OTHER EFFECTIVE AREA-BASED CONSERVATION MEASURES

An introduction to Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measures (OECMs), the World Database on Protected and Conserved Areas (WDPCA) and the Integrated Biodiversity Assessment Tool (IBAT)

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1. Introduction

Area-based conservation has long been a cornerstone of efforts to conserve species and habitats, safeguard and enhance nature's contributions to people,[1] and improve the resilience of land and seascapes to climate change (Zeng et al. 2022; Brodie et al. 2023; Duncanson et al. 2023; Nowakowski et al. 2023; Cannizzo et al. 2024).

Protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures (OECMs), collectively referred to as "protected and conserved areas", are central to global conservation efforts, with their importance highlighted in multiple multilateral environmental agreements, such as the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 14 and 15 and Target 3 of the Kunming-Montréal Global Biodiversity Framework (Global Biodiversity Framework), and private sector nature-related impact frameworks and standards.

Businesses, financial institutions and other organizations often make decisions that can directly or indirectly impact protected and conserved areas. This may include impacts on both the biodiversity values and other values (e.g., social, spiritual or cultural) of these areas. All private sector actors should assess and manage their risks associated with protected and conserved areas, with impacts to these areas posing legal, operational and social risks.

While protected areas are well established and widely embedded in policy, OECMs are a newer concept that is equally important. Accessible and high-quality data on the distribution and extent of OECMs, in conjunction with guidance on what OECMs are, is crucial for improving nature-related decision making.

Like protected areas, OECMs are ecologically sensitive areas that are recognized in global disclosure frameworks and standards (e.g., Taskforce on Nature-related Financial Disclosures (TNFD)), which require organizations to identify and mitigate potential negative impacts on them. Furthermore, private sector actors have an opportunity to support area-based conservation efforts, such as through the mobilization of resources and capacity (Deutz et al. 2020; World Economic Forum 2024).

This document introduces OECMs, what they are and why they are important, and how they complement protected areas. It also outlines how the Integrated Biodiversity Assessment Tool (IBAT) (https://www.ibat-alliance.org) can be used to access information relating to both.

[1] Ecosystem services, also referred to as Nature's Contributions to People, are positive benefits that ecosystems contribute to economic and human activity. Ecosystem services can be classified into provisioning services (e.g., food, materials), regulating services (e.g., climate regulation, flood control), and cultural services (e.g., recreation, spiritual reflection) (IPBES 2019; UNEP 2024).

2. Why are OECMs important?

OECMs encompass a diverse range of managed areas, from community-led conservation initiatives to private lands, and are havens for biodiversity that support critical ecosystem functions and services. The role of OECMs in achieving global biodiversity goals was highlighted in a 2024 study which found 74 terrestrial, 44 marine, and three freshwater Key Biodiversity Areas[2] - sites scientifically identified as significant for the global persistence of biodiversity - to be partially or fully covered by OECMs (UNEP-WCMC and IUCN 2024a). These figures are expected to increase as OECMs are recognized in more countries and territories.

In addition to having ecological importance, OECMs can be socially, culturally, economically and spiritually important, and can be implemented in ways that foster inclusive governance and management. Designation and management choices for OECMs have the potential to engage a wide range of stakeholders, including Indigenous Peoples, local communities, private landowners and other rights-holders. This provides an opportunity for equitable conservation across terrestrial, inland water and marine ecosystems (Jonas et al. 2024).

The importance and value of OECMs is also highlighted in a growing number of private sector nature-related impact disclosure frameworks and standards, which stipulate OECMs as sensitive locations of importance for nature and biodiversity. Such frameworks and standards include Taskforce on Nature-related Financial Disclosures (TNFD), Science Based Targets Network (SBTN), GRI Standards and European Sustainability Reporting Standards (ESRS).

For more information on how financial institutions and businesses can manage and mitigate risks and engage with opportunities associated with OECMs, see the guidance below.

- **UNEP-WCMC 2025a. Risk Management in Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measures - Guidance on OECMs for asset managers and asset owners.** UN Environment Programme World Conservation Monitoring Centre. Cambridge, UK. DOI: https://doi.org/10.34892/35b1-vs22
- **UNEP-WCMC 2025b. Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measures: An introduction for businesses.** UN Environment Programme World Conservation Monitoring Centre. Cambridge, UK DOI: https://doi.org/10.34892/4deq-0t41

[2] Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs) represent the most comprehensive dataset of areas of importance for species and habitats and are "*sites contributing significantly to the global persistence of biodiversity*" that have been identified using globally standardised scientific criteria (IUCN 2016).

3. What is an OECM?

In 2018, an "OECM" was formally defined by the Parties to the UN Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) 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, socio-economic, and other locally relevant values."* (CBD Decision 14/8, pg. 1).

The key concepts underpinning this definition is that an OECM is (CBD Decision 14/8):

- ***"Geographically defined"***
- ***An "area other than a protected area"***
- ***"Governed and managed"***
- ***"Sustained long-term"***
- ***Achieves "in-situ conservation of biodiversity"***

Further, in 2022, Parties to the CBD adopted the Global Biodiversity Framework. For the purposes of Target 3 of that framework, and in-line with the rights-based approach to its implementation, the Global Biodiversity Framework requires that areas are "*equitably governed*", *"recognize indigenous and traditional territories"* and "*recognize and respect the rights of indigenous peoples and local communities, including over their traditional territories*" (CBD Decision 15/4, pg. 9). More detailed explanations of each concept are provided in Box 1, with a set of four case studies highlighting examples of different types of reported OECMs provided in Annex A.

Box 1: Key concepts underpinning the definition of an OECM

Geographically defined: An OECM is a "*geographically defined area*", which implies it is a spatially delineated area with agreed and demarcated boundaries which may or may not be defined by features in the land or seascape. While the boundaries of most OECMs never change, in exceptional cases, the boundaries of some OECMs, such as those that border as riverbanks, may move (IUCN-WCPA Task Force on OECMs 2019).

Area other than a protected area: Any area that meets the CBD definition of an OECM cannot also be a protected area (Jonas et al. 2024). While protected areas must have biodiversity conservation as a primary management objective, OECMs may not have biodiversity conservation as a primary objective. However, OECMs must have identified ecological values such as biodiversity and ecosystem functions and services, and must deliver long-term and sustained conservation of those values, regardless of the site's primary objectives (IUCN-WCPA Task Force on OECMs 2019).

For example, some OECMs may be managed with research, education, tourism, water resource management, or preservation of archaeological artefacts as their primary objective (Jonas et al. 2024), with biodiversity conservation a secondary objective. In some cases, conservation might not be a stated objective. Regardless of an OECM's objectives, its management must result in biodiversity conservation.

Governed and managed: Governance relates to how decisions are made and by whom, while management relates to the implementation of those decisions. OECMs can be governed by the same range of entities as protected areas, such as (Jonas et al. 2024):

i. Governance by governments.
ii. Governance by private individuals, organizations or companies.
iii. Governance by Indigenous Peoples and/or local communities.
iv. Shared governance (i.e., governance by various rights holders and stakeholders together)

Management, in the context of OECMs, relates to the implementation of actions to enhance or maintain the natural values of the area (Jonas et al. 2024).

Governments may recognize OECMs as part of their efforts to meet Target 3 of the Global Biodiversity Framework. Target 3 includes additional, rights-based components which require that OECMs are "*equitably governed*", that "*indigenous and traditional territories are recognized*" and that the "*rights of Indigenous Peoples and local communities, including over their traditional territories, are recognized and respected*" (CBD Decision 15/4, pg. 9). Taken together, areas designated as OECMs must result in positive *in situ* conservation outcomes.

Long-term: The positive outcomes of an OECM are expected to be permanent and sustained over the long-term. Short-term or temporary management strategies do not constitute an OECM. Permanence could be an explicitly stated aim accompanied by measures to hinder reversal or changes to the OECM. Where permanence is not an explicit aim, there should still be a clear intention for the OECM to deliver positive outcomes indefinitely (Jonas et al. 2024).

In-situ: OECMs are managed and governed to ensure positive biodiversity outcomes within their natural environment. In this context, in situ conservation refers to maintaining and enhancing ecosystems, natural habitats, and viable populations of species in the places where they naturally exist (Jonas et al. 2024). For domesticated or cultivated species, it involves conserving them within the area where they developed their distinctive properties (CBD 2006).

4. OECMs in IBAT

The Integrated Biodiversity Assessment Tool (IBAT) (https://www.ibat-alliance.org/) brings together four of the world's most authoritative biodiversity datasets and expert insights to support world-shaping decision making. With the addition of OECM data to existing information on protected areas from the World Database on Protected and Conserved Areas (WDPCA), alongside data from the World Database of Key Biodiversity Areas (WDKBA) and the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species, IBAT further enables users to make informed insights and decisions.

The WDPCA provides the headline indicator for Target 3 of the Global Biodiversity Framework and represents the most authoritative global source of protected and conserved area data (Figure 1). While nearly all countries and territories have protected areas in the WDPCA, at the time of the integration of OECM data into IBAT, only a small number of countries and territories have mapped and reported OECMs. IBAT users should note that the current reported areas are likely to be an underrepresentation of the true extent of OECMs, and that OECMs are likely to cover an increasingly significant area as recognition, mapping and reporting of these areas continues to grow.

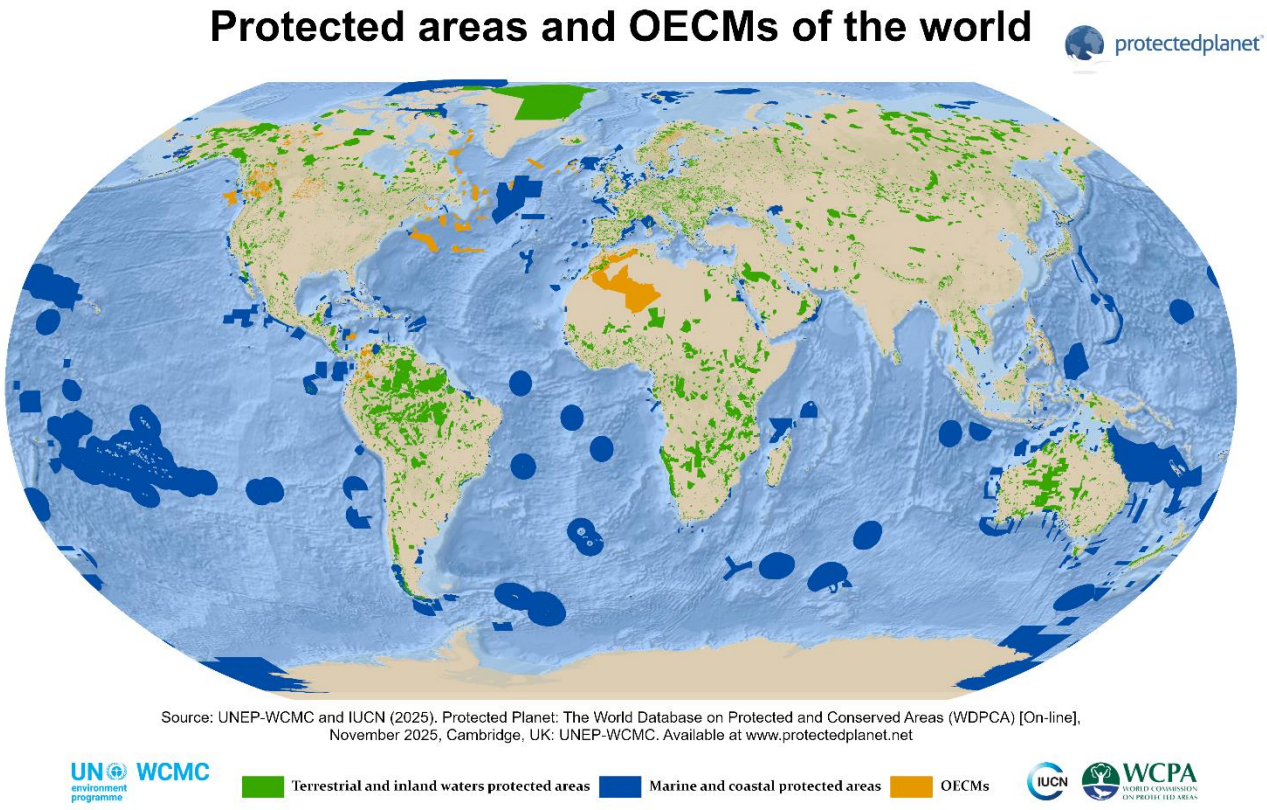

Figure 1 – Map of global protected areas and OECMs (November 2025 release of WDPCA) (UNEP-WCMC and IUCN 2025a). Databases available for non-commercial use at: www.protectedplanet.net, and available for commercial use at: https://www.ibat-alliance.org/.

OECM data are updated monthly by UNEP-WCMC in collaboration with governments, non-governmental organizations, private actors, Indigenous Peoples, local communities, and other data providers. Each reported OECM is represented spatially by a polygon boundary, or, if unavailable, a point location, and is accompanied by detailed attribute information. This includes the name of the site, the type of designation, the size of the site, governance information, and site management information, among other data. These data are integrated into IBAT, where users can visualize, query, and download them alongside data on protected areas, KBAs, and threatened species. Data downloads can be focused on an area of interest to inform biodiversity risk screening, reporting, and decision making.

OECMs are critical components of the global conservation agenda, providing refuge for biodiversity, delivering ecosystem services, and supporting a diverse set of rightsholders and stakeholders. As their recognition and reporting expands, it is essential that private sector actors and decision-makers treat OECMs with the same level of care and consideration as protected areas, ensuring that potential impacts are identified, mitigated, and monitored.

5. Additional Guidance and Resources

Additional guidance on how OECMs should be considered by financial institutions and businesses, along with criteria for identifying OECMs and other relevant resources can be accessed below:

- **Risk management in OECMs - Guidance on OECMs for asset managers and asset owners:** https://resources.unep-wcmc.org/products/WCMC_RT688
- **OECMs: An introduction for businesses**: https://resources.unep-wcmc.org/products/WCMC_RT749
- **IUCN Guidance on other effective area-based conservation measures (OECMs):** https://doi.org/10.2305/LAAW4624.
- **IUCN Site-level tool for identifying other effective area-based conservation measures:** https://portals.iucn.org/library/sites/library/files/documents/PATRS-006-En.pdf
- **30x30 Solutions Toolkit:** https://www.30x30.solutions/other-effective-area-based-conservation-measures/#Summary
- **Human Rights and Biodiversity Working Group, From Agreements to Actions:** A guide to applying a human rights-based approach to the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, includes guidance specifically related to targets on OECMs and area-based conservation under that Framework: https://www.iccaconsortium.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/from-agreements-to-actions.pdf
- **Protected Planet:** https://www.protectedplanet.net/en/thematic-areas/oecms?tab=OECMs

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Annex A – Case Study Examples of Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measures (OECMs)

Ngai Taporoporo o Takitumu (or Takitumu Conservation Area), Cook Islands.

Ngai Taporoporo o Takitumu (Takitumu Conservation Area) is a community-governed area managed primarily to protect critical breeding habitat for the endemic Kākerōri bird (Rarotonga flycatcher). This lowland forest ecosystem is also home to a range of other species, including the Cook Islands fruit bat and Rarotonga monarch, and covers an area of 155 hectares (Lucas et al. 2023).

Managed by the Takitumu Conservation Area Trust, a collaboration between the Government of the Cook Islands and local landowners and communities, site-level conservation, management, and monitoring is led by local landowners.

Despite the site's alignment with the IUCN's definition of a protected area, Ngai Taporoporo o Takitumu was submitted with free, prior, and informed consent to the Cook Island Ministry of Justice, Land Court Division, to gain its recognition as an OECM – the preference of the site's stakeholders (Lucas et al. 2023).

Ngai Taporoporo o Takitumu was subsequently reported to the WD-OECM in June 2024 (UNEP-WCMC and IUCN 2024b, 2025b).

Pusaka Koupu-upuan Logta Lawod Bangsa Molbog Indigenous Community Conserved Area, Philippines

The Pusaka Koupu-upuan Logta Lawod Bangsa Molbog Indigenous Community Conserved Area is a territory conserved by Indigenous Peoples, located on the coast of the Philippines and covering 352 km^2 (WWF-US 2022).

This OECM was recognized on communal lands and governed by the Pala'wan and Molbog Indigenous Peoples, providing an example of the integration of traditional governance with contemporary conservation efforts. Both the Pala'wan and the Molbog community engage in sustainable practices such as traditional agriculture, fishing, and eco-tourism, ensuring economic activities align with environmental conservation (Fabro 2022; Ethnic Groups of the Philippines 2023).

Profil Yayasan Pusaka Bentala Rakyat (PUSAKA), an Indigenous Peoples' advocacy organization, is supporting discussions around recognizing the site as a territory/area conserved by Indigenous Peoples and local communities (ICCA) as well as promoting local capacity building on site management (PUSAKA 2024).

Coca-Cola Bottlers Japan Water Source Forest Ebino (Miyaziki Prefecture), Japan

This privately governed 203-hectare woodland near Ebino, Japan, is home to a variety of unique and important species of freshwater invertebrate species, amphibians, and birds (Coca-Cola Bottlers Japan Inc. 2024).

A Nationally Certified Sustainably Managed Natural Site, this forest ecosystem is managed primarily for water resource management to support Coca-Cola Bottlers Japan with a sustainable and long-term source of freshwater. In doing so, the long-term conservation of local biodiversity is also achieved, with biodiversity conservation identified as a priority of the site (Coca-Cola Bottlers Japan Inc. 2024).

Legally-binding agreements between local government and forest cooperatives ensure the sustainable use and management of this site in perpetuity, with the site recognized by the Government of Japan's Ministry of the Environment as a part of a wider national network of OECMs, and reported to the WD-OECM in 2024 (Sharma et al. 2023; Coca-Cola Bottlers Japan Inc. 2024; UNEP-WCMC and IUCN 2025c).

Offshore Pacific Seamounts and Vents Closure, Canada

Canada's Pacific seamounts and hydrothermal vents are unique and important geological sites home to a variety of deep-sea biodiversity concentrated around these features.

This Ecologically and Biologically Significant Area (EBSA) is home to multiple species of coral, sponge, and other rare and endemic species. The site's 8.2 million hectare area is subject to a complete, government-enforced closure to commercial and recreational fishing activities which contact the seafloor, such as bottom trawling.

The areas within which Canada's Pacific seamounts and hydrothermal vents fall are managed by the federal body Fisheries and Oceans Canada and protected in the long-term primarily for their geological importance, with the conservation of marine biodiversity an additional secondary benefit (Fisheries and Oceans Canada 2019).

Formally recognized in 2017, this site has since been reported by Environment and Climate Change Canada to the WD-OECM (UNEP-WCMC and IUCN 2025d).