sites that meet Criteria 1 and 2 are 'potential OECMs'. As detailed in Sections 3.3, 4.3 and 4.4, consent of the governing authority and any Indigenous peoples and local communities is mandatory for them to be considered 'candidate OECMs' and for a full assessment to proceed. For Indigenous peoples and local communities, consent must follow a FPIC process, to ensure that there is transparency and adequate participation of affected members of the group, and that the decision is fully understood and supported. It should be noted that the time required for FPIC (following the recommended guidance) cannot usually be predetermined and may necessarily be long.

Box 6

Free, Prior and Informed Consent

Further resources on FPIC processes are available at the following websites:

- Forest Peoples Programme's curated library of FPIC materials
- FAO guides to FPIC
- Securing Indigenous Peoples' Right to Self-Determination: A Guide on Free, Prior and Informed Consent by the SIRGE Coalition

Women from the Batin Sembilan Indigenous group collecting forest products in the Harapan forest, Sumatra, Indonesia. The company which manages the forest recognises the rights of Indigenous and local community groups and has established agreements with them on management and use of the area. © Aulia Erlangga

5.3 Step 3: Full assessment

Good practice: Assessment of the site against criteria in the IUCN site-level tool, with the involvement of rightsholders and stakeholders, results in the identification and reporting of sites as OECMs through a transparent, well-documented and legitimate process.

The site-level tool provides generic guidance on the assessment of sites against each of the criteria. This section provides further details on specific issues that may be encountered during site-level assessment processes. The criterion numbers listed refer to those used in the site-level tool and should be read in conjunction with that resource.

5.3.1 Applying Criterion 3: Geographically defined area

Criteria:

3
The site is a geographically defined area

'Geographically defined area' implies a spatially delineated area with agreed and demarcated boundaries, which can include land, inland waters, marine and coastal areas, or any combination of these. In exceptional circumstances, boundaries may be defined by physical features that move over time, such as river banks, seasonal flood extent, or the high-water mark or extent of sea ice. Where possible, the boundary should be mapped in digital form to allow integration with other data, including within the WD-OECM.

An OECM may be a single site or a mosaic of sites that, together, meet the CBD criteria. Whatever the shape and size of the site, a defined boundary is essential to enable its area to be calculated, and as a basis for management and monitoring. The headline indicator for GBF Target 3 is 'coverage of protected areas and OECMs'. Measurement of progress against this indicator at the national level will require at least an estimate of the area of protected areas and OECMs.

Defining the boundary. In many cases, the boundary of a potential OECM will be clearly defined by an administrative area, an ecological zone, a customary or traditional territory, or the limits of authority of a governance or management institution. However, there will be cases where these spatial features are overlapping but have different boundaries, posing a challenge to define the potential OECM boundary. The following guidance may be useful:

- OECMs recognise the contribution of existing governance and management practices to biodiversity conservation, so the boundary is likely to reflect the area under the governing authority or management institution, or part of this area.
- Since the objective of identifying an OECM is to promote the conservation of important biodiversity values, the boundary must include a representative and viable population or area of the species, ecosystem or other value concerned. Without this, the potential OECM will not meet Criteria 2 and 4 on biodiversity importance. If an area under a particular governance type is too small to reasonably protect a viable ecosystem, population, or species life stage, it should not be recognised as an OECM.
- Where an OECM plays an important role in the conservation of a wider landscape, for example by connecting existing protected areas, boundaries may be designed to ensure that this function is maintained
- The determination of the potential OECM boundary should include practical considerations; e.g. it may follow the boundary of an adjacent protected area, or the boundary of an extractive concession in order to avoid overlapping with land use that is incompatible with the OECM designation. For this reason, it is likely to be useful to involve stakeholders in the site and those neighbouring the site in the definition of the boundary.

Case study 15.
The Belfast Wetlands

Location: South Africa | **Example of:** A candidate inland waters OECM within a larger site managed for forestry.

The Belfast Wetlands are within a landscape that is dominated by a state-owned forestry operation. The boundary of the candidate OECM, 3,500 hectares of wetland and grasslands, was defined to exclude that part of the site that is under commercial forestry, but to encompass the important natural ecosystem. The Department of Public Works owns the site, and it is governed in line with a policy (Management of State Forest Act 128 of 1992) that gives the Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment (DFFE) and the South African Forestry Company SOC Limited (SAFCOL) a mandate to responsibly manage natural areas within commercial forestry plantations. Specific conservation management objectives exist for the wetlands and grasslands and an environmental manager is employed. This site supports sustainable agriculture, tourism and environmental conservation, with ecosystem services that provide important economic, social and environmental benefits. The proposed OECM boundary therefore aligns with ecological boundaries, management realities, and the mandate of SAFCOL.

Significant tracts of intact wetland and grasslands, including threatened Dullstroom Plateau Grasslands, occur at the site. It acts as a corridor between the much larger wetland and grassland systems in the adjacent Langkloof Private Nature Reserve and the Greater Lakenvlei Protected Environment, providing a stepping stone for threatened wetland bird species. This site falls within a provincially delineated Critical Biodiversity Area and an Ecosystem Support Area, and falls within a KBA.

The Belfast Wetlands are an area of exceptional conservation value which are governed as part of a larger production landscape. The boundaries of the candidate OECM include the ecologically important grasslands and wetlands, but exclude the production forestry area. © ReWild Africa

How big should an OECM be? There is no minimum or maximum size for an OECM. However, the site should be of sufficient size to achieve the long-term in situ conservation of biodiversity, including all ecosystems, habitats and species communities for which the site is important. 'Sufficient size' is highly contextual and depends on the ecological requirements for the persistence of the relevant species and ecosystems. Determination of sufficient size will also be influenced by the site's degree of ecological connectedness to other suitable sites, and its position in land-, river- or seascapes.

As a general rule, large sites are preferable to small ones. However, there are many examples of important small sites. For example, for a rare plant or insect with a very limited range an OECM could be only a few hectares of suitable habitat. Most sites will be far larger, and may be over a million hectares. The decision on how big an OECM should be, therefore, requires consideration of ecological/conservation factors and practical/management factors. In many cases, this will best be done by bringing together relevant biodiversity conservation and management experts, including people with good knowledge of the site.

Criteria:

3
The site is a geographically defined area

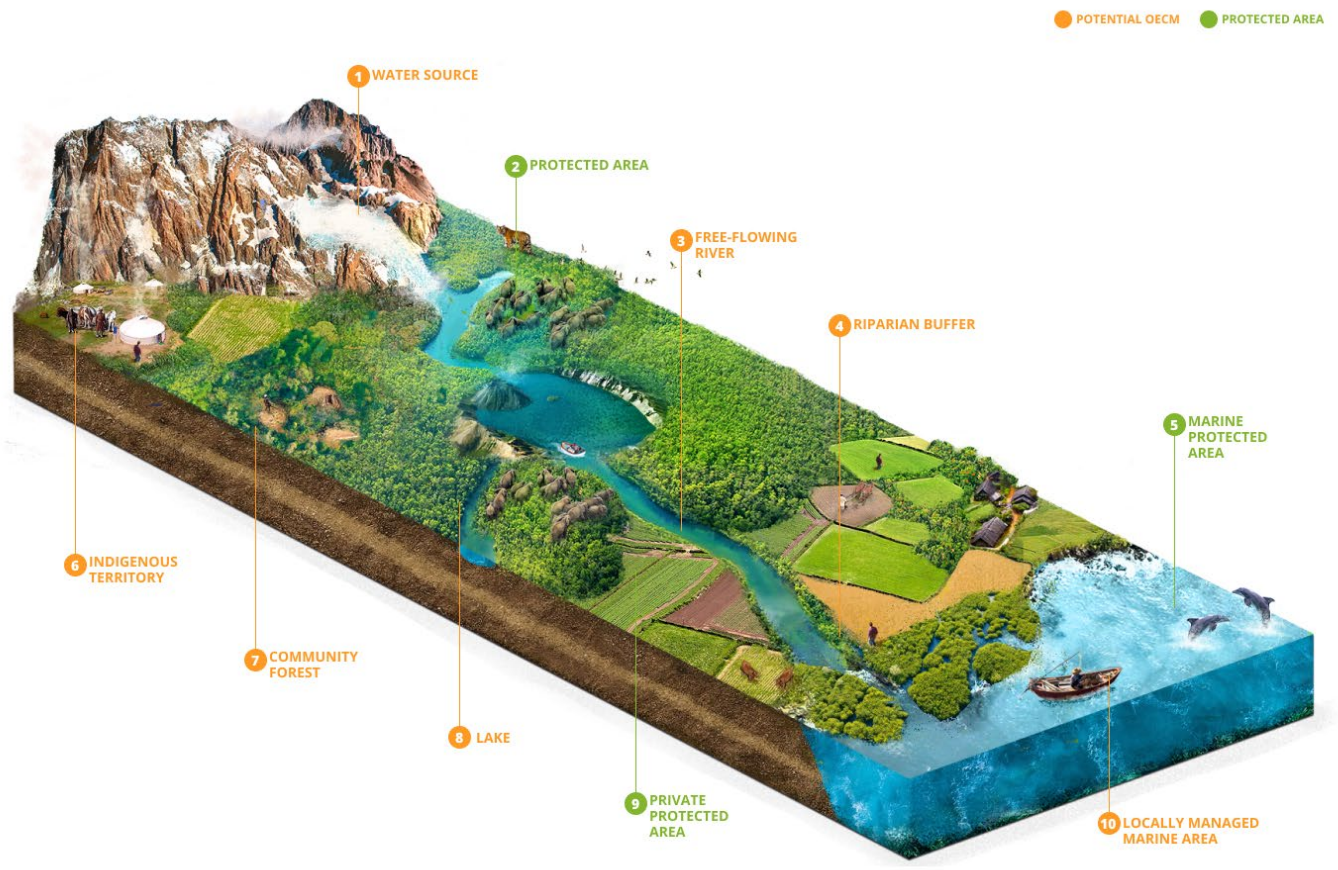

Figure 8. OECMs can contribute to increased ecological connectivity to complement protected areas, resulting in networks of protected and conserved areas. (Source: Adapted from World Wildlife Fund, 2022)

OECMs and connectivity. Ecological connectivity is the unimpeded movement of species and the flow of natural processes that sustain life on Earth. An OECM can be an area that has important biodiversity values because it is part of a wider mosaic or network of sites. In this case, the definition of OECM boundaries should take into account the need to ensure connectivity with other sites. In addition, the assessment process should consider:

- How the important biodiversity values within the site interact with the surrounding area, and how management of the area outside the site might affect the biodiversity values within it (Criterion 6); and
- The likelihood of major changes occurring in the surrounding areas and how this would affect the long-term value of the site (Criterion 7).

Three-dimensional geographical space and vertical zoning. Geographical space has three dimensions: length, width, and depth or height. A governance or management regime needs to take account of all three dimensions if all the biodiversity of the area is to be effectively conserved in situ. However, proposals for designations of OECMs sometimes have limits, e.g. only apply to the surface but not underground, or to the bottom of the sea but not the water column above it. This issue is particularly important in marine protected areas, where vertical zoning to allow commercial exploitation may undermine conservation outcomes, disrupt ecological connectivity and create monitoring and enforcement challenges.

Criteria:

3
The site is a geographically defined area

For OECMs, the **height and depth dimensions should be consistent with effective conservation management** to protect the full range of native biodiversity. In consequence, IUCN recommends that *all dimensions of the site be included within the boundary and there be no vertical zoning*. 'Vertical zoning' means defining the limit of the OECM at a certain depth or height, such that exploitation can take place in the area above or below the OECM.

However in rare cases where an OECM is proposed with vertical zoning (examples are likely to involve a division between the management of benthic and open-water biota in freshwater and marine sites), the site identification process should include full height/depth of the site for data gathering, to ensure that all relevant biodiversity values, issues and rightsholders and stakeholders are included. In proposing an OECM with vertical zoning, the identification process should establish that:

Criteria:

3
The site is a geographically defined area

- There is no important functional ecological relationship between the site's important biodiversity and the vertical zone that is excluded from the OECM designation.
- The current management or use of the zone that is excluded from the designation does not negatively impact on the conservation of the important biodiversity of the OECM. For example, pelagic fishing gear should not touch a conserved benthic zone.
- There is a reasonable likelihood that protection will be long-term and avoid other threats – e.g. there are no known plans to exploit subsurface minerals under the site.

In addition, for an OECM where a vertical zone has been excluded, long-term conservation efforts may include efforts to bring the excluded zone, and the stakeholders responsible for managing it, within the remit of the OECM when there is an opportunity to do so.

Boundary and related conflicts. The identification and reporting of an OECM recognises existing management arrangements and does not change the legal status, ownership or rights over a site. In situations where there is already a dispute or conflict over rights, access or ownership of land and resources, the identification of an OECM and the location of the boundary may be perceived, or claimed by some parties, to be a validation of the rights of one group over another. In these circumstances, there is a risk that the identification of an OECM could cause or exacerbate conflict or loss of rights.

Some elements of good practice in sites where the OECM identification process may be affected by a dispute over land and boundaries are as follows:

- In line with commitments in the CBD and GBF on respecting the rights of Indigenous peoples and local communities, **an OECM identification process should never result in involuntary loss of access and rights, or displacemen**t. A site where this occurred would not meet Criterion 8, on equity. Where such an outcome appears possible, the OECM identification process should be paused until the issue is resolved, or stopped altogether. This is especially important in countries where the OECM designation has been given legal standing, since there may be a risk that recognition of a site as an OECM has legal consequences for rightsholders.
- Through the consent and FPIC process, before the full assessment commences, the governing authority, Indigenous peoples and local communities have an absolute right to attach conditions to the OECM identification process, or reject it outright. They can choose to do so for any reason, including if, in their judgement, there is a risk that the OECM identification process could cause or aggravate conflict. While it is useful if their reasons for rejection are discussed during the consent process, such public discussion may itself be contentious. There is therefore no obligation for parties to the FPIC process to disclose their reasons for rejecting the OECM assessment.
- Where the governing authority and Indigenous peoples and local communities decide to proceed with OECM identification, the design of the multi-stakeholder process may provide an opportunity to address disputes. The involvement of specialist legal or mediation organisations may be helpful to support such efforts.
- The resolution of all disputes over access, rights and boundaries at a site may not be necessary or relevant for the identification of an OECM. Disputes may be contained and managed by rightsholders and stakeholders while allowing management of the site to continue. If the relevant criteria are met, the existence of a dispute does not automatically disqualify a site from being recognised as an OECM. Similarly, disputes which are not site-specific – e.g. a dispute over land rights between Indigenous peoples and government – should not prevent the identification of an OECM if the relevant rightsholders and stakeholders are able to collaborate sufficiently to meet the criteria.

Case study 16.
Cranes and South Korea's Cheorwon Plain

Example of: A reported OECM where year-round management contributes to conservation of migratory species that are only present for part of the year

Cranes are considered to represent the critical biodiversity value of the Cheorwon Plain. While present only from October to March each year, the institutions and management practices that sustain them operate year-round. The Cheorwon Plain in Gangwon-do province, South Korea, is an important habitat for red-crowned and white-naped cranes. Both species are considered 'vulnerable' to extinction by IUCN. Both species are migratory, spending the winter in South Korea and surrounding countries. At Cheorwon the cranes use fallow rice paddy land to feed, and the quality of the habitat is linked to its management by the farmers. Since 2004, local farmers from five villages have helped the cranes by keeping rice straw in the field in winter and irrigating the land. Their actions are voluntary, encouraged and rewarded through a Biodiversity Management Agreement that pays them for sympathetic land management. Bird-focused ecotourism creates further economic opportunities for local people in guiding, hosting and selling locally branded rice. Several local groups offer ways for local people to be involved in the scheme, under the umbrella of the Cheorwon DMZ (Demilitarized Zone) Crane Ecotourism Council. The interventions have paid off, with crane numbers increasing from fewer than 1,000 of both species in 1999 to over 3,500 in January 2017. While the cranes are present for only six months of the year, land use and management decisions made throughout the year affect the quality of the habitat. An NGO, the National Nature Trust, works with local groups, raises funds and coordinates crane conservation activities. The Korean National Parks service provides technical input (Heo, 2024).

White-naped cranes with chicks photographed in their breeding grounds in Mongolia. Up to a quarter of the global population of these threatened birds spend the winter in the Cheorwon plain. © Staffan Widstrand / Wild Wonders of China / WWF

5.3.2 Applying Criterion 4: Important biodiversity

Criteria:

4
The site is confirmed to support important biodiversity values

The CBD defines biological diversity as "the variability among living organisms from all sources including, inter alia, terrestrial, marine and other aquatic ecosystems and the ecological complexes of which they are part; this includes diversity within species, between species and of ecosystems."

It is a clear requirement that OECMs must achieve the effective and sustained in situ conservation of biodiversity. Identification of an OECM should therefore include the identification of the biodiversity values for which the site is considered important, based upon the best available knowledge. Information on the current status of the important biodiversity values of an OECM (e.g. habitat areas, species populations) also establishes a baseline for future monitoring, which can in turn help to determine if additional management is required. Assessment of the biodiversity values should take into account the ecological requirements of focal species and ecosystems. For example, survival of a large predator such as a leopard or jaguar requires a healthy population of its prey species; a threatened parrot species may rely on the presence of old trees with nesting holes; a wetland may require an uninterrupted supply of clean water; or a population of rare plants may benefit from specific fire or grazing regimes.

The biodiversity of an OECM **does not have to be globally important to qualify**. OECMs may be identified because the biodiversity they support is important at a national or even sub-national level. National species and ecosystem red lists, biodiversity action plans, and the planning documents of relevant agencies and institutions may be consulted to help determine

which biodiversity values are considered important. In addition, there will be important information held by traditional knowledge holders and university researchers.

The OECM should make a significant contribution to the conservation of the biodiversity value identified. For example, if a site is identified as important for a rare species, it should hold a significant number or proportion of that species' population. If the site is important for a specific ecosystem, the area of the ecosystem should be large enough and its condition good enough to support the claim (see also the question of 'how big should an OECM be', Section 5.3.1).

Table 4 lists a range of types of biodiversity value which could qualify, while Table 5 lists sources of information on sites of importance for biodiversity.

Criteria:

4
The site is confirmed to support important biodiversity values

Table 4. Types of biodiversity value for consideration as OECMs and the rationale behind each (adapted from Watson et al., 2020). OECMs should effectively protect one or more of the following elements of native biodiversity.

Areas of Importance for Biodiversity	Rationale
Rare or threatened species and ecosystems	OECMs can be a core tool in halting species extinction and stabilising the decline of threatened species. There are currently significant shortfalls in protection of many endangered species and ecosystems on land, inland water and sea that need to be a focus of GBF Target 3.
Natural ecosystems that are under-represented in protected area networks. *This may include globally significant ecosystems (e.g. significant water bodies, wetlands, rainforests, coral reefs)*	It is important to have examples of all ecosystem types in protected and conserved areas. Recognised globally significant ecosystems (e.g. Ramsar sites) and other international assessments need to be proactively protected.
High level of ecological integrity or intactness	These places are critical for species and ecosystem conservation, especially considering the impacts of climate change. Conserving the most intact components of ecosystems is considered a 'no regrets' conservation approach. Such ecosystems are currently not well protected.
Significant population/extent of endemic or range-restricted species or ecosystems	Range-restricted species and ecosystems may be more vulnerable to extinction and should be prioritised for conservation.
Important ecosystems for species life stages, including aggregations such as feeding, resting, moulting, spawning, and breeding areas	These areas are critical for safeguarding key ecological processes needed to sustain certain species populations.
Ecological connectivity	Areas that are important for ecological connectivity, and managed to maintain ecological connectivity, can be OECMs if they meet the set of criteria.
In addition to the conservation of biodiversity through the values above, assessment of the value of a site may want to give consideration to:	
Climate refugia for species and ecosystems	Many species are moving due to changes in the climate. As a consequence, 'refuge' habitats will likely be key for sustaining many species, especially for those species already endangered or likely to become endangered in the future.
Ecosystems containing high levels of carbon in either above-ground or below-ground biomass. These areas should also have biodiversity value.	Sequestering and storing carbon in native vegetation is a critical component of climate change mitigation strategies. Protected areas and OECMs play an important role in safeguarding high-carbon ecosystems, especially those that are at risk of being degraded. High-carbon ecosystems are often areas of importance for biodiversity.

There are global data sets available that are an important reference when identifying data for a site and applying the criteria described above (see Table 5 below). Information may also be available from sources such as:

- Published reports and research papers;
- Governance authorities, who may have extensive knowledge of the site's habitats and species, and stakeholders who have information about changes they have observed over their lifetimes;
- Local research institutions or NGOs, which may be able to help with biodiversity assessments;
- Photographs and satellite images. Older images can help show changes over time.

Criteria:

4
The site is confirmed to support important biodiversity values

Table 5. Global data sets available for assisting with identifying OECMs. These data sets all are based on one or more of the criteria described in Table 4. It is important for countries to consider if these globally identified sites are sufficiently protected and conserved as part of planning for OECMs.

Global Data Sets for the Identification of Important Biodiversity Values	Ecological Criteria	Number of Sites Identified as of January 2024
IUCN Red List of Threatened Species	Changes in species total population and trends in populations; species range maps	163,000 species assessed, with more than 45,000 of them found to be threatened with extinction
Red List of Ecosystems	Changes in the area, quality or ecological processes that support key ecosystems	More than 4,000 ecosystem units have been assessed.
Key Biodiversity Areas	Threatened or geographically restricted species (any taxa) or ecosystems (terrestrial, freshwater, marine, subterranean) biological processes, ecological integrity, and irreplaceability.	16,336
Alliance for Zero Extinction Sites	Critically endangered or endangered species (any taxa) restricted to single sites	1,465
Ecologically and Biologically Significant Marine Areas	Unique/rare/threatened marine species/habitats, biologically productive, high marine species diversity, important areas for life history strategies, vulnerable to human impact, natural/relatively intact	321
Ramsar Sites	Threatened or rare/unique wetland species, waterbird and freshwater fish populations, biological processes	2,471
Important Plant Areas	Threatened and geographically restricted plants, plant richness, threatened habitat and plant species of cultural/economic importance	2,246
Important Marine Mammal Areas	Sites important for threatened/ declining marine mammals, geographically restricted populations, aggregations, important areas for reproduction, feeding and migration, and areas of high species diversity or distinctiveness of behaviours/genetics	391
High Conservation Value sites	Primarily production landscapes in forests: species diversity (threatened and endemic), large landscape-level ecosystems, rare/ threatened ecosystems, provide ecosystem services, important for community needs and important cultural value	226
Important Shark and Ray Areas	Expert-driven innovative approach to identify discrete portions of habitats critical to sharks, rays and chimaeras	122

5.3.3 Applying Criterion 5: Governed and managed

Criteria:

5
Institutions or mechanisms exist to govern and manage the site

'Governed' implies that the area is under the authority of a specified entity, or a combination of entities. OECMs fall under the same range of governance types as protected areas, namely:

- Governance by governments (at various levels);
- Governance by private individuals, organisations or companies;
- Governance by Indigenous peoples and/or local communities; and
- Shared governance, i.e. governance by various rightsholders and stakeholders together (Dudley, 2008; Borrini-Feyerabend et al., 2013).

An area where there is no governance regime is not an OECM, even though its biodiversity may remain intact. For example, unmanaged areas of the high seas, areas under military conflict, and other areas incidentally in a natural or near-natural state should not be considered as OECMs in the absence of a management regime that provides effective and enduring in situ biodiversity conservation. Management regimes can include deliberate decisions to leave the area untouched.

Determining which groups are the governing authority is not always simple. For example, there may be differences between who is governing an area de jure (in law) and de facto (in practice), or overlaps between different governance authorities, and these may change seasonally or in response to other factors. There may also be groups that claim rights on the basis of past violations and displacement (Borrini-Feyerabend et al., 2013; Stevens et al., forthcoming). Governance overlaps and contested claims should be acknowledged and equitably resolved before OECM identification. Newly arising overlaps or claims may also need resolution after an OECM has been identified. The national OECM process (see Section 3.4) may be a useful forum for establishing a mechanism to deal with these issues. The governance type can also shift over time – including towards more (or better recognised) shared and Indigenous- or community-led arrangements. OECM governing authorities – with rightsholders and stakeholders – can reflect on and, where needed, shift the governance type to support the most appropriate, rights-affirming arrangements.

Shared governance and management. Some sites are managed by multiple groups or agencies, often with different objectives, mandates and resources, and with varying degrees of coordination and cooperation between them. An example might be a site where a forestry agency has responsibility for watershed protection, local Indigenous communities farm and make use of non-timber products, and a water company extracts spring water. A freshwater site might be managed by different government authorities responsible for water supply, irrigation and tourism, while local community institutions manage fisheries.

For sites with multiple stakeholders, management through an inclusive institution that has the necessary mandate and capacity could be one model. However, the existence of such an institution is not a requirement for the identification of an OECM. In applying Criterion 5, the assessor should make a judgement on whether one or more mechanisms or institutions exist that, working together, could result in the successful management of the key resources and features of the site. It is important to recognise that community-based mechanisms may be informal and unwritten, but nevertheless effective. For example, periodic closures of hunting or fishing areas may be sufficient to preserve stocks of wild species, without the need for a formal decision-making system. Coordination between different agencies may be desirable but is not necessary for identification of an OECM; nonetheless, the agencies must continue to act in ways that contribute to maintaining the biodiversity value of the site. The possible impact of the recognition of a site as an OECM on the relationship between different stakeholders should be considered when seeking consent.

Case study 17.
The Kadwa Kosi floodplains

Location: Bihar, India | **Example of:** A potential OECM where multiple stakeholders play different but complementary roles in the management of the site, with their combined efforts resulting in positive impacts for conservation

Kadwa Kosi is a 1,600-hectare community-conserved wetland in Bihar, India. The site is important for wetland species, among them a small breeding population of the greater adjutant stork. Numbers of the stork have increased from about 75 in 2005–2006 to over 750 in 2018–2019 as a result of local management, and are the subject of small-scale birdwatching ecotourism. The site supports five other stork species, and the endangered Gangetic dolphin is found in the river.

The Kadwa Kosi wetland is governed by the village council (Gram Sabha), which is part of the local Panchayat (assembly). The Gram Sabha makes decisions about land use and conservation. The local government Forest Division provides management support, including implementing education and practical management actions. An NGO based in a local town provides technical advice to government and community, and facilitates communication and awareness raising for conservation (UNDP, 2022).

Sites beyond national borders. An OECM can be in an area beyond national jurisdiction (e.g. international waters), as long as there is a governance mechanism.

Sites with no governance or management. A site does not meet Criterion 5 if there is an open access situation, with no management institution or mechanism. Assessment of Criterion 5 is likely to be closely related to assessment of Criterion 6 (Governance and management of the site achieve or are expected to achieve the in situ conservation of important biodiversity values). For example, where a site has a management institution, but the institution is ineffective and unable to prevent degradation, then the site may meet Criterion 5, but fail to meet Criterion 6.

5.3.4 Applying Criterion 6: In situ conservation

Criteria:

6
Governance and management of the site achieve, or are expected to achieve, the in situ conservation of important biodiversity values

The CBD definition of an OECM states that they are governed and managed in ways that achieve long-term in situ biodiversity conservation. The CBD defines 'in situ conservation of biodiversity' as:

> *The conservation of ecosystems and natural habitats and the maintenance and recovery of viable populations of species in their natural surroundings and, in the case of domesticated or cultivated species, in the surroundings where they have developed their distinctive properties. (CBD Article 2).*

In addition, OECMs are expected to achieve **the conservation of biodiversity as a whole**, rather than only selected elements of biodiversity. The CBD definitions of 'biodiversity' and 'in situ conservation' clearly recognise that a single species can only exist in situ as part of an interconnected web with other species and the abiotic environment. Therefore conservation measures targeting single species or subsets of biodiversity should not allow the broader ecosystem to be compromised.

The in situ conservation of biodiversity in an OECM may be deliberate, or a side effect of the management for another purpose. Thus, unlike protected areas, OECMs do not need to have a primary objective of conservation. However, there should be a direct causal link between the area's management and the in situ conservation of biodiversity. The type of management is open, and could be any arrangement that is sustained and delivers biodiversity conservation outcomes. 'Managed' can include a deliberate decision to leave the area untouched.

Managing threats. OECMs should be effective at delivering positive and sustained outcomes for the in situ conservation of biodiversity. This includes having mechanisms in place to address existing or anticipated threats (see Mathur et al., 2017 for guidance on identifying and managing threats). A **threat assessment** will identify the threats that are important for the important biodiversity values. The Conservation Measures Partnership's standard categorisation can be used as a basis for identifying both current and future threats. The main threat category headings are shown in Table 6.

Table 6. The IUCN Conservation Measures Partnership classification of direct threats.

1. **Residential & Commercial Development**
2. **Agriculture & Aquaculture**
3. **Energy Production & Mining**
4. **Transportation & Service Corridors**
5. **Biological Resource Use**
6. **Human Intrusions & Disturbance**
7. **Natural System Modifications**
8. **Invasive & Problematic Species, Pathogens & Genes**
9. **Pollution**
10. **Geological Events**
11. **Climate Change**

Criteria:

6
Governance and management of the site achieve, or are expected to achieve, the in situ conservation of important biodiversity values

Points that may assist with assessment of the ability of management to deal with pressures and threats include the following:

- Important biodiversity values continue to be present at the site. This is a strong indication that past and current pressures are being managed.
- A mechanism is in place to monitor the continued presence and status of the important biodiversity values. Such a mechanism may be informal or indirect, but should enable those responsible for management to be aware if the important biodiversity values of the site are changing. Where it is not feasible to directly monitor the biodiversity values, it may be possible to monitor environmental variables or management practices as a proxy. For such an approach to be credible, there must be a clear link between the persistence of the biodiversity value and the factor being monitored.
- Management has adequate capacity to manage the existing pressures. This might be evidenced through past history, current action or a strong legal or customary mandate through which the management institution is able to exercise control.
- Management has the capacity to identify and respond to new threats. Factors that would support an affirmative response to this question include past history in detecting and responding to new threats, existence of networks with other organisations that could provide financial or technical support if needed, and the presence of a mechanism for reporting problems and deciding on an appropriate response.

In cases where the conservation of the site's major values depends on actions or conditions outside its own management control, the manner in which such actions or conditions will nonetheless be achieved or maintained will require explanation.

Industrial use in OECMs. Environmentally damaging industrial activities and infrastructure development should not occur in OECMs. This is consistent with IUCN Recommendation 102 (WCC-2016-Rec-102-EN), which calls on governments and relevant authorities "to adopt and implement policies that restrict environmentally-damaging industrial activities and infrastructure development that may have negative impacts on any areas of particular importance for biodiversity and ecosystem services that are identified by governments as essential to achieving the Aichi Biodiversity Targets." Environmentally damaging industrial activities include, for example, industrial fishing and forestry, industrial mining, oil and gas extraction, and industrial agriculture. Environmentally damaging infrastructure development includes such projects as dam, road and pipeline construction and operation.

Some potential OECMs will be managed for low levels of use or extraction of natural resources. If this management is sustainable, it may result in effective conservation outcomes consistent with the CBD definition of in situ conservation. Judging whether biodiversity values are effectively conserved by sustainable management may be difficult. The following guidance applies in these cases:

- Where the resources being used are **not** the important biodiversity values for which the site is identified, it will be important to establish how the management and use of the site impacts, positively or negatively, on the important values.
- Where the resource being used is the important biodiversity value for which the site is proposed as an OECM, it will be necessary to demonstrate that the long-term survival of the species or ecosystem is not threatened (and ideally, is enhanced, for example by active management) by this use of the site.

5.3.5 Applying Criterion 7: Sustained governance and management

Criteria:

7
In situ conservation of important biodiversity values is expected to be for the long term

The CBD definition of an OECM includes the stipulation that it has "sustained governance and management which results in long-term in situ conservation of biodiversity." This means that sites with short-term or temporary management strategies do not constitute an OECM. For example, a commercial fishing closure that stays in place only until an overfished area recovers is not an OECM.

Some sites with seasonal arrangements (e.g. sites managed for migratory bird species – see Case Study 16 of the Cheorwon Plain) may qualify as OECMs if the seasonal measures deliver the required conservation impact, and are part of a sustained overall management regime that results in the in situ conservation of biodiversity over the long term.

Since it is impossible to know for certain what will happen at a site in future, an OECM assessment process needs to make a judgement about the likelihood that the governance and management arrangements will continue to be sustained and deliver long-term conservation outcomes. The site-level identification tool asks, "Is there a **reasonable likelihood** that the important biodiversity values for which the site is identified will be conserved in situ in the long-term?" Examples of factors that might constitute 'reasonable likelihood' could include, but are not limited to:

- Legal status that gives protection to the site and/or its biodiversity, and which cannot easily be reversed.
- An official policy or planning document that carries significant legal weight, can be enforced and is unlikely to be changed – perhaps a spatial plan or development plan.
- Another form of protected status that has meaning in the local context – e.g. recognition as a customary territory of an Indigenous group, in a place where rights over such territories are widely recognised and respected.
- A legal agreement, covenant or some other arrangement that is enforceable by law and which guarantees conservation management of the site. This could apply, for example, in cases where a private landowner and government have a contract under which the government makes payments to the owner to manage the land in a way that protects biodiversity.
- For a privately managed area, inclusion of conservation management in the statutes of the company that owns the site, or a similar long-term commitment.

What constitutes 'sustained governance and management' is not defined as a certain number of years, because it is not possible to identify a figure that is relevant in all countries, and because some countries have an existing definition. For example, Australia has a long-established definition of 'long-term' – a minimum timeframe of 99 years if permanent protection is not possible – embedded in both national policy and legal agreements (Fitzsimons et al., 2024). IUCN guidance for privately protected areas is that where it is not possible to show that a site is protected in perpetuity, 'long-term' should be proven (i.e. secured through legal or similarly well-defined means) for at least 25 years, but the intent should be for perpetuity.

Case study 18.
Meeting the requirement for 'sustained' governance and management at Disko Fan

Location: Nunavut, Canada | **Example of:** A reported OECM where the long-term protection was upgraded so it could qualify as an OECM

When the Disko Fan was first proposed as an OECM, it was protected through a temporary (five-year) ban on bottom fishing that was unlikely to meet the requirement for OECM governance to be sustained. A subsequent change of status to become a permanent marine refuge allowed the site to qualify.

The Disko Fan is an underwater alluvial fan in Arctic waters off the coast of Baffin Island, Canada. The 7,485 km^2 site is important for cold-water corals, which include large gorgonians and a unique bamboo coral, and also for narwhal and other dolphins and whales. Initially, destructive fishing was prevented through an integrated fisheries management plan, a temporary measure that is reviewed every five years and can be cancelled at any time. Later, the site was recognised as a marine refuge by Fisheries and Oceans Canada, which means that it is an 'area-based fisheries closure under the federal Fisheries Act that contributes to the conservation of biodiversity over the long-term' (Government of Canada, no date).

5.3.6 Applying Criterion 8: Equitable governance and management

Criteria:

8
Governance and management arrangements address equity considerations

As with protected areas, the governance of OECMs should be equitable and reflect human rights principles recognised in international and regional human rights instruments and in national legislation, including those relating to gender equity and Indigenous peoples. Assessment of equity is within the context of the site and there will be a wide range of different situations. In some cases it will be sensitive, and may require involvement of an appropriate expert, and the facilitation of a process that allows all stakeholders to express their views openly.

Annex II (I/B) of CBD Decision 14/8 on 'Voluntary guidance on effective and equitable governance models' states that governance of an OECM should reflect the equity considerations adopted in the CBD, and defines equity in terms of three dimensions:

- Recognition: Acknowledgement of and respect for the rights and the diversity of identities, values, knowledge systems and institutions of rightsholders.
- Procedure: Inclusive rule- and decision-making, transparency and accountability, and effective and fair law enforcement.
- Distribution: Costs and benefits resulting from the management of an OECM are equitably shared among different rightsholders and stakeholders.

IUCN states that, in practice, equity means that conservation interventions promote the well-being of affected communities, with key operational principles including sharing of capacity, power and benefits with rightsholders and stakeholders (WCC-2020-Res-002-EN, 2020; WWF and IUCN WCPA, 2023). The guidance also recognises that redress and reconciliation of past injustice may be required before rightsholders and stakeholders can engage in discussion on biodiversity conservation going forward. The guidance includes examples of practical steps to improve equitability in the governance of protected and conserved areas, including: support for all types of governance, recognition of different world views and knowledge systems, use of safeguards and participatory assessments, access to justice and reconciliation support, equitable distribution of costs and benefits, equitable access to funding opportunities, enhanced transparency and coordination, improved capacity-building, and strengthened processes and mechanisms to address structural inequality through contributing to systemic change.

The same guidance notes that equitable governance is closely related to broader human rights-based approaches, and provides guidance on how to consider procedural and substantive human rights. The guide also provides links to a variety of tools that can be used to assess governance quality, while emphasising that effective use of these tools depends on the quality of the process followed, and a commitment to follow-up the results.

Criterion 8 adopts the CBD framework for defining equitability (recognition, procedure, distribution; see above). It recognises that:

- **Equity considerations will be different for different sites.** A site with a single governing authority and no other rightsholders may not have any issues related to equity, and can be assumed to meet this criteria without further analysis. Conversely, a site with multiple rightsholders involved in governance, such as one with local people dependent on natural resources, a private company with a concession, and a government agency with a mandate to oversee the area, may require significant effort to ensure effective participation, and a multi-faceted dialogue on rights, responsibilities and the sharing of benefits.
- **Equity is not a fixed concept and cannot be measured against a simple metric.** An OECM assessment will need to identify any relevant critical issues related to equity at the site, with reference to local culture and norms, as they relate to governance and management of the site and especially to the in situ conservation of important biodiversity values.
- **There will likely be opportunities for improvements at every site where equity is an issue.** An OECM assessment should work with stakeholders to establish the current level of equity, and identify where improvements are being made or could be made. To meet the criterion for equity, a site assessment should demonstrate that governance and management of the site include consideration of the relevant issues, and that there is a reasonable likelihood of increasingly equitable outcomes in future.
- **The assessment or recognition of a site as an OECM should never result in the denial or abuse of the human rights of any group, and where possible should contribute to resolving conflicts and abuses.** Sites with acute, on-going problems such as evictions, exclusion of customary rightsholders, or violent conflict between stakeholders, will not meet the equity criteria.

- **In some cases, inequitable outcomes may be a result of the wider context and cannot be addressed at site level.** An example would be a site where the national legal framework means that local use of resources is illegal, and does not provide a pathway to recognise local access rights. The presence of wider factors causing inequality should not, in itself, prevent a site from meeting the Criterion 8. In such cases, the site-level OECM assessment would focus on what positive changes can be made towards more equitable outcomes within the constraints of existing laws and policies.

Criteria:

8
Governance and management arrangements address equity considerations

The starting point for discussion of equity issues at a site is the list of rightsholders and stakeholders identified (Step 2 of the site-level tool). It will then be necessary to identify how the rights of each group are affected, using the dimensions of equitable governance (recognition, procedure, distribution). The SAGE toolkit for assessing the equity situation in protected and conserved areas provides one possible framework for a participatory, multi-stakeholder assessment of these issues, with a focus on community rights.

Case study 19.
The Dixie Community Rangelands

Location: South Africa | **Example of**: Sustainable land use within a candidate OECM

The Dixie Community Rangelands demonstrate that when management objectives are intentionally aligned with sustainable land use, and governance mechanisms are strengthened, conservation outcomes are achieved. The Dixie Community Rangelands, which cover 1,329 ha in eastern South Africa, fall within a KBA, a provincial Critical Biodiversity Area, and the Protected Area Buffer of Kruger National Park. The site is governed by a Traditional Authority, which is strengthened by two parallel committees that provide a platform to represent community views on rangeland management: a Community Development Forum (CDF) and a Farmers' Cooperative. Both are formally constituted. The elected CDF members sign the forum's constitution and are registered with the Traditional Authority Office. The Farmers' Cooperative comprises community members who have signed a conservation agreement with an NGO, Conservation South Africa (CSA), and use the rangelands for grazing their cattle. The conservation agreement is typically renegotiated annually, and is implemented under a renewable partnership project spanning three to five years.

The long-term objective is a community–private sector partnership that links community livestock production with a corporate-based, market-driven economic incentive scheme that sources environmentally friendly free-range beef. Local communities use the site for grazing cattle and as a source of firewood and medicinal plants, with livestock having an important cultural and economic value. CSA is assisting the community to adopt improved grassland grazing and burning regimes, which benefit livestock farming and are compatible with the conservation of the savannah habitat and associated species. Conservation is a secondary management objective. More information.

The landscape of the Dixie Community Rangelands. © ReWild Africa

5.4 Special considerations for identifying OECMs across governance types and biomes

Good practice: Consider the distinctive characteristics of terrestrial, freshwater and marine biodiversity as well as the site's governance arrangements in applying the OECM site-level identification tool.

The application of the OECM framework is context specific, and therefore special considerations apply across various governance types and biomes. Detailed guidance for several types and biomes exists in the form of IUCN Technical Notes. Currently available Technical Notes on OECMs include:

- Privately conserved OECMs
- Marine OECMs
- Inland water OECMs

Technical notes will continue to be published and updated over time. Several case studies throughout this document illustrate the application of the OECM framework across specific governance types and biomes, including:

- Government governance: Case Study 18
- Privately governed: Case Study 1, Case Study 22
- Indigenous peoples and/or local communities: Case Study 6, Case Study 12, Case Study 17, Case Study 21
- Forest ecosystems: Case Study 4, Case Study 23
- Inland water ecosystems: Case Study 2, Case Study 17
- Marine ecosystems: Case Study 13, Case Study 18

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Case study 20.
The land rights of the Sámi

Location: Norway | **Example of:** The potential of the OECM framework to allow flexibility in integrating the rights of indigenous groups and conservation objectives

The strong emphasis given to the rights and traditional practices of Indigenous peoples in the GBF, including in the identification and management of OECMs, may offer an opportunity for increased collaboration between national authorities and the Indigenous Sámi people in Norway.

The Sámi people are an Indigenous people living across Sápmi – a region covering parts of Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia. The natural diversity of the ecosystems in this area is of crucial importance as the basis for Sámi culture and livelihoods, including for fishing, hunting, trapping, gathering, crafts and reindeer herding. When protected areas were first introduced by the Norwegian government, the objective was the preservation of 'wilderness' and access for recreation. Sámi traditional and cultural activities were not included in the definition of 'wilderness', and reindeer were classified as domestic animals by the Norwegian Environment Agency, leading to restrictions on access by Sámi in some protected areas, while access for recreational activities was encouraged.

To meet its commitment under the GBF, Norway will need to expand its protected and conserved areas, which currently cover 17.7% and 4.5% of the country's land and sea area, respectively. The Sámi parliament has issued a decision that any new protected areas in Sámi lands should be designed and managed with the Sámi land owners, and should be based on the Sámi concept of *várjalit - vaarjelidh - suodjalit*, which recognises the total dependence of humans on nature and the fundamental importance of respect for nature's gifts to humans, leading to conservation through sustainable use and management with an intergenerational perspective. In practice, such an approach would allow Sámi rights and interests to take precedence over other uses where there is a conflict, and would support the continuation of traditional Sàmi industries, harvesting traditions and cultural practices. Protected areas should also ensure protection against destructive activities – from mining to over-tourism – and provide a forum for dialogue and cooperation between stakeholders.

To operationalise this vision for protected areas in Norway, the Sámi parliament has requested the Norwegian government to revise a key policy (the Natural Diversity Act) to unequivocally allow Sámi nature use and cultural practice, and to introduce new tools for the conservation of natural diversity, based on *féridalit – vaarjelidh - suodjalit*. The Norwegian government has announced that an action plan for how Norway will implement the GBF will be presented as a White Paper in late 2024. Depending on their implementation, OECMs are likely to offer the flexibility needed to combine respect for traditional management with conservation objectives (Samediggi, 2023).

The Sámi people are an Indigenous people living across Sápmi – a region covering parts of Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia. The Sea Sámi traditionally make a living from fishing, hunting, farming and cattle rearing. © Kjell M. Deråsa

Case study 21.
Madroño Lakes

Location: Colombia | **Example of:** A potential OECM where local communities and Indigenous peoples worked together to protect their lands

Vereda Madroño is home to a community of peasant and Indigenous families that have lived in a forest reserve area in the lower Caquetá River, in the southeastern part of the Colombian Amazon, for nearly 40 years. Twenty years ago, they formed a Community Action Board and, supported by Conservation International Colombia, designed a management plan for the territory they use and manage. They agreed on zoning of 22,000 hectares, allocating 70% for conservation, including Madroño Lakes, which is an important lake system, and the rest for use and good management. Since 2008, they have protected a population of Pirarucu (*Arapaima gigas*) in the lakes, a species that was on the verge of local extinction, but whose population has increased tenfold as a result. At least twelve species categorised by IUCN as globally or nationally threatened (e.g., *Lagothrix lagothricha, Pteronura brasiliensis, Priodontes maximus, Cebuella pygmaea, Myrmecophaga tridactyla*) are also protected, along with important carbon stocks in the wetlands. The governing authority is requesting the Colombian state to legally recognise their ownership of the territory they occupy and conserve. They support the recognition of the site as an OECM because this strengthens recognition of the impact of their work.

Case study 22.
The Jabarkhet Nature Reserve

Location: Northern India | **Example of**: A potential privately owned OECM that provides important ecological connectivity with other biodiversity-rich areas.

Jabarkhet Nature Reserve is a 44 hectare forest in the biodiversity rich mid-altitude oak–rhododendron–lyonia forests of the western Himalayas. It is one of a series of forest patches which, together, maintain connectivity across the landscape, including linking the Rajaji Tiger Reserve with the middle Himalayas. It is adjacent to state forests, but is privately owned and managed. The site protects a water catchment that supplies a local town. Previously, the site was being degraded by tree felling, wood collection, grazing and hunting activities. In 2013 the private owner, in collaboration with conservation NGOs, initiated conservation activities with the objective of restoring biodiversity and contributing to local livelihoods. Management action included stopping illegal degradation, removal of invasive exotic species, fire prevention and replanting of degraded areas. Local community members were trained and employed to monitor the site using camera traps, and to carry out management actions. Local youth work as guides for visitors, and there are plans to increase the benefit of low-impact ecotourism through development of homestays (UNDP, 2022).

Case study 23.
The South Freezy Lake Old Growth Forest

Location: Ontario, Canada | **Example of:** A reported OECM that is permanently set aside within a forestry concession

The South Freezy Lake Old Growth Forest is a remnant of undisturbed forest within a commercial logging concession. The surrounding forest, which is managed for timber production, would not qualify as an OECM. However, the old growth forest of the South Freezy Lake block is permanently set aside and managed to protect its biodiversity values. As a result, it has been recognised as an OECM by the Canadian government. The old growth forest covers 20 hectares, and contains trees over 150 years old. Steep cliffs and wetlands have helped protect the site, and there is no history of industrial activity. The old growth forest is within the Forest Stewardship Council-certified forestry concession owned by a company that promotes sustainable forest management as well as recreational use of its forests, and works with the provincial government of Ontario and the federal government to monitor and manage the South Freezy Lake Old Growth Forest for conservation. More information.

Section 6.

Reporting OECMs to the World Database on OECMs

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OECMs are reported to the World Database on OECMs, based on the consent of the governing authority, providing an up-to-date record of the total number of OECMs in each country and worldwide.

Good practice: All OECMs are reported to the WD-OECM, with all relevant data supplied and appropriate consent from rightsholders. Any changes and updates (including changes between OECM and protected area status) are reported promptly.

The OECM framework is a product of decisions by the Parties to the CBD. When adopting the definition of OECMs, the CBD COP14 also requested Parties to submit data on OECMs to UNEP-WCMC (CBD, 2018). In order to fulfil this obligation, UNEP-WCMC established a parallel database to the World Database on Protected Areas (WDPA) for OECMs, called the World Database on OECMs (WD-OECM). Both of these databases fall under the Protected Planet Initiative and are available via the Protected Planet website (www.protectedplanet.net). They are spatial databases that show the boundaries of protected areas and OECMs alongside basic descriptive information, such as site name, governance type and management authority. These databases are accompanied by the Global Database on Protected Area Management Effectiveness (GD-PAME), which is being expanded to cover multiple facets of the effectiveness of protected areas and OECMs.

Protected Planet data are widely used across sectors to inform decision-making and to track progress towards internationally adopted conservation goals, including by providing the headline indicator for Target 3 of the GBF and indicators for SDGs 14 and 15. It is important to note that unless an OECM is reported to the WD-OECM, it will not be included in the relevant indicators for these targets/goals. In collaboration with IUCN, UNEP-WCMC publishes a Protected Planet Report every two years. The report presents data on the coverage of protected areas and OECMs and other vital elements of Target 3 – such as how well-connected protected areas and OECMs are, and how well they represent different ecosystems and important areas for biodiversity.

Reporting to the WDPA and WD-OECM is primarily done by national governments. At the national level, a transparent process of registering and reporting OECMs should be established, ideally as part of a national OECM process (see Section 3.4). Governments can report data for all sites in the country, including protected areas and OECMs, across the range of IUCN governance types. However, any reporting by governments of protected areas and OECMs under non-state governance must be done with the permission of the non-state governing authority, and in the case of Indigenous peoples and local communities, with the FPIC of these groups. Government data can also be reported to the Protected Planet databases through entities that facilitate data collection at a regional level, where relevant. Non-state actors, including Indigenous peoples, local communities and private actors, can submit data through their national governments or directly to the Protected Planet databases, but only on protected areas or OECMs under their own governance, or on behalf of and with the consent of another non-state governing authority (e.g., an NGO can submit data on a protected area or OECM with the agreement of the non-state governing authority). Direct reporting by Indigenous peoples and local communities to the Protected Planet databases can also be done through the ICCA Registry, which is another platform managed by UNEP-WCMC that aims to promote the recognition and support of Indigenous and community-led conservation.

Data submitted by a national government, or submitted on its behalf, is automatically considered 'state verified'. Data submitted by non-state sources must be verified by an authoritative reviewer. This reviewer is often the national government ('state verification'), but in some cases may be a non-government expert or peer review network ('expert verification'). The role of data verifiers is to confirm that, to the best of their knowledge, the data provider has submitted correct information. They are also asked to raise any concerns relating to data accuracy and to the process by which the data have been collected (including FPIC issues).

Peer review networks have been established in some countries to review data submitted by Indigenous peoples and local communities. The peer review process is determined by these groups based on what is most appropriate in the national context. In some instances, the process involves facilitating review with a neighbouring community. In others, it involves peer review by an expert committee of representatives of Indigenous peoples, local communities and – in some cases – supporting NGOs. The expert verification method may be particularly useful to support submissions of OECMs from non-state actors who do not wish to undergo government verification. However, engaging in national OECM processes and reporting data through national governments to the Protected Planet databases, or reporting data directly with state verification, may increase the chances of becoming eligible for any support designated for OECMs at a national level.

Case study 24.
Colombia's national OECM process

Location: Colombia | **Example of:** A national-level OECM process that evolved as a result of needed improvements

Following the adoption of Decision 14/8, Colombia set out to adapt the OECM guidelines to its national context and establish a unique reporting pathway, through a collaborative effort between private and public organisations and the use of pilot cases. As part of this process, a Facilitator Group was formed, comprising the Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development (the CBD focal point), a national NGO, and a biodiversity research institute, alongside an external evaluation panel. Together, they aimed to ensure the accurate application of the OECM criteria. Thanks to these initiatives, Colombia became the first country in the Latin America and Caribbean region to recognise and report OECMs.

However, during this trial and learning phase, certain weaknesses in the evaluation and reporting processes were identified, which resulted in the reporting of some sites that may not fully meet the criteria.

In response, the Facilitator Group decided to establish a more inclusive platform—a community of practice known as the Expanded Table. This platform brings together up to 18 public, private and community organisations, providing a space for critical reflection on both conceptual and procedural weaknesses and the exploration of opportunities in light of the new 30x30 target. The Expanded Table has collaboratively developed a work agenda aimed at strengthening the OECM program at the national level, ensuring a clear understanding and application of the criteria, and incorporating past lessons into a more robust reporting process.

For more information on the reporting requirements of the WDPA and WD-OECM and verification of data, see Table 7, Annex 5, and the guidance available from www.wcmc.io/WDPA_Manual. For queries regarding reporting, please contact: oecm@unep-wcmc.org.

Table 7. Basic principles for verification of OECM data for inclusion in the Protected Planet databases.

Data collated and submitted by governmental sources	In line with the CBD mandate for the WD-OECM, data submitted by governmental sources on OECMs are considered as 'state verified' and will be included in the Protected Planet databases after formatting and quality control. The governmental source should have the permission of relevant stakeholders and rightsholders to share the dataset with UNEP-WCMC. Where relevant, the dataset must be shared with the FPIC of Indigenous peoples and local communities involved in the management, governance or ownership of the OECMs described in the dataset.
Data submitted by non-governmental sources	Data reported directly from non-government providers undergoes a verification process before being added to the Protected Planet databases. Data can be verified either by state verifiers or by expert verifiers. If neither party can verify the data, it will not be entered into the Protected Planet databases. If a non-state actor is providing data on behalf of another non-state governing authority, it should be with its consent or, if applicable, with the FPIC of Indigenous peoples and local communities.
Resolution of conflicting data	Where there is conflict between the opinions of the data provider and data verifier (e.g. disputes over the correct boundary of a site), the matter will be discussed with both parties in an attempt to reach a solution. Data providers are made aware of the verification process when submitting data, and are kept informed of its progress. In cases where no resolution can be found, the data will not be entered into the Protected Planet databases.
Frequency of data verification	Data providers are encouraged to update and report data as often as changes are needed.

Section 7.

Monitoring OECMs

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Regular monitoring of OECMs enables the governing authority to track the ecological status of the site and adapt the governance and/or management arrangements to continue to achieve conservation outcomes.

Good practice: Monitor the OECM regularly to determine if biodiversity values are being conserved over the long term and to identify pressures and threats.

A key element of the OECM definition is that they should be "governed and managed in ways that achieve positive and sustained long-term outcomes for the in situ conservation of biodiversity." Thus evidence is required showing that the site is important for biodiversity (see Table 1) and is effectively conserving biodiversity as a result of its management. Some level of baseline inventory and ongoing monitoring of the site's biodiversity values is required to answer these questions. Depending on the site, monitoring may also cover (a) conservation actions, including those focused on sustaining biodiversity and improving in situ conservation; (b) threats to the biodiversity; and (c) governance, stakeholder involvement and management systems that contribute to the biodiversity outcomes (Woodley et al., 2015; Haase et al., 2018).

Monitoring a site's effective conservation of biodiversity can be accomplished in a number of ways. It is not possible to provide a full guide to ecological inventory and monitoring within these guidelines. Table 8 provides a summary of some of the tools available. The choice of methods and frequency of monitoring will depend on the data required to understand the ecological values, the resources and capacity available, and the level of threat or rate of change at the site. An effective approach to monitoring is to encourage stakeholder engagement, e.g. by combining formal scientific approaches, Indigenous knowledge, citizen science, and information from resource managers, as appropriate. In addition to scientific information, traditional knowledge and expert opinion should also be used, where relevant.

Many monitoring and assessment tools exist to measure management effectiveness, governance, and conservation outcomes. These tools have different purposes, benefits and limitations, so an OECM governing authority will need to assess which one is appropriate. Many were designed for use in protected areas, and may need to be adapted for use in an OECM. Protected area management effectiveness (PAME) tools are widely used. They offer standardised frameworks that can be used to measure the effectiveness of OECMs (e.g. IMET, METT; see Table 8), but may need to be supported with additional information on biodiversity outcomes and governance quality. Other tools have a specific focus on governance and equity (e.g. SAGE, GAPA, SAPA; see Table 8) but have no information on ecological outcomes. Often there are NGOs or universities in a country or region who are supporting the use of one or more of these tools and could provide technical support or training to staff of an OECM.

Information on biodiversity outcomes and management effectiveness should be reported to UNEP-WCMC for integration into the Protected Planet databases as part of reporting on OECMs (see Section 6).

The IUCN Green List of Protected and Conserved Areas is the global standard to assess conservation outcomes for both protected areas and OECMs. It provides a comprehensive framework to assess governance, management, and ecological planning and design that support ecological outcomes. Using the Green List's methods can help OECM managers assess the contribution of their site to effective and equitable conservation.

At Indigenous community-conserved areas there may be traditional knowledge systems that have been used over long periods to identify and monitor biodiversity value, cultural significance and the condition of the natural system. These knowledge systems can be used alone, or in conjunction with other scientific information, to assess and monitor a site.

Monitoring of OECMs should be done on an ongoing basis, to ensure the site's biodiversity values are still present and in good condition. The regularity of repeated monitoring will depend on the site and its biodiversity values. For example, if an area is under high deforestation pressure, it would be useful to monitor frequently, perhaps every year. If an area is an important stopping area for migrating waterfowl, and the populations seem stable, monitoring might be done every five years.

Table 8. Guidance, data sources and site assessment tools useful for monitoring OECMs.

Guidance on Monitoring and Indicators	Description
A framework for monitoring biodiversity in protected areas and OECMs (IUCN)	Detailed guidance on biodiversity monitoring in protected areas and OECMs
Guidelines for planning and monitoring corporate biodiversity performance (IUCN)	An approach for developing a corporate-level biodiversity strategic plan, including measurable goals and objectives and a set of core linked indicators
Global Biodiversity Change Indicators (GEO BON)	A set of global indicators integrating biodiversity observations, remote sensing data, and models to understand biodiversity change
Sources of Data for inventory and monitoring	
UN Biodiversity Lab	Web-based platform providing access to global spatial datasets and analysis
Global Forest Watch	A set of global datasets on forest ecological condition, forest change and deforestation
Global Fishing Watch	A set of global datasets on oceans and fisheries, including near-real-time assessment of fishing pressure, ocean productivity and ocean temperature
Living Planet Index	Time-series data on thousands of species and populations collected from monitored sites around the world; website allows search, download and contribution of data
IUCN Red List of Threatened Species	World's most comprehensive information source on the global extinction risk status of animal, fungus and plant species; website includes population estimates, range maps and threats for listed species
IUCN Red List of Ecosystems	A global standard for assessing risks to ecosystems; allows users to identify common threats (both spatial and functional) to understand the level of risk that an ecosystem is facing
Map of Life	Datasets on species and habitats for any geographic area
Area Based Assessment Tools	
Management Effectiveness Tracking Tool (METT)	The most widely used protected area assessment system, applied over 5,000 times; primary focus is on management but also covers some elements of governance and conservation outcomes
Integrated Management Effectiveness Tool (IMET)	Allows an in-depth assessment of marine and terrestrial protected areas, regardless of their management categories and governance type
Site-level Assessment of Governance and Equity (SAGE) (IIED)	A relatively simple, low-cost tool for assessing the quality of governance of protected or conserved areas
Social assessment for protected and conserved areas (SAPA) (IIED)	Assesses the impacts of protected areas and OECMs on the well-being of local people
Governance assessment for protected and conserved areas (GAPA) (IIED)	Focuses on governance challenges and underlying causes (applicable in cases where actors are willing to explore sensitive governance issues)
IUCN Green List of Protected and Conserved Areas	A global benchmark for protected and conserved areas so that they achieve effective conservation outcomes based on good governance, effective management and sound planning and design

Monitoring of OECMs is key to providing the information needed by site managers and other stakeholders on the biodiversity values and threats to the site. © Emmanuel Rondeau / WWF-US

Responsibility for Monitoring. When a site is reported as an OECM, it should be clear who is responsible for ensuring that ongoing monitoring is conducted. In many cases the site manager will be responsible for monitoring. In other cases a government agency may take on responsibility for monitoring or provide the necessary resources to ensure monitoring is completed in a satisfactory manner. Reporting a site as an OECM carries the responsibility of monitoring the biodiversity for which the site is considered important. The organisation or entity responsible for monitoring should ensure that monitoring data are retained, are publicly available and that summary results are reported to the WD-OECM.

Case study 25.
Private Forests of the Gadoli and Manda Khal Fee Simple Estates

Location: Northwestern India| **Example of:** Ecological monitoring used to demonstrate the positive in situ impact of management on a potential OECM's biodiversity

The Gadoli and Manda Khal Fee Simple Estates are 450 hectares of forest within a privately owned tea estate in the biodiversity-rich Western Himalayas of India. Since 2010, the Gadoli and Manda Khal Wildlife Conservation Trust has taken legal and practical action to reduce illegal damage to the site, including patrolling, promotion of sustainable land management techniques, and forest restoration. To monitor the impacts of the management intervention, the Gadoli and Manda Khal Biodiversity Conservation Project was initiated in 2016 in collaboration with the University of Stellenbosch, South Africa. Monitoring revealed the increasing species richness of the bird fauna, with the number of species recorded rising from 24 (2013) to 61 (2019), as well as several rare mammals being recorded. The monitoring results supported the conclusion that the management activities were having a positive impact on the biodiversity values of the site. The results were included in a scientific paper on the use of birds as indicators of ecosystem restoration. The monitoring created additional opportunities for involvement of local community members and students at the site, with local youth trained to operate the camera trapping network, while others were involved in patrolling and fire monitoring (UNDP, 2022).

Section 8.

Strengthening OECMs

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Despite being identified as OECMs, many sites remain vulnerable to pressures and threats. Supporting self-strengthening processes will better enable the governing authorities of OECMs to address challenges and make the most of opportunities.

Good practice: Assess governance and management of the OECM and identify elements that need to be strengthened to ensure equitable governance, effective management and long-term conservation outcomes.

Identifying and reporting OECMs is made meaningful for local people and biodiversity when it results in the respective governing authorities and sites being able to secure greater and more locally appropriate forms of recognition and support (Jonas et al., 2017). OECMs, and their governance authorities, should be rewarded for their conservation efforts, including by supporting them to address threats. These threats may be environmental, social, economic or political in nature and could arise from many sectors and sources, such as:

- Shifts in government policy that negatively affect OECMs (Cook et al., 2024);
- Insufficient formal recognition of the rights of those who own or control the OECM, and the institutions that represent them;
- Changes or a breakdown in the functioning of an OECM's governing authority;
- Reorientated management priorities and objectives for the OECM or inadequate management of the OECM;
- The impact of existing and new competing land uses within or outside of the OECM;
- Monitoring and reporting proving to be inadequate to determine if the anticipated conservation outcomes are being achieved; and
- Financing and capacity constraints.

This section focuses on the importance of increasing the knowledge and capacity of supportive actors (8.1), undertaking internal strengthening (8.2), enhancing management and monitoring (8.3), improving the legal recognition of OECMs (8.4), increasing their financial support (8.5), and defending them when they and their governance authorities and/or defenders are threatened (8.6).

8.1 Deepening knowledge and capacities of supportive actors

Good practice: Engage key government agencies, civil society and private sector entities to ensure they fully understand and actively support the identification, reporting, monitoring and strengthening of OECMs.

To augment internal strengthening (Section 8.2), OECM governance authorities may require support from a range of external actors when attempting to improve management capacity, enhance legal recognition, increase financial support and defend sites against imminent threats. This section focuses on enhancing the ability of government officials, legal actors, international organisations and NGOs, and funders to support OECMs.

Government officials. New or updated laws and policies can operate as an enabler of OECMs, for example by recognising and supporting substantive and procedural human rights and land tenure, or prohibiting ecologically harmful activities within and adjacent to sites important for biodiversity, including through robust social and environmental impact assessments (see Sections 3.5 and 8.4). In addition, government officials should consider the following activities:

- Organise training for officials on OECMs, the CBD criteria and related guidance. Training should cover how the government can support identification, reporting, monitoring and strengthening of OECMs, and how OECMs contribute to national conservation efforts. It should also explore the challenges associated with the OECM framework, including those relating to rights infringements and the application of the ecological criteria. When working with Indigenous peoples and local communities, outside government officials will also benefit from learning about local cultures, worldviews, languages and knowledge systems. Government officials who may benefit from such training include ministry and departmental

staff, managers of protected areas adjacent to or near OECMs, community liaison staff, biodiversity monitoring personnel and law enforcement officials.

- Share case studies within and between countries, with a focus on upholding the CBD criteria at the national level.
- Where OECMs and protected areas adjoin to form a larger conservation landscape mosaic, undertake joint capacity development, awareness raising and planning sessions for the government officials and OECM governance authorities to enhance cooperation on the implementation of joint or aligned management plans.

Legal actors. Training should be offered to legislators, lawyers and judges, among other legal actors, to encourage a more supportive legal and policy enabling environment, as well as to foster a cadre of attuned individuals working within judicial systems. A good starting point is undertaking a comprehensive legal and policy review to understand how OECMs align with the national context, and to identify gaps in national law and policy (see Sections 3.5 and 8.4).

International organisations and NGOs. While international organisations and NGOs are often leading awareness-raising and capacity-building initiatives, individuals working within them nevertheless require support to learn about the OECM framework and stay up to date as national processes proceed and good practice evolves. This should enable these individuals to amplify good examples as well as identify questionable approaches, and to provide more effective support to OECM governance authorities, stakeholders and defenders. As with government agencies, international organisations and NGOs will benefit from learning about local cultures, worldviews, languages, and knowledge systems whenever they work with Indigenous peoples and local communities.

Funders. Development partners (public and private funding agencies) are often seeking to support people and places that deliver social, environmental and climate benefits. The flexibility of governance and management arrangements accommodated within the OECM framework allows for multiple benefits to be realised simultaneously. Funders and development agencies can ensure that their staff understand the OECM framework, and have access to data on OECMs in their target regions. Their approach to funding should be attuned to local realities, including those of Indigenous peoples and local communities. Linking funding for local stakeholders to the recognition of a site as an OECM may be an important incentive for them to assist (see Sections 3.2 and 8.5).

Strengthening the capacity of external supporters can generate administrative and programmatic recognition and support through, for example, national and sub-national strategies and action plans, incentive schemes, programmes, and research and funding policies related to OECMs. It may also lead to increased public awareness and social recognition of OECMs, and generate additional technical and financial support and awareness through action alerts and campaigns. The impact of these measures will be enhanced if these groups collaborate, e.g. on relevant workshops, festivals and celebrations, awards for exemplary conservation, livelihood or development initiatives, appropriate inclusion in educational curricula and programmes, and constructive coverage in print, broadcast, online, social and other media.

The IUCN WCPA Specialist Group on OECMs provides direct support to the above actors, including through these guidelines, the Site-level tool for identifying OECMs (Jonas et al., 2023), other resources available on its webpage, and events.

8.2 Internal strengthening, including governance

Good practice: Support strengthening of OECM governance authorities, managers and other stakeholders as necessary to perform their role in the conservation of OECMs.

The resilience of sites in the face of shifting external circumstances and threats may be enhanced through internal efforts to understand the current situation, assert rights, and, where needed, seek stronger or more appropriate recognition and support, including through alliances and partnerships. The pathways to such internal strengthening (or self-strengthening – e.g. see Territories of Life Self-Strengthening Process) will vary by context. Here we explore some key considerations and approaches for strengthening OECMs related to governance, documentation, visioning and strategic planning, legal literacy and financial management. Governing authorities' priorities for strengthening will vary depending on their context, and these approaches are mutually supporting, iterative and inter-related.

Governance quality, including equity. Like that of protected areas, OECM governance should be equitable and effective in maintaining biodiversity. Participatory governance assessments are one way that governing authorities, together with rightsholders and stakeholders, can better understand and improve equity and effectiveness. Several governance assessment tools and processes developed by international groups are available, and can be adapted for use in OECMs. These include resources focused on:

- Protected area governance – e.g. WCPA , which can support systems-level assessment, and includes an Annex with further guidance on recognising and supporting areas and territories conserved by Indigenous peoples and local communities. See also a number of tools developed by the International Institute for Environment and Development (https://www.iied.org/17664iied), some of which are briefly described in Table 8.
- Environmental governance – e.g. the Natural Resource Governance Framework.
- Broader protected and conserved area considerations, including governance – e.g. the Green List of Protected and Conserved Areas.

These examples are not exhaustive and will not be applicable in all situations. Locally developed approaches may be available to and preferred by rightsholders and governing authorities. Lessons for governance assessment include (adapted from Campese and Sulle, 2019; WWF & IUCN WCPA, 2023):

- Governance of the assessment matters – including who convenes and participates, how (and why) assessment is undertaken, and how outcomes are shared;
- Inclusive, context-appropriate processes (e.g. shared reflections) are crucial; and
- Assessment comes with a responsibility to integrate findings into governance and systems and take responsive action.

Documentation of resources and management. The governing authorities' ability to conserve the important biodiversity values of a site may be strengthened by documenting information about their ecological condition and any threats they are facing. For example, support for locally appropriate research/information gathering is useful to further develop the knowledge base about aspects such as the conservation values of OECMs and threats to them. Particular emphasis should be placed on enabling the governance authorities – especially in the case of Indigenous peoples and local communities – to conduct their own research and documentation and communicate it in their own words, including through Indigenous and community media where appropriate. Care also needs to be taken to avoid documentation that could threaten the OECM by bringing unwanted attention.

Visioning and strategic planning. Documentation can be the basis for participatory development of a vision and plan for an OECM. The process should create a space for stakeholders to reflect on, articulate and commit to a shared understanding of what they want from their OECM and how they can make that vision come to life and sustain it. The plans may be similar to protected area management plans or more expansive Life Plans or community protocols. It is important that any plans reflect and respond to the local context and advance

the governing authority and rightsholders' objectives for governance and management. The site plans can be integrated with overall national or regional plans for OECMs.

It is essential to periodically revisit and update visions and plans. This means that they can also be informed by (and, in turn, inform) governance- and management-related assessment and research and other knowledge and experience. For example, if a governance assessment highlights gaps/weaknesses (e.g. inadequate participation), a periodic OECM planning (or plan update) process can provide an opportunity for the governing authorities to address that concern.

Legal literacy. It is important for the governance authorities of OECMs to learn about laws and policies relevant to themselves and their site. Doing so enables the authorities to be effective advocates for better recognition and support (see Section 8.4). Where external legal empowerment and capacity-building programmes are requested, they should include research, development of educational resources and tools, translation services, and financial support. Follow-up might include support for OECM governance authorities to advocate for their rights to free speech and assembly, for independent media, and for international solidarity, including providing platforms and spaces for them to make their voices heard.

Case study 26.
The Ulu Papar biocultural community protocol

Location: Sabah, Malaysia | **Example of**: A community process to set out and advocate for its rights and local responsibilities to its territory

Ulu Papar is a valley located at the uppermost reaches of the Papar River in the District of Penampang, Sabah, Malaysia. The landscape is inhabited by about 1,000 Indigenous Dusun people in nine small settlements. The communities live on the boundary of Crocker Range National Park. Prior to 2010, the communities had concerns over three main issues: lack of tenure security, conflicts with state-driven conservation and destructive development. In 2010, the people of Ulu Papar came together to create a biocultural community protocol – a document articulating the interests, rights and responsibilities of the overall Ulu Papar community in the preservation, management and utilisation of its territories and culture. The communities subsequently used the community protocol to advocate for their rights and responsibilities to maintain their cultural diversity and the biological diversity of their lands and waters, which have the potential to meet the OECM criteria (John et al., 2012).

8.3 Enhancing management and monitoring of OECMs

Good practice: Take action to address pressures and threats, and enhance the management of the site's biodiversity values, including monitoring outcomes to inform governance and management of the site.

Management of OECMs needs to ensure long-term maintenance of the biodiversity for which the sites have been recognised. By definition, every site reported as an OECM has significant biodiversity values, but it should not be assumed that the situation will remain stable. For example, populations of focal species or the condition of important ecosystems may have already been in decline at the time of recognition as a result of ongoing threats, while new threats may arise in the future.

While OECM management can draw on the extensive literature and experience of protected area management (e.g. Worboys, 2015), management approaches and actions need to be adapted to, compatible with, and ideally integrated into existing systems and practices. The following broad recommendations, adapted to the specific ecological, social and cultural context of a site, can provide a foundation for the long-term and effective management of any OECM.

Strengthening the governance, management and monitoring of OECMs is integral to fortifying their positive impact for critically endangered species like the Silky Sifaka. © WWF-Madagascar / RAKOTONDRAZAFY A. M. Ny Aina

8.3.1 Determining necessary actions

In broad terms, conservation management of an OECM should focus on actions that maintain its recognised biodiversity values and reduce the threats, in the context of the system of governance. If the conservation status of focal attributes is stable and the threats minimal, maintaining current management may be sufficient. If not, then further action will be required. Guidance on practical management options is available from a range of sources including:

- The Conservation Measures Partnerships' classification of conservation actions (more information).
- Publications of the IUCN World Commission on Protected Areas (more information).
- Publications of the IUCN Species Survival Commission (more information).
- The Conservation Evidence project's library of proven practical conservation measures (more information).
- The IUCN Panorama website's case studies of effective and successful conservation initiatives (more information).

8.3.2 Organising management

Site-based protection and management. Most conservation areas require some kind of site-based management. Those engaged in this work within protected areas are widely termed 'rangers' (International Ranger Federation, 2021), but many other terms are used around the world for people more broadly involved in the management of conservation areas. The duties of these managers in OECMs generally include some or all of the following:

- Monitoring the condition of the area;
- Surveillance and reporting of problems and illegal and harmful activities (and, in some instances, direct law enforcement);
- Liaison with community members and providing information to occupants, users and visitors; and
- Practical site management and maintenance.

Options for establishing an OECM site-based team include:

- Maintaining or strengthening traditional and new systems of surveillance and information-sharing;
- Extending the duties of an existing team (e.g. in forestry areas already patrolled by forest rangers) or extending the operational area of a ranger team based in a nearby protected area;
- Establishing a new formal protection and surveillance team (full-time or part-time, employed or voluntary); and
- Establishing a network of stewards/guardians providing information to the side manager.

The management of an OECM can be strengthened by the formation of a trained site-based team. © WWF-Pacific Tom Vierus

Training

Professional advice and training may support site-based teams. The International Ranger Federation provides a framework of competences to assist identifying the required skills.

Two IUCN competence registers can also be used to identity needs and design training programmes:

- For protected area practitioners, with linkages to conserved areas (more information).
- For threatened species recovery (more information).

Local specialist training centres and colleges and NGOs may be able to provide necessary training. Learning materials and programmes are increasingly available online. The Conservation Training website provides extensive information. The WCPA Specialist Group on OECMs and Capacity Thematic group can also provide advice. Within Indigenous and local communities, knowledge-sharing and intergenerational learning can ensure that local expertise and experience is acknowledged, used and perpetuated.

Responsible and accountable protection

Giving individuals the authority to conduct enforcement can lead to misconduct and abuses of power unless a framework of conduct, responsibility, accountability and social safeguards is in place. The International Ranger Federation provides a global code of conduct and other resources for rangers and those doing equivalent work. The US Agency for International Development has produced ranger training on social safeguards and human rights.

Wider measures for protection

Alongside site-based protection and management, OECMs may need protection against external threats, such as encroachment, adverse impacts from industry or land use change, or legal challenges. The most appropriate responses will vary according to the OECM governance type and the rightsholders and stakeholders, and will depend on whether (and how) the OECM and/or land or territory rights are already legally recognised. See Section 8.6 and Case Study 26.

For in-depth examples relating to Indigenous peoples and local communities, refer to the cases and country-level summaries in the 2021 Territories of Life (ICCA Consortium, 2021).

Specialist inputs to management

External assistance may be required in identifying and implementing the necessary measures for management. Sources of advice and assistance include:

- National protected area and environmental agencies, managers and stewards of other OECMs and protected areas, and universities and other research institutions.
- Local, national and international NGOs.
- The expert networks of the IUCN Commissions, in particular the World Commission on Protected Areas and the Species Survival Commission.

8.3.3 Monitoring and adaptive management

The assessments of biodiversity current status and threats should provide a baseline for future monitoring of the condition of the area. A set of indicators should be identified to document changes and to detect major problems and unforeseen issues. Indicators should be readily monitorable within the resources and skills of the owners or stewards of the site. In community-managed areas, collaborative identification of biocultural indicators may lead to more effective monitoring (Dacks et al., 2019). The results of monitoring and the impact of management should be regularly reviewed, in order to determine if they are delivering the intended results and if changes in management are needed. Further guidance on monitoring systems and approaches is found in Section 7.

Case study 27.
Conserva Aves

Location: Colombia | **Example of:** A program that provides support and resources for OECM identification and strengthening

Conserva Aves (Conserve Birds) is a nature conservation initiative developed in nine Latin American countries. It promotes creating and managing at least two million hectares to protect migratory, threatened and endemic birds through 100 sub-national protected areas and OECMs. A strategic alliance of leading conservation organisations supports Conserva Aves in Latin America and the Caribbean.

In Colombia, Conserva Aves supports 18 organisations that aim to protect more than 78,000 hectares in 16 municipalities. Currently, 10 of these 18 organisations have led the recognition for OECMs covering 42,000 hectares of highly endangered critical biomes and ecosystems, including tropical dry forests, Orinoco savannas, tropical rainforests, and Andean forests.

Conserva Aves supports OECM planning and design of financial sustainability strategies, as well as implementation of priority interventions such as productive restoration, community ecotourism, bio-enterprises, and complementary nature-based solutions.

The comprehensive approach aims to guarantee that Conserva Aves encourages sound conservation strategies for conserving bird populations and promoting the well-being of local communities.

8.3.4 Documenting the management approach

Formal management plans for protected areas can be dense and lengthy documents, but often a much simpler management document for an OECM will suffice to organise and plan management (at least until a more detailed plan is produced). For OECMs managed by Indigenous peoples and local communities, a document in this form may not be appropriate or necessary. Management regulations may be embedded in traditional governance systems or in a community Life Plan. However, such systems may not have evolved to deal with new, unforeseen threats, and where local traditions and cultures have declined, local systems of regulation may have lost some of their influence. Action may be needed to revive traditional management and regulation systems.

Table 9. Example of a simple format for a management document for an OECM.

Biological diversity attribute	Status and condition	Trends	Ecosystem services	Main threats	Required actions	Monitoring	Resource and support needs
Freshwater wetland ecosystem	500 hectares. Fish harvests declining Waterfowl populations declining	Area reduced by 200 hectares in 20 years due to drying	Supply of clean water for local community	Illegal boreholes and pollution from small-scale mining	Work with authorities to limit water extraction; action against illegal miners	Annual water tests, fixed-point photograph, monthly water level measurements, number of boreholes	Basic monitoring equipment, engagement of local agencies, legal support
Great Blue Butterfly	Decline in numbers	Local people say there are fewer each year	Butterflies support tourism	Increased illegal collecting for the specimen trade	Community surveillance to determine extent of collection	Community counting event each July. Docum- enting of collecting incidents	Basic training for community guardians

8.3.5 Importance of participation

The activities and processes described here should always include the full participation of stakeholders and rightsholders, and of those who will be conducting the management. Collaborative planning generates ownership, respects rights and knowledge, and greatly increases the likelihood that management requirements will be implemented and maintained.

8.4 Enhancing legal recognition of OECMs

Good practice: Review relevant laws and policies, to enhance the enabling environment for OECM conservation.

This section focuses on how laws and policies can provide better recognition of OECMs and strengthen their governance and management systems. It presents three scenarios, which are neither mutually exclusive nor exhaustive. This section should be read in conjunction with Section 3.5.

Scenario 1. A country has started to identify and report OECMs, and after discussion among rightsholders and stakeholders, it is decided that there is merit in reforming one or more existing laws or policies to better strengthen or support sites. Reasons for this could include discovering that one or more laws or policies undermines the ability of governing authorities to guarantee that governance or management measures will be sustained, or that a small change to a law or policy will enable sites important for biodiversity to qualify as OECMs. Responses might include reforming laws on recognition of Indigenous peoples' and local communities' tenure or natural resource rights to support local responsibilities within sites important for biodiversity. It can also include revising laws that clash with or undermine local governance of

natural resources, including laws relating to resource extraction and ecologically harmful land use change (see Box 7).

Scenario 2. New threats to OECMs emerge that must be addressed systematically through law or policy. In this case, an inclusive process to consider the issues and develop legal or policy responses has merit (see Box 7).

Scenario 3. A country has started to identify and report OECMs, and after discussion among rightsholders and stakeholders, it is decided that a specific OECM law or policy would be of benefit. In this case, an inclusive process of evaluating the need for, and then developing, the law, regulation or policy should be conducted. See Section 3.5 for a set of related considerations. These can include providing clear, consistent and cost-effective procedures for identifying, reporting, monitoring and strengthening OECMs.

Government officials, in collaboration with other stakeholders, should strive to regularly assess and update relevant laws and policies necessary to support OECM networks when required – e.g. to reflect new and unforeseen threats to the area.

Box 7

Legal and policy responses to strengthen OECMs

Where policy reform is required (Scenarios 1 and 2, above), a range of legal measures may be usefully implemented. The following points set out a non-exhaustive list of potentially applicable options (from Jonas et al., 2012; Paterson, 2023):

- Recognise the following rights in constitutional frameworks where relevant: substantive rights (such as environmental rights, land rights, resource rights), procedural rights (access to information, just administrative action, access to justice) and forms of legal pluralism in the context of customary law and practice, land and resource rights, and traditional institutions.
- Enhance the rights and protections for (potential) OECMs under a range of laws, including tenure, use and management, planning, recognition of local institutions, permitting and prohibiting ecologically harmful activities.
- Harmonise laws and reform laws that undermine OECMs, including those relating to waste management, natural resources, agriculture, fisheries, forestry, extractives, energy and finance.
- Provide formal recognition and legitimacy to existing institutions governing and/or managing OECMs.
- With a focus on Indigenous peoples and local communities, reform legal and policy frameworks to recognise and respect the right to self-determination (in the case of Indigenous peoples); customary and collective land and resource rights (including self-designation of Indigenous and traditional territories); customary laws and decision-making processes; traditional knowledge, cultural and spiritual values, cultural heritage and customary practices.
- Enable strong cooperative governance between relevant government authorities, stakeholders and rightsholders with a role or influence on OECMs.
- Establish/enhance structures, processes and (technical and financial) resources to enable effective, accessible implementation of laws that support and defend OECMs.
- Promote positive conservation outcomes by making provision for regular monitoring and reporting, and incentives and financing arrangements.
- Enact and strengthen laws that support environmental human rights defenders.

8.5 Increasing financial support for OECMs

Good practice: Leverage the OECM status to maximise the effective use of existing resources, and to access new and additional support and opportunities for rightsholders and stakeholders.

It is likely that as more sites are identified as OECMs, some will be financially sustainable while others will require new and additional sustainable streams of financing. This section focuses on how to increase financial support for OECMs. Importantly, many of the ideas in this section have been developed in the context of protected areas. Exactly how this advice meets the particular contexts of OECMs is evolving.

IUCN defines financial sustainability as "the ability to secure sufficient, stable and long-term financial resources, and to allocate them in a timely manner and in an appropriate form, to cover the full costs of conservation and to ensure that they are managed effectively and efficiently" (Emerton et al., 2006). Accessing a variety of sources and types of funding is likely to make flows more sustainable and less vulnerable to change. Sustainable finance is linked to several GBF targets, three of which are particularly relevant to OECMs: Target 3, known as 30x30, which was described in earlier sections; Target 18, which calls for reducing harmful incentives by at least US$500 billion a year and scaling up positive incentives; and Target 19, which calls for mobilising US$200 billion per year for biodiversity from all sources, including US$30 billion through international finance.

The funding gap that needs to be filled to achieve GBF Target 3 is estimated to be US$103–178 billion annually for protected areas, while the financial benefits of achieving Target 3 in terms of greater revenues have been estimated at US$64–454 billion per year by 2050 (Waldron et al., 2020). The potential benefits are greater than the potential costs. In addition there could also be an avoided-loss value of over US$534 billion a year for the ecosystem services provided by forest and mangrove protected areas alone (primarily deriving from protection against the damage from climate change). The actual value of these ecosystem services when including all biomes would be far higher (Waldron et al., 2020).

A variety of innovative and sustainable finance solutions tailored for individual OECMs are required. An effective financing mechanism for a site needs to: (1) establish robust financial management systems that operate efficiently, effectively and sustainably; (2) create financial incentives for those who bear conservation costs or could influence conservation outcomes; and (3) actively empower and enhance the capacity of conservation managers (Lazić and Emerton, 2020). Hence, the focus should not solely be on generating finance, but also on managing it correctly, deploying it effectively and aligning incentives appropriately.

The IUCN Sustainable Finance Specialist Group and Conservation Finance Alliance suggest that there are six main categories of costs related to protected areas: establishment or identification, operational, core institutional, opportunity, damage and transactional (IUCN WCPA and CFA, in press) (Table 10). For OECMs requiring additional finance, any or all of these costs might apply at various stages, from the initial identification work to long-term managing and monitoring, which is why financing needs to be sustainable throughout. Governing and management authorities will likely use different approaches, as some will need to raise funds while others may already have existing funds.

Table 10. Six main categories of costs related to protected areas. Source: IUCN WCPA Sustainable Finance Specialist Group and Conservation Finance Alliance (IUCN WCPA and CFA, in press).

Direct cash expenditures, mainly by protected area-managing authorities	
Establishment or identification costs	Initial capital and other costs required to establish a protected area or identify an OECM, or change its boundaries and/or governance and management mechanisms
Operational costs	Capital and recurrent expenditures needed to plan, implement and monitor on-the-ground protected area management activities
Core institutional costs	Spending required to establish and maintain the institutions, policies, laws and processes for an effective protected area
Direct and indirect cash and non-cash costs, mainly to local communities	
Opportunity costs	Foregone or diminished development, land and resource use opportunities in and around the protected area and in associated sectors
Damage costs	Losses to production, livelihoods and well-being resulting from adverse human–wildlife interactions and from conservation actions
Transactional costs	Time and other resources taken to engage in conservation activities, and to enforce and comply with rules and regulations

Systematic approaches and methods to finance OECMs. In order to support OECMs, finance solutions need to be evaluated, extended and developed in an inclusive manner, and may entail equitable benefit sharing mechanisms. Any work on financing an OECM should begin with an assessment of:

- How governance and management of the site is currently conducted and being resourced;
- How permanent the arrangements are and what conditions are needed for it to continue; and
- What additional inputs are required to secure the long-term future of the site, including addressing likely threats.

For example, an area might have been well managed for generations as part of the traditional practices of its owners and through their own labour and resources. An appropriate approach to financing might include support to the owners to sustain those practices plus additional investment to secure the boundaries of the area from encroachment. Or an area maintained as a watershed protection zone by a water company might, on analysis, require investment in a better monitoring regime.

The role of funders should be to support easily accessible and transparent funding mechanisms, provide opportunities for training and capacity enhancement (including culturally sensitive inputs and facilitation), and facilitate access to culturally and ecologically appropriate facilities and services for well-being (for example, water, sanitation, health, education and infrastructure).

There are four distinct systematic approaches to conservation finance that can be described as the "four filters" because they can be used to identify and prioritise solutions for protected areas (Meyers et al., 2020). It is necessary to consider all filters for any site. Filters 1 and 4 primarily deal with financial aspects – saving resources (including time) through improved efficiency and boosting funds for conservation. Sustainable financing of OECMs should be done by considering both increasing the amount of finance available but also ensuring a decrease in costs. In contrast, Filters 2 and 3 are oriented towards influencing behaviours – ensuring long-term alignment of interests, discouraging harmful practices and investments, and fostering collaborations and positive actions. The four filters are:

1. **Optimise resource efficiencies.** Aim to achieve the greatest impact on conservation objectives with the resources available. Options for this include outsourcing, partnerships, biodiversity mainstreaming (i.e. instituting a whole-of-government approach), institutional restructuring, better coordination between funders and sectors, joint planning actions, landscape or seascape planning, avoiding duplication of efforts, enhancing co-funding, identifying and building economies of scale, and identifying alternative actions that could result in the same conservation outcome.
2. **Discourage harmful actions.** Apply finance solutions that discourage actions that harm nature and reduce the chances of achieving conservation objectives. Options for this include taxes, fines, and penalties for activities that harm biodiversity. Another option at the system and national levels is advocating for harmful public subsidies (e.g. to fossil fuels) to be redirected towards conservation finance or less harmful actions.

3. **Incentivise positive actions.** Develop finance solutions that align incentives for positive conservation outcomes. Options for this include:
   - Economic instruments: tax breaks, tradable resource use permits, compensation and offsets, and environmentally motivated subsidies for individuals, companies and practices;
   - Fiscal approaches: direct government budget allocation, ecological fiscal transfers and government grants;
   - Other government and private-sector incentives: certification schemes for sustainable products and services, favoured trading opportunities and technical support.
   - Blended finance (i.e., integrating public and private finance), sustainability-linked loans and bonds, and financial guarantees.
4. **Increase financial capital for conservation.** Secure additional resources and ensure their responsible management for conservation activities. Options for this include fines, penalties and green taxes, but almost any economic instrument and many market-based solutions can be used.

Financial mechanisms. A variety of approaches can be applied in different local contexts, and finance solutions can be integrated and layered together to support OECMs and their rightsholders and stakeholders. Approaches can also be specifically aligned with sustainable income-generating activities.

Public finance is currently the main funding source for protected areas, and for nature in general (UNEP, 2023), but this is slowly beginning to change. It is important for sites to diversify their funding portfolios to reduce over-reliance on public finance or any single source of income. There are numerous ways for OECMs to be sustainably financed, some of which include: payment for ecosystem services schemes, tax Incentives, biodiversity credits, collaborative management partnership, carbon finance, conservation trust funds, carbon finance and certification. These ideas, which have only just begun to be applied in the context of OECMs, are set out in Annex 6 and Case Studies 28 and 29.

The IUCN WCPA Good Practice Guidelines on Protected and Conserved Area Finance (IUCN and CFA, in press) contain more detailed information on this topic.

Case study 28.
Financial mechanisms for OECMs
(from Sharma and Pasha, 2024)

Japan: Scheme for biodiversity 'support certificates'
Japan has launched the initial phase of a pilot programme for companies to participate in government-certified biodiversity initiatives. Led by Japan's Ministry of the Environment through the 30 by 30 Alliance, the scheme involves issuing 'support certificates' to corporations that support OECMs through various means such as donations or investments. These non-tradable certificates serve as evidence for corporations to demonstrate their support for biodiversity activities under the Taskforce on Nature-related Financial Disclosures (TNFD) framework, similar to biodiversity credits or offsets (Reklev, 2023). The scheme also supports companies that wish to contribute to conservation to connect with OECMs that need their support. If the pilot phase is successful, the programme will be fully implemented in 2025. To avoid corporate greenwashing, sites being considered for the issuance of these certificates will, if selected, need to be carefully re-evaluated in the future to confirm that the important biodiversity values are still being maintained.

Viet Nam: Legal basis for payment for ecosystem services schemes
After a national scoping study on various mechanisms and considerations, Viet Nam is considering providing a legal basis to finance OECMs through payment for ecosystem scheme regulations, as outlined in Article 138 of the Law on Environmental Protection in Viet Nam (Sharma et al., 2023).

Maldives and India: Collaborative management partnerships between governments and the private sector
Maldives and India are both using collaborative management partnerships between governments and the private sector to fund OECM sites. In Maldives, this entails collaborative partnerships with seaside resorts to create marine OECMs in the area surrounding their property (Ministry of Environment, Climate Change and Technology, 2022). In India, collaboration includes that with major corporations to identify and monitor sites they govern and manage (UNDP, 2022).

South Africa: Tax incentives for landowners
South Africa has introduced a new tax incentive for private and communal landowners that provides financial benefits for conservation while simultaneously creating candidate OECMs. The incentive enables qualifying citizens to deduct expenses related to conserving threatened species and ecosystems from taxable income. It is expected to unlock around ZAR1.5 million (US$80,000) per year in new finance for conservation (Sustainable Finance Coalition, 2023).

Case study 29.
BIOFIN's Biodiversity Finance Plan

The Biodiversity Finance Initiative (BIOFIN) has developed the Biodiversity Finance Plan, which is a concept that has been endorsed by the parties to the CBD. The Biodiversity Finance Plan is a template national document guiding finance solutions for the next 5–10 years. By engaging various sectors, it aims to implement a comprehensive approach to biodiversity financing, including for protected areas (UNDP, 2018). In addition, BIOFIN has built an extensive online database of finance sources. Users have the option to search for 'Protected areas and other conservation measures' under the 'Biodiversity categories' filter. Regional examples of online resources include the Sustainable Finance Coalition's Inventory of Finance Solutions in Africa.

Sustainable Finance Coalition's Model. This model aims to ensure finance becomes tangible and creates lasting change using four tenets: Find, Incubate, Implement and Amplify:

1. **Find:** Explore opportunities to find the right finance solution that benefits people and landscapes.
2. **Incubate:** Collaborate with experts to design building blocks, such as legislative and policy frameworks, for the solution to work.
3. **Implement:** Test the solution at a small scale within a landscape.
4. **Amplify:** Roll out the solution making it widely accessible.

8.6 Defending OECMs

Good practice: Establish networks and other mechanisms to ensure people working for the conservation of an OECM have access to support to help address challenges and threats they face.

OECMs may need to be defended against immediate external threats, such as degazettement and encroachment or adverse impacts from industry or land use change. The most appropriate responses to such threats will vary by context, including the OECM governance type, the rightsholders and stakeholders involved or impacted, and whether, and how, the OECM and land or territory rights are already legally recognised.

Protecting an OECM with high threat levels and widespread illegal activity can be hazardous to all those engaged in it, whether directly and indirectly. Indigenous peoples and local communities are particularly vulnerable and face growing threats, both from the impacts of harmful activities in their lands and territories, and from defending them (ICCA Consortium, 2021). At least 1,733 land and environmental defenders were killed between 2012 and 2021, nearly 40% of them Indigenous (Global Witness, 2022). A total of 2,351 conservation rangers died while on duty between 2006 and 2021, 42% due to homicide and the remainder because of accidents, disease and wildlife incidents (Galliers et al., 2022). See Box 8 for more on environmental human rights defenders.

Box 8

Environmental human rights defenders

Indigenous peoples and local communities face particular threats when trying to assert their rights and defend their lands and waters. GBF Target 22 includes a commitment to "ensure the full protection of environmental human rights defenders". Ensuring the security of defenders is crucial for all actors engaged with OECMs, including governments, conservation organisations and funders. While detailed recommendations are beyond the scope of this guide, some key actions include:

- Previously mentioned actions for respecting, protecting and promoting human rights, including land, territory and resource rights, within and beyond OECM frameworks.
- Providing defenders with effective and accountable legal protection against violence, intimidation and retaliation, as well as legal remedies and other redress mechanisms.
- Enhancing resources and capacities for rightsholders to defend their rights, including through financing and other support for defenders' networks, full and equitable participation and access to information, risk mapping and reporting, and rapid response mechanisms.
- Enhancing the roles and responsibilities of conservation organisations (including NGOs and funders) in protecting and supporting defenders.

A wide range of relevant resources can be found here.

GBF Target 22 must also guide Target 3 implementation, including in relation to OECMs. Therefore, carrying out the general recommendations and guidance presented in Box 8 is crucial for all actors engaged with OECMs, including governments and conservation organisations and funders. At the site level, actions include:

- Assessing the risks and hazards involved in the work.
- Providing equipment and materials to ensure that defenders can operate safely and securely.
- Offering adequate training, including regular training updates.
- As necessary, and where appropriate and supportive frameworks exist, securing legal recognition (within OECM or other frameworks), including rights to own, govern and manage the site.
- Engaging in litigation or other judicial or non-judicial remedies.
- Taking collective action, including staging protests, issuing media reports and carrying out coordinated advocacy campaigns at different scales.
- Asserting rights and priorities, e.g. through community protocols and Life Plans (see Case Study 26).

For in-depth examples relating to Indigenous peoples and local communities, refer to the cases and country-level summaries in the 2021 publication Territories of Life (ICCA Consortium, 2021).

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Annex 1

Contributors

This publication builds on an IUCN WCPA technical report entitled Recognising and reporting other effective area-based conservation measures (IUCN Task Force on OECMs, 2019). This annex acknowledges the people who contributed to both publications.

1. 2019 Technical Report

The Task Force worked for three years to support a process within the CBD that resulted in CBD Decision 14/8 on 'protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures', adopted by 196 Parties at the 14th Conference of the Parties (November 2018). The technical report focused on elaborating the guidance provided in CBD Decision 14/8, Annex III, on the recognition and reporting of other effective area-based conservation measures (OECMs).

The Task Force had 120 members and was co-chaired by Harry Jonas and Kathy MacKinnon (WCPA Chair, UK). The draft was edited by the Co-Chairs, supported by an editorial group comprising Nigel Dudley, Marc Hockings, Dan Laffoley, David MacKinnon, Trevor Sandwith, and Stephen Woodley. The Task Force held four expert workshops: in Cambridge, England (January 2016), Vilm, Germany (July 2016 and July 2019), and Vancouver, Canada (February 2017). IUCN WCPA thanks the German Federal Agency for Nature Conservation (BfN), the Swiss Federal Department of the Environment, SwedBio, and the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society (CPAWS) for their financial contributions to the work of the Task Force.

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2. 2024 Guidelines

The OECM Specialist Group was established in 2019, is chaired by Harry Jonas and Stephen Woodley, and at the time of publication has over 450 members. Harry Jonas, Pete Wood and Stephen Woodley edited these guidelines based on the 2019 technical report, and Ryan Zlatanova was the publications manager. The publication was commented on by members of the Specialist Group and reviewed for IUCN by Clara Matallana-Tobón and Marc Hockings.

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Annex 2

Links between OECM identification criteria in the CBD decision 14/8 (Annex III) and the IUCN Site-level tool for identifying OECMs

Criteria in CBD Decision 14/8 – Annex III (CBD, 2018)	Criteria in the IUCN Site-level tool for identifying OECMs (Jonas et al. 2023)	Notes
Criterion A: Area is not currently recognised as a protected area		
Sub-criterion: Not a protected area	Criterion 1: Not a protected area	No difference between the CBD sub-criterion and that used in the tool
Criterion B: Area is governed and managed		
Sub-criterion: Geographically defined space	Criterion 3: Geographically defined space	No difference between the CBD sub-criterion and that used in the tool
Sub-criterion: Legitimate governance authorities	Criterion 5: Governed and managed	A site must be governed. 'Legitimate' is context specific and is not measured by the tool. However, legitimacy of the OECM identification process and rights of the governing authority and any Indigenous people and local communities are protected through the FPIC process.
Sub-criterion: Managed	Criterion 5: Governed and managed	A site must be managed. The tool does not distinguish between 'governed' and 'managed', but requires that one or more groups are recognised as being responsible for these.
Criterion C: Achieves sustained and effective contribution to in situ conservation of biodiversity		
Sub-criterion: Effective	Criterion 6: In situ conservation	The CBD sub-criteria 'effective' and 'in situ conservation' are combined in the tool to confirm that the site's management is currently delivering conservation of biodiversity
Sub-criterion: Sustained over long term	Criterion 7: Sustained nature of governance and management (Note the first edition of the tool used 'long-term' instead of 'sustained'. This has been changed to align with CBD language.)	No difference between the CBD sub-criterion and that used in the tool
Sub-criterion: In situ conservation of biological diversity	Criterion 6: In situ conservation	CBD sub-criteria 'effective' and 'in situ conservation' are combined in the tool to confirm that the site's management is currently delivering conservation of biodiversity
Sub-criterion: Information and monitoring	no equivalent criteria	The description of this sub-criterion in Decision 14/8 refers to the availability of data on biodiversity, effectiveness, equity and boundaries. The tool requires that this information be available for the assessment of each relevant criteria. A separate criterion specifying information and monitoring was therefore not required.
Criterion D: Associated ecosystem functions and services and cultural, spiritual, socio-economic and other locally relevant values		
Sub-criterion: Ecosystem functions and services	Covered by: Criterion 6: In situ conservation Criterion 8: Equity	The description of this sub-criterion in Decision 14/8 outlines the principle that the management of an OECM should support ecosystem services as a part of ensuring in situ conservation of biodiversity and equity. Because the presence of ecosystem functions and services is not a criterion for the identification of an OECM, it is not included in the tool, but is covered by Criterion 5: In situ conservation, and by Criterion 8: Equity. See further information in Section 5.
Sub-criterion: Cultural, spiritual, socio-economic and other locally relevant values	Covered by: Criterion 5: Governed and managed Criterion 8: Equity	The description of this sub-criterion in Decision 14/8 reiterates the principle that governance and management of the site upholds these values where they are present. Because the presence of these values is not a criterion for the identification of an OECM, they are not covered by a separate criterion in the tool, but are included in 'governed and managed'. See further information in Section 5.

Annex 3

OECMs and other GBF Targets, in addition to Targets 3 and 10

The identification of OECMs will contribute to the achievement of other GBF targets, and conversely, the achievement of many of the other targets will indirectly support the management of OECMs. In addition, several targets have implications for the management and reporting of protected areas and OECMs, but are not directly relevant to the identification of OECMs:

Target 1 refers to the need to plan the conservation of biodiversity in a participatory and integrated way and is therefore consistent with the principle that identification of OECMs is voluntary and should be based on consultation and consent (see Sections 3.3 and 5.2).

Target 2 refers to ecosystem restoration. Restoration may occur in protected areas and OECMs, as well as outside them. Areas that are degraded to the point that they have lost their biodiversity values do not meet Criteria 2, 4 or 6 (on biodiversity value and effective management) of the OECM site-level tool. However, a site where significant, though partial, progress has been made on restoring biodiversity values may meet these criteria (see Section 3.7).

Target 4 refers to actions for the conservation of individual species and genetic diversity. OECMs and protected areas have an important role to play in these efforts as part of the conservation of the overall biodiversity values of the site.

Target 5 emphasises the need for any harvesting of wild species to be sustainable. This is consistent with the effective management of OECMs.

Target 6 covers actions to mitigate the impact of alien invasive species on biodiversity. There will be many cases where effective management of an OECM includes management of invasive species.

Targets 7 and **8** refer to the threat to biodiversity and ecosystems from pollution and climate change. While OECM management may be able to take some actions to mitigate the impact of these pressures, they require a system-wide response.

Target 9 refers to the sustainable management of wild species. This is consistent with the definition of effective management used in the identification of OECMs.

OECMs are also likely to contribute to **Target 11** (ecosystem functions and services to people), and possibly to **Target 12** (mainstreaming biodiversity in urban planning).

The requirement for equitable management of OECMs should include benefit sharing, in line with **Target 13**.

The conservation and management of OECMs may benefit from the implementation of the tools and solutions described by **Targets 14–23**. Particularly relevant are the integration of biodiversity into policies and plans across all sectors (**Target 14**), increased funding for biodiversity conservation (**Target 19**), and improved data and knowledge (**Target 21**). The focus of OECMs on equity, consent and participation will contribute to **Targets 22** and **23**.

Annex 4

Questions that could be addressed by a national OECM process to establish standards and support application of the site-level tool

On including rightsholders and stakeholders and obtaining their consent

- What groups play an important role in site management but are vulnerable to exclusion from the decision-making process? How should they be involved?
- What relevant laws and policies exist on the rights of groups to be consulted and involved?
- What land and resource rights exist (both formally in law, and as claimed based on assertions of Indigenous and local rights), and how should these rightsholders be involved?

On Criterion 1: 'Not a protected area'

- After reviewing the tool and guidance in this document, what land designations are classified as protected areas (and therefore not as OECMs) according to both the IUCN definition and national legislation and policy? What land classifications are not protected areas but may contribute to biodiversity conservation and should be assessed as potential OECMs?

On Criteria 2 and 4: 'Important biodiversity'

- Where are the main sources of information on biodiversity in the country (e.g. databases, universities and other research institutions, individual experts, collections of Indigenous and local knowledge)?
- What rare, threatened or endangered species and ecosystems are present in the country? Is there a Red List or a similar standard reference for these species and ecosystems?

What species and ecosystems are important to Indigenous peoples and local communities?

- What species and ecosystems are under-represented in the current protected area system?
- What are the important natural ecosystems in the country, and are there examples of large areas that are in a near-natural state but not included in protected areas?
- What endemic or range-restricted species occur in the country? What is the threshold for a 'significant population' of these species? Are the most important sites for these species included in protected areas?
- Which species are vulnerable to pressures because of a specific feature in their life cycle, such as gathering in large numbers to breed, feed or migrate?
- Where are the important landscapes for biodiversity conservation in the country, and are there natural habitats outside protected areas that are vital for connectivity within the landscape?

On Criterion 3: 'Geographically defined area'

- What spatial data are available on existing boundaries of ecosystems, administrative regions, land ownership and land use zoning?
- What standards apply for the preparation of boundary maps?

On Criterion 7: 'Sustained'

- What specific legal provisions or other standards can be considered to guarantee that the management of a site is sustained or permanent? Which provisions and standards are temporary, and therefore not (on their own) sufficient to meet the criterion for an OECM?

On Criterion 8: 'Equity'

- Considering the land and resource management arrangements that are likely to be found in potential OECMs, are there minimum standards that can be established for equity? For example, are there minimum standards for participation/representation, transparency and allocation of costs and benefits?

Annex 5

Protected Planet Databases on Protected Areas and OECMs

What is the World Database on Protected Areas?

The WDPA is the most comprehensive global database of marine and terrestrial protected areas, comprising both spatial data (i.e. boundaries and points) with associated attribute data (i.e. tabular information), collected in a standardised way. Source information is also maintained for all datasets submitted. The WDPA is updated on a monthly basis and made available and downloadable online through Protected Planet, with the exception of data that have sharing restrictions placed on them by data providers. The WDPA and WD-OECM User Manual (UNEP-WCMC, 2019) provides detailed information and guidance about the data held within Protected Planet, including its collation and data standards.

What is the World Database on OECMs?

The WD-OECM follows the same structure as the WDPA, with minor modifications. The WDPA and WD-OECM are the official data sources used for several global reporting mechanisms, informing indicators and tracking progress towards protected and conserved area targets, including by providing the headline indicator for GBF Target 3 and indicators for the SDGs.

Protected Planet data standards

All data in the WDPA or WD-OECM must meet a set of standards. Standards are important to ensure all information is supplied in a common format that is interoperable and useful for a wide variety of reporting and analytical purposes. There are four key requirements:

- All sites must meet the IUCN/CBD definition of a protected area or OECM.
- Spatial data from Geographic Information Systems (GIS) and an associated list of standardised attributes must be provided.
- Source of information must be provided to ensure that ownership of the data is maintained and traceable.
- A data contributor agreement must be signed to ensure that there is a written record of the provider agreeing that the data be included in the WDPA or WD-OECM and the terms under which they are made available.

Using the Protected Planet databases to measure progress against GBF Targets

UNEP-WCMC uses the Protected Planet databases to measure progress against international conservation goals, including by providing the headline indicator for GBF Target 3. For reporting on Target 3, three statistics are generated for national, regional and global levels: protected area coverage, OECM coverage, and combined coverage.

To calculate coverage, UNEP-WCMC removes overlaps between sites, and excludes certain categories of sites (those that are proposed, points with no reported area, and protected areas designated as UNESCO Man and the Biosphere Reserves). Although protected areas and OECMs cannot occupy precisely the same area, there may be occasional cases of partial overlap. In such cases, the area of overlap is treated as a protected area only. This method avoids double-counting. Further information on how UNEP-WCMC calculates coverage statistics is available on the Protected Planet website.

All data on OECMs should be submitted to the UNEP-WCMC. Additional information and guidance is available here.

For any queries regarding reporting, collation, use or processing of the WD-OECM, please contact: **oecm@unep-wcmc.org**.

Annex 6

Various financial mechanisms for protected areas

Financial mechanism	Explanation
Payment for ecosystem services (PES) schemes	A PES scheme is a market-based approach in which those who benefit from particular ecosystem services delivered by a site pay for them (Smith et al., 2013). Ecosystem services are the diverse benefits provided by ecosystems that support humans. Water and carbon are the most frequently traded ecosystem services (see below).
Tax Incentives for OECMs	The tax system can be used to either (a) generate revenue by taxing harmful goods or actions, or (b) incentivise positive environmental goods or actions. Positive environmental tax incentives aim to incentivise individuals and businesses to make more environment- or biodiversity-friendly decisions (Sustainable Finance Coalition, 2024a) and are one of the primary ways to promote behavioural change (OECD, 2020) Tax incentives designed to reward long-term conservation commitment can provide a dedicated incentive for OECMs, for example as in South Africa (Stevens et al., 2024).
Biodiversity credits	Biodiversity credits are used to incentivise investments in nature (Porras and Steele, 2020). A buyer pays for a 'credit', which represents a conservation impact, such as area of ecosystem conserved or number of individuals of a rare species protected. The funds paid for the credit support the conservation work, while the purchaser can use the credit to demonstrate their support for conservation, which can bring reputational benefits and thus business opportunities (NatureFinance, 2023). The design and development of biodiversity credits should include safeguards that protect the rights of Indigenous peoples and local communities, as well as robust impact methodologies (Sustainable Finance Coalition, 2024b).
Collaborative management partnership	In a collaborative management partnership, a protected area authority enters into a contract with a partner to manage the site, in whole or in part (Baghai, 2018). The duration and type of the contract varies and depends on the protected area and the aims of the authority (Fitzgerald, in press, a). There are three main kinds of collaborative management partnerships: (1) financial and technical support only, (2) co-management, and (3) delegated management. Protected areas with a collaborative management partnership in place have been shown to have higher median funding than those without one (Lindsey et al., 2018).
Entrance fees	Entrance fees charged to visit a site are one of the most common sources of self-generated protected area revenues worldwide. Fees are commonly charged per individual or group and are sometimes included with the payment for transport or guiding services (van Zyl, in press). Fees may be higher for international visitors. A common issue for government protected area authorities is that they are required to submit the fees to a centralised fund, so the site may not benefit directly from the income.
Project finance for permanence	Project finance for permanence is defined as "an approach or single initiative that secures important policy changes and all funding necessary to meet specific conservation goals of a program over a defined, long-term timeframe with the ultimate aim of achieving the ecological, social, political, organisational, and financial sustainability of that program" (Cabrera et al., 2021). This means that signatories endorse and agree a set of commitments, which ensure that the conservation objectives and associated financing are secured in advance of a project launch. In this way, such projects aim to incentivise long-term financial sustainability and shift conservation and development to a more durable and holistic approach (Fitzgerald, in press, b).
Carbon finance	Carbon finance includes financial tools such as carbon emission trading, as well as non-market mechanisms, where the aim is to compensate an actor for taking action that reduces carbon (or other greenhouse gas) emissions. When applied to land use and forestry, the measuring of carbon stocks and modelling future emissions scenarios requires specialist skills and significant up-front investment. Carbon credit projects have come under increasing scrutiny regarding transparency, impact and beneficiary involvement. They should be designed using a rights-based approach and should address all the required building blocks (Sustainable Finance Coalition, 2024c). Carbon credit projects have been used to generate finance for biodiversity-related activities and actors, and applied to protected areas.

Financial mechanism	Explanation
Conservation trust funds (CTFs)	Conservation trust funds (CTFs) are defined as "private, legally independent institutions that provide sustainable financing for biodiversity conservation. The core business of CTFs is to mobilise resources from diverse sources – including international donors, national governments and the private sector – and to direct them, primarily through grants, to a diverse range of environmental programs and projects through non-governmental organisations (NGOs), community based-organisations and governmental agencies (such as national parks agencies)" (Bath et al., 2020). CTFs may be set up to support biodiversity initiatives more broadly, or to sustainably fund a specific conservation area. CTFs can be established as a vehicle for the sustainable financing of protected areas and OECMs (Van Zyl et al. 2021)
Certification	A 'certification scheme' is a framework that is used to establish standards and validate processes. This includes the standard itself and the regulations that affect its implementation, evaluation, governance and claims, as well as other aspects (WWF, 2015). The applicant usually pays to obtain the certification, including covering the cost of related administrative processes, which can help fund protected areas (Sharma, in press). The Wildlife Certification Scheme, under development in South Africa, has suggested incorporating specific candidate OECMs into the framework to support sustainable use of wildlife (UNDP, 2023).

Source: IUCN WCPA Sustainable Finance Specialist Group and Conservation Finance Alliance (in press).

PROTECTED AREA AND OECM DEFINITIONS, MANAGEMENT CATEGORIES AND GOVERNANCE TYPES

IUCN defines a protected area as:
A clearly defined geographical space, recognised, dedicated and managed, through legal or other effective means, to achieve the long-term conservation of nature with associated ecosystem services and cultural values.

The definition is expanded by six management categories (one with a sub-division), summarised below.

Ia Strict nature reserve: Strictly protected for biodiversity and also possibly geological / geomorphological features, where human visitation, use and impacts are controlled and limited to ensure protection of the conservation values.

Ib Wilderness area: Usually large unmodified or slightly modified areas, retaining their natural character and influence, without permanent or significant human habitation, protected and managed to preserve their natural condition.

II National park: Large natural or near-natural areas protecting large-scale ecological processes with characteristic species and ecosystems, which also have environmentally and culturally compatible spiritual, scientific, educational, recreational and visitor opportunities.

III Natural monument or feature: Areas set aside to protect a specific natural monument, which can be a landform, sea mount, marine cavern, geological feature such as a cave, or a living feature such as an ancient grove.

IV Habitat/species management area: Areas to protect particular species or habitats, where management reflects this priority. Many will need regular, active interventions to meet the needs of particular species or habitats, but this is not a requirement of the category.

V Protected landscape or seascape: Where the interaction of people and nature over time has produced a distinct character with significant ecological, biological, cultural and scenic value: and where safeguarding the integrity of this interaction is vital to protecting and sustaining the area and its associated nature conservation and other values.

VI Protected areas with sustainable use of natural resources: Areas which conserve ecosystems, together with associated cultural values and traditional natural resource management systems. Generally large, mainly in a natural condition, with a proportion under sustainable natural resource management and where low-level non-industrial natural resource use compatible with nature conservation is seen as one of the main aims.

The category should be based around the primary management objective(s), which should apply to at least three-quarters of the protected area – the 75 per cent rule.

The management categories are applied with a typology of governance types – a description of who holds authority and responsibility for the protected area. IUCN defines four governance types:

Type A. Governance by government: Federal or national ministry/agency in charge; sub-national ministry or agency in charge (e.g. at regional, provincial, municipal level); government-delegated management (e.g. to NGO).

Type B. Shared governance: Transboundary governance (formal and informal arrangements between two or more countries); collaborative governance (through various ways in which diverse actors and institutions work together); joint governance (pluralist board or other multi-party governing body).

Type C. Private governance: Conserved areas established and run by individual landowners; non-profit organisations (e.g. NGOs, universities) and for-profit organisations (e.g. corporate landowners).

Type D. Governance by Indigenous peoples and local communities: Indigenous peoples' conserved areas and territories – established and run by Indigenous peoples; community conserved areas – established and run by local communities.

The Convention on Biological Diversity defines an "other effective area-based conservation measure" (OECM) as:
A geographically defined area other than a Protected Area, which is governed and managed in ways that achieve positive and sustained long-term outcomes for the in situ conservation of biodiversity, with associated ecosystem functions and services and, where applicable, cultural, spiritual, socioeconomic, and other locally relevant values.

This covers three main cases:

1. **Ancillary conservation** – areas delivering in situ conservation as a by-product of management, even though biodiversity conservation is not an objective (e.g. some war grave sites).
2. **Secondary conservation** – active conservation of an area where biodiversity outcomes are only a secondary management objective (e.g. some conservation corridors).
3. **Primary conservation** – areas meeting the IUCN definition of a protected area, but where the governance authority (i.e. community, Indigenous peoples' group, religious group, private landowner or company) does not wish the area to be reported as a protected area.

For more information on the IUCN definition, categories and governance types, see Dudley (2008). *Guidelines for applying protected area management categories*, which can be downloaded at: https://doi.org/10.2305/IUCN.CH.2008.PAPS.2.en

For more on governance types, see Borrini-Feyerabend et al. (2013). *Governance of Protected Areas: From understanding to action*, which can be downloaded at https://portals.iucn.org/library/node/29138.

For more information on OECMs, see Jonas et al. (2023) *Site-level tool for identifying other effective area-based conservation measures (OECMs): first edition*, which can be downloaded at: https://doi.org/10.2305/WZJH1425

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