PROTECTED AREAS: SOLUTION OR PROBLEM?

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Protected areas are the **main conservation tool** used in most countries around the world. These areas contain some of the most incredible landscapes, the most biodiverse places, and provide us with vital services for our survival and well-being.

The origin of protected areas – whose first opening was the Yellowstone National Park in the USA in 1872 – It is located in the distance from the rural environment and nature that took place during the Industrial Revolutions between the 18th and 20th centuries. Given the growing rural exodus and isolation of the population from nature, they wanted to represent the emblematic – even romantic – "lost" relationship between human beings and nature through these "islands of nature" (protected areas). **Protected areas then became the main tool and symbol of global conservation**.

Currently there are objectives to increase protected areas and conserve biodiversity, established by different international plans and frameworks. Highlights include the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity and the Aichi Targets or the Target 15 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Despite the fact that scientists urge to "shield" half the planet with protected areas (50% of the terrestrial area, and 30% of the oceans), previous studies show that protected areas do not prevent the loss of biodiversity. In fact, experts argue that conservation strategies based solely on increasing protected areas will not be enough to achieve sustainable management of the environment.

What can you do about it? The objective should be to **combine traditional conservation**

strategies (protected areas) with more recent strategies with a more holistic vision . The latter focus on transforming dichotomous territories formed only by protected areas and developed/productive areas, by other more multifunctional that integrate production (agricultural, industrial) and conservation areas. The creation of multifunctional territories requires recognition of the economic benefits that our society obtains from the services provided by nature (ecosystem services). As shown by the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment and scientific studies, the estimated global economic value of ecosystem services is $125 trillion per year (2011 value). The usefulness of this economistic approach, although not without criticism , lies in increasing the awareness of our society about the economic value of conserving nature. This could contribute to creating multifunctional landscapes that integrate conservation objectives and strategies alongside production-focused ones – as conservation would not be seen as a "brake" of development.

Under this framework, **governments would see the creation of multifunctional territories as a great economic, social and environmental opportunity for their programs**. A more realistic and comprehensive conservation strategy, combined with traditional conservation strategies (protected areas), would help create more sustainable and resilient socio-ecological systems, **thus improving our social well-being in the medium-long term**.

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There are no comments yet.