

REGIONAL STRATEGIC PROGRAM OF WORK ON PROTECTED AREAS

SUMMARY

This document summarizes the Regional Strategic Program of Work on Protected Areas (PERTAP), which is a result of the coordinated work of the Technical Committees of the Central American Commission on Environment and Development (CCAD) with accompaniment by representatives from Mexico and the participation of outstanding experts and other regional institutional and civil society stakeholders, in a process facilitated by the project to establish a Program for the Consolidation of the Mesoamerican Biological Corridor (PCCBM).

Together, the Regional Strategic Connectivity Program (PERCON), the Regional Strategic Biodiversity Monitoring and Evaluation Program (PROMEBIO) and the PERTAP form the base of the programmatic scaffolding for the consolidation of the Mesoamerican Biological Corridor (MBC).

The Central American Commission on Environment and Development (CCAD) recognizes and thanks all of those individuals, officials, representatives from civil society and regional experts that offered their valuable contributions to ensure that the formulation of the PERTAP has the required approach and quality. Special thanks go to the representatives from Mexico that participated in the process.

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Regional Project to Establish a “Program for the Consolidation of the Mesoamerican Biological Corridor” (PCCBM).

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Regional Strategic Program of Work on Protected Areas

Summary

The Regional Strategic Program of Work on Protected Areas (PERTAP), framed by Resolution VIII/28 of the VII COP on the Convention on Biological Diversity, is derived from the Central American Alliance for Sustainable Development (ALIDES); from the Central American Regional Environmental Plan (PARCA); and the Regional Strategy for the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Biodiversity (ERB). These provide the principles, policies, guidelines and strategic instruments that guide the joint work of the Central American nations on the issue of protected areas.

The program gives special attention to the conditions and circumstances of each country regarding protected areas, offering criteria and the critical opinion of various sectors of society, including NGOs, the private sector and the communities. The process of formulating this program took into consideration the conclusions of regional forums and events as well as advancements on this issue, in order to ensure the *in situ* and long term conservation of the diversity of ecosystems, habitats, populations, species and genes of this privileged territory, and to guarantee the ongoing supply of the goods and services that these provide. The program is an instrument that unites efforts in the protection and conservation of those natural terrestrial, fresh water, marine and coastal marine spaces that exemplify the unique or singular ecosystems or wildlands of the region and that represent reservoirs of biodiversity and natural resources in Mesoamerica for current and future generations.

The implementation of the program is the responsibility of the signatory countries, with assistance, follow-up and evaluation from the Executive Secretariat of the Central American Commission on Environment and Development (CCAD). The program represents the commitment of the region to work together on their environmental obligations. It establishes activities that ratify the resolve to further a process of regional integration

while also allowing for financial proposals to international assistance organizations and finance institutions.

The first chapter describes the political, bio-physical, socio-economic and legal-institutional context, thus establishing a basis to highlight the strengths, opportunities and threats that face the region in the conservation of protected areas. The second chapter expresses the interest of the region in working together and joining efforts with other sectors of civil society. It also proposes guidelines for work required for the protection, conservation and use of the protected areas and their biodiversity. Finally, the third chapter proposes criteria and mechanisms for the implementation and monitoring of the program, placing emphasis on the need for participation by all the involved stakeholders.

With the implementation of the PERTAP, the regional system of protected areas will be managed effectively, with representative examples of all the prioritized ecosystems of the region; a harmonized legal, technical and institutional framework will be established and applied in the region for the management of prioritized protected areas and national capacities for management of the regional system will be strengthened; the application process for mechanisms for financial stability of the regional system will move forward and, finally, an understanding of the change in status and integrity of the elements of natural and cultural heritage of the Regional Protected Areas System will facilitate proper decision-making. All of this occurs in the framework of broad participation by social stakeholders and the incorporation of the elements set forth here, within their own strategic management and development instruments.



Program Rationale

The Mesoamerican Biological Corridor is a broad initiative for sustainable development with two major strategic elements: a set of protected natural areas and multi-use areas with the goal of promoting sustainable economic activities that make ecological connectivity possible. The PERTAP has been designed to complement the efforts of the Regional Strategic Connectivity Program (PERCON) and the Regional Strategic Program for Biodiversity Monitoring and Evaluation (PROMEBIO) according to the new challenges for environmental management in the region and with the perspective of active participation from the countries on the regional, national and local levels, expressed through their respective agencies.

The program is an instrument for the facilitation and support of efforts undertaken by the countries in order to generate increased value added in their joint actions, acquiring synergy from their coordination and cooperation to reach a set of commonly agreed-upon goals that cannot be reached by each country alone. Thus far, the National Protected Areas Systems (SINAP) of the countries have operated with their own dynamic and with different levels of consolidation, without a harmonized structure or frame of reference for the work at the regional level. The authorities of the protected areas of the countries of the region have identified various reasons that fully justify the formulation of the program: cooperation in transboundary systems, joint management of shared ecosystems, influence at a global level, economies of scale in regional activities, management of international funding, the promotion of synergy, and the harmonization of instruments and positive management of asymmetries.

The Technical Committee on Protected Areas (CTAP) has recommended that the Central American Protected Areas System (SICAP) be conceived as, “an open, dynamic and flexible regional management system comprised of the protected areas of the seven countries of the region in their respective national systems, and it considers the relationships with the socio-economic and cultural contexts of the areas and the regional context in order to contribute to the process of sustainable development and regional integration”. This definition is in accord with a set of overall guidelines that the CTAP has analyzed and discussed as part of the common platform of concepts that must support the efforts toward consolidation of the regional system of protected areas.



Regional Strategic Program

Vision

The countries of the region have consolidated a Regional Protected Areas System through harmonized, participatory and efficient management of their protected areas for conservation of biological diversity, contributing to sustainable human development and in fulfillment of the commitments adopted at the regional and global levels.

Mission

Direct the development of actions to consolidate the Regional Protected Areas System, within the framework of harmonization among the countries, facilitating the participation of different social and governmental stakeholders.

Principles

The countries of the region have agreed upon a set of general principles in the framework of the process of preparation of this program. These

principles are inspired by the definitions, mandates and guidelines contained in the most important regional policy documents signed by the countries. These principles define the philosophical and ethical framework that will direct the efforts of the countries to complete the construction and consolidation of the SICAP in order to achieve the national, regional and global objectives for the protected areas.

The action plan responds to the proposed objectives and outcomes for the period of ten years (2006-2015). However, a first phase has been established (2006-2010) responding to the logical framework system in order to link it to the PARCA and maintain programmatic consistency in the work of the CCAD.

The general objective of the PERTAP is to: Strengthen the comprehensive, participatory and harmonized management of the Regional Protected Areas System.

Six outcomes have been proposed by the program:

1. The regional system effectively manages protected areas with representative examples of all the regionally prioritized ecosystems.
2. The Regional Protected Areas System is defined and operating in technical, institutional and legal aspects.
3. Social stakeholders fully and effectively participate in the management of the Regional Protected Areas System.
4. National technical and administrative capacities for management of the Regional Protected Areas System are strengthened.
5. Mechanisms for the financial sustainability of the Regional Protected Areas System are in the process of application.
6. Changes in the status and integrity of the elements of natural and cultural heritage in the Regional Protected Areas System are monitored.

To achieve the outcomes, operational strategies are set forth and indicators are established to measure the fulfillment of the outcomes and objectives.

Program Implementation and Follow-Up

The program is under and is an organic part of a hierarchical sequence of regional policy instruments that began with the ALIDES, continues in the PARCA I and II, becomes more specific in the ERB and is implemented in the PERTAP and its complementary programs.

The terms and timeframes for the program imply a vision of strategic scale.

The program has been conceived and designed based mainly on internal capacities for analysis and formulation of the institutions and other partners in the region, and is not the product of an exogenous vision of needs and priorities.



The program is not tied to a single source of funding, and it does not have a guarantee of all the resources needed for its implementation. Therefore, to achieve sustainability, an implementation plan is proposed to unite efforts and complementary elements. This document establishes some elements to be considered in order to guarantee the implementation of the program and its operational mechanisms.

Criteria for Operational Prioritization: Take Advantage of Opportunities, Prevent Threats

Although a careful analysis was conducted of the objectives and strategic activities that form part of the PERTAP for a period of five years, this program is still ambitious and its fulfillment will be based on a set of assumptions and conditions that must occur in the proper fashion. In addition, efforts are needed to prevent the current risk and threat trends from becoming more acute. In order to define the goals and activities that should begin in the short term, three set of criteria were selected in the context of a first operational plan for the program: the commitments contracted by the region in regional and global agreements; the opportunities and threats that are opened under free trade agreements at different levels; and potential synergy with other regional initiatives that are directly or indirectly related to protected areas.

Implementation Plans

The following courses of action are proposed for the formulation of the first operating plan for the PERTAP:

- Define the legal and institutional framework of the Regional Protected Areas System.
- Prepare proposals to incorporate unrepresented regionally prioritized ecosystems into the Regional Protected Areas System.

- Harmonize the management of ecosystems in border protected areas.
- Incorporate representatives from social sectors into the management agencies for the Regional Protected Areas System.
- Promote technical assistance and transfer of capacities among countries.
- Integrate or link the management of protected areas to terrestrial, marine and coastal marine landscapes at their various scales in a way that retains their structure, connectivity and ecological functions with the participation of the communities, promoting local development.



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- Develop capacities for the mobilization of financial resources.
 - Develop a regional monitoring and evaluation system.
 - Promote research in protected areas according to the priorities of the regional agenda.

To be able to implement this set of interventions, the CCAD and its bodies must establish mechanisms for implementation, adapting some existing mechanisms and creating other new ones, individually or together with other programs. These include:

- **Institutional:** This refers to the set of agencies and institutional agreements that enable the operation of the PERTAP and its processes at the regional level and between the countries. For this, the CCAD will define the basic institutional agreements at the regional and national levels in conjunction with the respective national authorities. These agreements must put the structure for the strategic administration of the program into operation.
- **Operational:** These are mechanisms that allow the organization of the procedures and inputs for implementing the strategic elements proposed in the program over time and according to the true possibilities of the region, in order to enable the various stakeholders involved in the process to undertake their proposed activities and actions in an orderly fashion.
- **Financial:** These are the different agreements, provisions and forms in which financial resources will flow to make the implementation of the PERTAP possible.
- **Organizational:** These mechanisms identify the various forms of organization that are necessary for the implementation of actions proposed by the program and may be public or private in nature.
- **Technical and Methodological:** These mechanisms structure the different technical and methodological processes that enable the implementation of activities and facilitate the internal processes of

the program. They may include dialogue and essential technical discussions for the various processes for harmonization of instruments, standards, indicators, etc.

Program Monitoring

The monitoring, supervision and control of the activities in the PERTAP will be conducted according to the mechanisms proposed by the CCAD. For this, annual operating plans will be developed which must contain performance indicators that allow ongoing evaluation of progress and implementation of the activities. Likewise, an evaluation of the PERTAP is proposed after two years and after five years of implementation. With the results of these evaluations, adjustments and adaptations may be made in the plan for subsequent years.

The CCAD, through its Executive Secretariat, with the assistance of other technical agencies from the region and the countries, will be responsible for follow-up on the implementation of the plans, establishing the appropriate channels and mechanisms for this.

The tasks and outcomes of the PERTAP itself include monitoring the impact of the program on the Regional Protected Areas System.

