

An Overview of ASEAN Protected Area Systems

► By SAHLEE C. BUGNA

In the past few decades, as the quality of our oceans, forests and the air we breathe continue to deteriorate, a number of environmental issues have surfaced and generated global concern. Paramount among these issues is that of biodiversity conservation.

Biodiversity refers to the variability among living organisms, the diversity of life, often divided into three hierarchical levels: genes, species and ecosystem diversity. Biodiversity comprises all life forms that have adapted to the variety of climatic and physical conditions currently found on earth. Its protection ensures that the linkages between species and ecosystems are maintained, and that the quality of the environment and our vast natural resources may be enjoyed by future generations.

This global concern has led to the creation of several international agreements that specifically focus on the preservation of biodiversity. These include:

- Agenda 21. Introduced at the 1992 Rio Earth Summit, it presents an international program of action for achieving sustainable development in the 21st century. Some underlying themes emphasize a bottom-up approach to development (stemming from communities and NGOs), community participation, transparency in governance and the need for integrated approaches to achieve significant progress.
- Convention on Biological Diversity. This was also adopted at the Rio Earth Summit. The convention requires member-na-

tions to take a comprehensive approach to biodiversity protection by recognizing the central position of protected areas, the development of a multi-sectoral national strategy, as well as the establishment of an integrated protected area system.

- Bonn Convention (1979). This concerns the conservation and protection of migratory species, and stipulates the restoration of important habitats in order to prevent, reduce or control factors that endanger affected species.
- Convention on International Trade of Endangered Species (CITES)(1972). The enforcement of CITES is meant to control the

trade in threatened and endangered species, which severely threatens biodiversity worldwide.

- The Ramsar Convention (1971). Contracting parties are obliged to designate at least one wetland for the List of Wetlands of International Importance, adopt and implement a National Wetlands Policy, as well as establish nature reserves to preserve wetland sites.

These and a number of other international and regional agreements emphasize the global concern for biodiversity conservation and call for the implementation of action plans tailored to respond to conservation needs in each country. Compliance with such agreements can strengthen biodiversity conservation efforts both at the local, and international levels.

ASEAN protected area systems are designed according to conservation requirements of each country, but often follow categories set by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN).

ASEAN Biodiversity will be featuring a series of articles on protected area systems in ASEAN member countries to highlight the structures in place to preserve the biodiversity richness of each country, reasons for biodiversity loss, and the efforts being implemented to conserve biodiversity. In creating awareness of protected area management efforts in the ASEAN, perhaps the exchange of information will also generate animated discussions between member countries on how best to conserve biodiversity. ●

IUCN Protected Area Categories

Category 1a: Strict Nature Reserve
– full protection for natural ecosystems in an unmodified state.

Category 1b: Wilderness Area – wilderness protection.

Category II: National Park/State Park – ecosystem protection and recreation.

Category III: Natural Monument – conservation of specific natural features.

Category IV: Habitat/Species Management Area – conservation through active management.

Category V: Natural Landscape/Seascape – landscape/seascape conservation and recreation.

Category VI: Managed Resource Protected Area – sustainable use of the natural ecosystem.