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PAPER TITLE:

The New Paradigm for Protected Areas

PAPER ABSTRACT:

This paper will: (a) introduce the outputs from the Vth IUCN World Parks Congress (WPC) was held in Durban, South Africa in September 2003; (b) introduce the key elements of the new paradigm for protected areas; and (c) outline the specific implications for the management of people in and around protected areas. There will be a particular focus on the changing role of park visitors as integral element of park management programmes.

With more than 3,000 participants from 160 countries, the Vth World Parks Congress represented the largest and most diverse gathering of protected area experts in history. The Congress celebrated one of the most significant conservation achievements of the last century – the inclusion of more than 11.5% of the earth's land surface in protected areas, representing a tremendous commitment by countries to protect their biodiversity and to pass on natural areas to future generations. However, WPC participants also noted that many of these areas face significant challenges and threats. In particular many protected areas, particularly in developing countries, often lack the necessary management capacity and resources to ensure their long term viability. It is also increasingly clear that protected areas have to be considered in the context of rapid and, in many cases accelerating, change. Global warming, invasive species and development pressures are increasingly impacting on protected areas and this poses significant challenges for those involved in protected area establishment and management as to how to respond. The key outputs from the World Parks Congress were framed in a Durban Accord and a Durban Action Plan. These provide the basis for a new paradigm of protected areas for the 21st century. The key elements of this paradigm include the need to: (a) address key gaps in protected area coverage, particularly in relation to the establishment of marine protected areas; (b) strengthen the effectiveness of management of existing protected areas, particularly through focused capacity building of protected areas agencies and staff; (c) the need to develop new and innovative approaches for protected areas, particularly in relation to new models of protected area governance and means for better linking protected areas with planning at regional scales; (d) ensure that protected areas consider and are linked with the needs of local people.

Within the context of the new paradigm, the management of visitors to protected areas and the need to better engage with local communities in and around protected areas takes on particular importance. In particular there must be a shift towards planning for protected areas with and for, rather than against, people, as has been the situation in some cases in the past.