

Natural Capital Accounting at the World Parks Congress

The 6th IUCN-WCPA World Parks Congress was held in Sydney, Australia from 12-19 November 2014. Its focus on “Parks, People, Planet: Inspiring solutions” drew over 6000 delegates from over 170 countries. Held every 10 years, the Congress has played a demonstrative role in setting the agenda for international environmental action over the past 50 years centered around the management of protected areas in all countries of the world.

In this sixth Congress a very conscious widening of the agenda was undertaken with efforts to draw in a much broader range of disciplines to the discussion and ensuring coverage not only of protected areas themselves but also the local communities dependent on them and the connection to economic, human and environmental sustainability more generally.

In this broader context of “Parks” the role of data, monitoring and specifically natural capital accounting, was a cross-cutting topic at the Congress. This interest in measurement and accounting was reflected in a number of ways.

First, through Conservation International and the World Bank special sessions on natural capital accounting were held. These sessions showcased projects underway at national level and provided exposure and introduction to key concepts and ideas. The joint UNEP/UNSD/CBD Advancing Natural Capital Accounting project was one of those presented.

Second, among the various introductory plenary sessions there was a recognition of the need to move beyond a focus on the area being protected to the associated biodiversity and ecosystem services of protected areas. This extension, which connects well to the purpose of natural capital accounting, was couched in terms of making sure the focus of CBD Aichi Target 11 was not only on its first phrase concerning achieving protection of 17% of terrestrial and inland water areas and 10% of coastal and marine areas, but also its second phrase of protecting those areas of “particular importance for biodiversity and ecosystem services. At the same plenary session speakers variously highlighted the advances in monitoring techniques, the importance of data and monitoring and, explicitly, the important role to be played by natural capital accounting.

Third, and most fundamentally, the draft innovative approaches to changes from the Congress (http://worldparkscongress.org/about/promise_of_sydney_innovative_approaches.html) highlighted measurement and accounting from a number perspectives. The Congress itself was organized along eight main streams from “Achieving conservation goals” to “Enhancing the diversity and quality of governance”. Recommendations have been developed by each stream; and four of the eight streams drafted recommendations on data, accounting or reporting related issues. Recommendation 2 of Stream 3: “Improving health and well-being” noted the need for the value of parks to be recognised in accounting and explicitly referred to the SEEA as a relevant measurement tool. (Stream 3 held special sessions on recognizing the value of parks to societal and individual well-being.) Under Stream 4: “Supporting human life”, Recommendation 1 highlighted the need to develop the evidence base concerning the contribution of ecosystem services.

As the work of the Congress and its vast number of delegates moves on from Sydney it is clear that there is considerable mutual benefit for collaboration between the natural capital accounting and the Parks communities. Much is to be learned on both sides about the relevant perspectives and approaches to information and decision making but there is an opportunity that can be grasped to build on the Promise of Sydney.

http://worldparkscongress.org/about/promise_of_sydney_vision.html

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