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The Process of Preparing a General Management Plan for a Protected Area

AWF Working Papers



Philip Muruthi

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The Process of Preparing a General Management Plan for a Protected Area

SYNOPSIS. One major constraint on protected area management is the lack of well designed strategies for approaching the future. Production of a good management plan is vital to execution of efficient and effective protected area management. Protected areas maintain samples of diversity: biological, cultural, landscape, and watershed in addition to facilitating recreation, controlling habitat degradation and supporting rational use of lands. They fit straightforwardly with a landscape level conservation approach such as AWF's African Heartlands Program – www.awf.org. This paper outlines the general management plan making process and outlines some "good practices". It encompasses the process starting with the decision to prepare a plan for a certain protected area or group of areas and finishing with evaluation of the plan's effectiveness, plan review and amendment or replacement. This paper should be a useful starting point for staff and partners who will engage in the management planning process in the quest to save protected areas which are anchors within their particular conservation landscape.

The purpose of a protected area management plan

A management plan is a document that guides the use and control of resources within a protected area. It is a dynamic, feasible, practical, and realistic instrument that, based on a process of ecological and socio-economic planning, provides the general indications for conservation, zoning and uses of the natural space, becoming the pillar instrument for zoning, management and development of the protected area. Management plans provide guidance in three dimensions: *in space*, establishing what should be done in a given place, *in time*, establishing what should be done at a given time and *in method*, establishing how things should be done. Management planning¹ interprets and integrates a range of policies, treaties, strategies, business plans and legislative requirements into a geographical overlay that provides an essential framework to guide management of a particular protected area and assure the public that the area is being responsibly managed. Specific purposes of management plans are seen as being to:

- Ensure protected areas are managed to achieve objectives of conservation management, corporate goals, legislation and stakeholder expectations – assures quality, consistency, and prevention of incremental degradation through *ad hoc* decision making.
- Ensure public involvement in protected area management. A General Management Plan (GMP) supports and encourages participation by other stakeholders in the development of the protected area and improves on subsequent legitimacy and social sustainability.

- Develop a shared understanding of and a vision of the protected area – identify the significance of the area, consolidate legislative and policy issues, integrate various elements of management and convey to the public and management staff how the reserve will be protected and visitors provided for.
- Public accountability – what we want to achieve and how including criteria by which the performance of management under the plan will be assessed.

Who needs a plan? Functions of a management plan

Every protected area should have a plan to guide its management and to ensure effective use of limited resources. The management plan has some obvious and important functions. It provides a description of the area, identifies the objectives of the area management, resolves any conflicts and prioritizes the various objectives. A management plan identifies and describes the management required to achieve the objectives. As a road map, a plan maintains continuity of effective management. The GMP helps in obtaining resources for managing the protected area (it is a bid for resources). The plan enables communication within and between protected areas and organizations. A good management plan helps demonstrate that management is effective and efficient.

What is a protected area?

A protected area is "an area of land and / or sea especially dedicated to the protection and maintenance of biological diversity, and of natural and associated cultural resources, and managed through legal or other effective means" (IUCN 1994).

Six levels of protected areas are identified within the broad definition, ranging from strictly protected reserves

¹ Planning means thinking in a systematic manner, explaining possibilities and analyzing their advantages and disadvantages, setting goals, projecting towards the future. Over time, planning enables efficient and effective management of sites and species.

with limited access to more accessible areas managed for sustainable resource use.

Protected areas are vital components of strategies to preserve biodiversity including rare species, and maintain ecological integrity (Bruner *et al.* 2001, Possingham *et al.* 2005). Protected areas around the world assist to safeguard biodiversity and often provide other benefits such as protecting water supplies, providing flood protection, protecting cultural values, and sustaining the livelihoods of local people. The total coverage of protected areas has more than doubled over the last decade to about 12.65% of the Earth's land surface (Chape *et al.* 2003). However, most protected areas are not solely capable of this task in the long term. On their own they are too small, too few in number or too widely separated to maintain viable wildlife populations, sustain the effects of large natural disturbances and ensure maintenance of regional scale biological processes such as metapopulation dynamics.

Even the most strictly protected area is not immune to external impacts. Within the traditional concept of protected areas, it is assumed that they are unoccupied areas with legal, political support for their conservation, that they are a property of the state, they have strong institutions and enough financial and human resources for their management. It is also assumed that there is social acceptance of the concept and of the objectives of the protected areas. These and other assumptions should be considered in the process of developing a general management plan.

Timeframe for a management plan

The common time frame for the GMP is five years.

The process of GMP preparation

Planning is a continuous task in the management cycle. For simplicity sake, I have broken the GMP making process into several steps (Figure 1).

1. Identification of the need to prepare a GMP for the particular area

The process starts with the *identification of the need to prepare a GMP for the particular area*. At this early juncture the total planning area may not strictly be agreed upon. The need to prepare a GMP may be identified by the protected area managers, their directorates or other stakeholders who have an interest in its management.

2. Getting Started with the GMP building process: the start-up team

The start-up team is a small group of perhaps four – five persons, who take charge of the preparatory phase. At this initial stage, a management concept has not been developed – a *start-up team* must take the initiative for the process. A key output of the start-up planning team is a scoping report in preparation for developing a general management plan providing a framework for the plan, identifying key issues, components, resources and roles. The startup team is made up of people who are knowledgeable in management planning, familiar with the site and are able to communicate with the local actors.

The start-up team drafts a statement of significance and purpose, identifies information needs for the planning process, and creates a schedule for plan development. The team must be clear on how to handle the different steps in the process together with the different actors. A preliminary budget is developed and recommendations made regarding opportunities for capacity building within and around the protected area. The team gathers information about the legal and political bases for the protected area. The lead agency must have a compendium of all laws related to the protected areas in general, which must be complemented with laws and agreements that exist for the particular protected area. The start-up team begins outreach with the key stakeholders and draws up a simple outreach plan to work with stakeholders and support them actors so that they can effectively participate in the GMP making process. The start-up team identifies the basic needs including tools, equipment, and supplies urgently required for effective management of the protected area even before the plan is completed. A Core Planning Team to complete the GMP is identified by the start-up team.

AWF facilitated preparation of the GMP for Samburu National Reserve (SNR) in Samburu Heartland (www.awf.org) whose start-up team included staff from SNR, Kenya Wildlife Service (the national wildlife authority), the United States Department of Interior (DoI), local community development manager. The DoI provided two experts: one in plan development and another in protected area management. DoI staff and other members of the scoping team subsequently participated in the planning process until the plan was finalized and ratified.

3. Preparation of Terms of Reference for the GMP Planning Process

The start-up team's scoping report contributes to the development of comprehensive terms of reference (ToR) for the management planning process. The objective of the ToR is to guide the planning process and team so that all the critical issues and steps are followed and ensuring that a sound GMP is prepared. Key elements of the ToR include objectives, priorities, timeframe, information needed, public involvement, financial implications, team composition, responsibility and authorities. ToR for the GMP making process must be shared and agreed upon with key stakeholders particularly the protected area management authority upon whom the plans implementation will depend.

4. Formation of the Core Planning Team

The responsibility for initiating preparation and implementation of the GMP lies with the protected area authority which forms the start-up team. The function of the core team is to complete the plan - its members have been members of the start-up team. The core team should be multidisciplinary. Its constitution depends on the main issues in each specific area.

The core planning team has a team leader and experts in the areas of tourism, community development, ecology, legal issues and protected area management. The team leader knows the planning process and is preferably a natural resources management specialist. S/he provides oversight to the process ensuring ToR are adhered to, assigns duties, supervises the team, collates information and ultimately is in-charge of producing the GMP. The tourism expert analyzes the tourism scenarios in the area and proposes an optimal tourism strategy.

A community based natural resources management and rural development expert is essential to success of a participatory protected area management planning process. An ecologist handles research and ecological aspects of the GMP including habitat and species management. The protected area manager involved in the GMP process should be quite senior in the establishment. A legal expert may be called upon to look at legal basis of the protected area, land issues and contracts pertaining to the protected area and to give advice relevant to the GMP process. Each team member must have ToR for their respective tasks.

Other experts may be brought on board as necessary. Institutional representation may be necessary in the planning team where the area being planned has several

influences outside the direct jurisdiction of the institution charged with the responsibility of managing that protected area.

5. Principles to orient the management process

The core planning team considers certain key principles that serve to orient the management of protected areas. The principles include protected areas being integral parts of local, regional and national dynamics, implementation of participative processes, coherence of the institutional realm, planning as a continuous task in the management cycle, and involvement of all relevant actors in collective construction to achieve consensus about the use and future of the area. As a matter of principle: management should be based on appropriate levels of information (evidence-based if possible), conservation should be seen to have a social function, and conservation objectives should be the starting point for general management planning. There is no unique formula to plan and manage a protected area. Plans should be able to respond to external and internal changes - they should be flexible. The planning team should be aware that protected areas are of necessity prone to conflicts. Finally, the planning documents must be simple, amenable to alteration, and accessible. The concept of a management plan which grows as information becomes available is widely accepted - the team should plan with the best available information within the stated planning period.

Initial GMP Planning Workshop for core team and key stakeholders

The interdisciplinary core planning team meets to begin the development of the GMP. Key stakeholders are invited the workshop to ensure that planning is interactive. The scoping report and the terms of reference are amended based on inputs of stakeholders. The workshop agrees regarding the geographic reach of the planning - the extent to which the plan will include the protected area and surrounding areas. Thematic working groups may be formed at this workshop. Members of the team could also be trained at this workshop to improve on their effective participation in the entire planning process.

6. Identification and Analysis of Stakeholders

Protected areas are influenced by factors internal and external to themselves. Analysis of Stakeholders will provide information regarding who has access to, and control over resources, their needs, practical and



strategic interests, and how they affect resources in the planning area. It is also important to examine existing institutions, their activities and how they affect protected area management. Analysis of stakeholders should be done early in the planning process.

7. Collection of Background Information

Background information is usually collected systematically from various sources including literature reviews, interviews and field visits.

Literature Review information can be sought from the conservation and management authorities and other organizations that may have an interest in its management. Documents worth surveying include reports (research, evaluation, rural appraisal), local and regional development plans and files of the respective management authorities. The relevant policy and legal framework governing management of protected areas and other land uses that may influence it are reviewed. This provides guidance and direction on the general management of the particular area. International Conventions and protocols pertaining to the management of the area also studied. Maps, satellite images and photographs of the area should be reviewed to provide insights into spatial and temporal characteristics and their variation.

Interviews should be held with those working for various conservation and development organizations within and around the protected area. Interviews can provide information about key issues and problems in the protected area as well as local and regional influences not available in the literature.

8. Field Visits

Each protected area is different and it is necessary that the planners make field visits to their particular site to capture and authenticate the pertinent issues and fill knowledge gaps. Field visits must be planned properly to meet their purpose. Each team member should have a fairly good understanding of the area based on the literature review, the scoping exercise/report and terms of reference. The team leader should assemble all relevant maps for the area at relevant scale and avail them to team members. A base map for the planning area should be prepared using Geographical Information System (GIS). Regardless, a GIS metadata database should be established for the planning process. An itinerary for the field trip should be prepared that allows the team to move together initially to allow for

interdisciplinary appreciation of the protected area and issues to be addressed. After the reconnaissance survey, members of the team may undertake their tasks separately based on ToR and interrelationships.

9. Analysis of Data/Information Collected so far

To this stage, the process has concentrated on collecting data and information that can help the planning team to thoroughly understand the situation within and around the protected area. Information collected could be formidable to analyze and summarize. To simplify, the planning team may consider summarizing information into four components;

- This *Descriptive Compendium* which is a source of information for any geographic, biophysical, ecological, social or economic question in relation to the area.
- The *Compendium of laws, norms and agreements* which is a source of information for any legal question in relation to the protected area.
- The *Zoning Plan* which establishes norms for use of the land, defining where you can do what and how.
- The *Development of Management Programmes* which gives priority to activities that should be performed first, offering answers about what to do, where and how.
- The first two bullets form the first chapters of the General Management Plan. Care must be taken not to overemphasize the descriptive compendium at the detriment of the other parts of the plan which may be more important for management. These zonal and strategic plans begin as outline statements, gradually growing into definitive documents. These plans come later in the GMP document though the information is gathered throughout the planning process including section 10 below.

10. Management issues, Problems, Constraints and Challenges

Collection of information through literature review, interviews and field visits and the subsequent analysis and documentation will reveal problems, issues, and challenges that may prevent the realization of the goals and objectives of establishing the protected area. This is a very important part of GMP preparation process - it provides a basis for the development of management interventions. Issues and problems should be grouped into categories such as natural/environmental resources, visitor use/experiences, operations, community conservation issues, infrastructure and administration.



11. Identification of Exceptional Resource Values

Exceptional resource values capture the essence of why the protected area was established and exists as such and must be protected. Identification of an area's exceptional resource values helps the planning process to set priorities for the management and conservation. The process of identifying exceptional values & for nature conservation is simple and somewhat subjective and might include consideration of features such as size, diversity (species, physical, habitat, community), naturalness, rarity, fragility (degree of sensitivity to change), typicalness, recorded history, position in an ecological unit, potential for improvement / restoration.

12. Preparation of a Statement of Significance

A statement of significance is a highlight of the special features/exceptional resource values that give it character and importance as a protected/conservation area. The statement also helps in putting the conservation area into context within the national protected area system and at the regional level. From the statement of significance, management objectives of the area are derived. Some protected areas will have been established to serve certain purposes, which will be stated at the time of their official declaration. However, others are established without a very clear definition of the significance and the core values for which they are to be managed.

13. Definition of Management Objectives for the Protected Area

Management objectives represent the desired future conditions in the area. Objectives serve to enhance the core values and exceptional resources highlighted in the area's statement of significance. The core/exceptional resource values may be shaped by higher national and international conservation goals and objectives.

The planning team will need to ask a few key questions. What resources are of critical biodiversity conservation value in the conservation area, what is their status? What are the Governments stated goals and objectives with regard to the conservation of those Biodiversity resources? What role would this particular conservation area play at the national, regional and international level in the conservation and management of these resources? What type of management regimes and practices are allowed for this type of conservation area in the country and internationally? What role does the conservation area play with regard to tourism in the country and the

local area? Should tourism development therefore be one of the key goals of managing the area or not and how should this be controlled and/or regulated? What are the key threats and challenges that have to be addressed if the conservation area is to thrive optimally and ensure the sustained protection of its resources? Is community participation critical for the conservation and management of the area and if so, how will the local people be involved in its management. Formulation of management objectives considers ecological, social and achievability factors.

14. Zoning Plan

The zoning plan rationalizes and regulates the use of the protected area and its resources, defining where things can be done, and how so as to achieve the area's management objectives. Zoning is based on an analysis of the key biodiversity values of the area alongside its potential and threats in meeting conservation and socio-economic-legal goals. Zoning must maintain a close relationship with the objectives and category of the protected area. Zoning indicates what level of use is permitted in each zone, where physical developments will be sited, type and nature of activities that can be undertaken in each zone and how. Each zone must fulfil its specific purpose.

Zoning becomes useful for protected area management when the spatial conditions for an area predetermine if for certain activity and you want to secure the utilization of its potentialities and opportunities. Zoning is important if there are different interests in that space which implies conflicts. To develop a zoning plan, the team has to know "what" you want to protect, "with whom", "from whom", or "from what" and "why". One may ask what conservation targets² (species, ecological communities, systems and processes) are characterized by their attractiveness, rareness or fragility and what human factors threaten their existence.

The zoning plan is not an assessment of carrying capacity of the various parts of the protected area but rather it defines the 'limits of acceptable use' and the types of developments and activities that can and can not occur in each zone. In fragile areas, complete restrictions could be imposed on all users except the protected area management. A particular vegetation type which is

² A conservation target is simply an ecological entity (species, community, system or process) that you want to conserve in perpetuity.

critical for the conservation of a certain species of wildlife, which is one of the exceptional resources in the conservation area, could be delineated as the core conservation zone. Similarly, development of tourism infrastructure may be prohibited in the core conservation area but allowed in the use zones.

Zoning is an extremely participatory task and it requires rules and guidelines understood by all managers and users of a protected area. A joint definition of the vision of the protected area and each of its zones is developed. The different zones are mapped and delineated spatially and validated with the various key actors. The different zones should be easily identifiable on the ground for purposes of management. Agreements and rules for the use of natural resources in the different zones are drawn. It is also defined the manner in which monitoring and evaluation of agreements will be undertaken. The planning team and stakeholders should jointly define, agree and document the sanction mechanisms to ensure that everyone abides by the agreed rules. In some countries³, these agreements are backed by politics and legislation concerning protected areas. It is important to apply socio-economic and cultural criteria to zoning in addition to biological and physical and geographical criteria in order to minimize use conflicts. As much as possible, zoning should not be limited to the protected area itself but also contemplate the potential development of the buffer and neighbouring and corridor zones. If the zoning plan has flexibility clauses, they must be discussed and agreed upon in writing. Where advantageous and possible, a zoning plan can be flexible in time – e.g. restricted access to beaches and resource use can be imposed during critical times when sea turtles lay their eggs.

15. Development of Management Programmes

Management programmes are the desired actions that will lead to the achievement of the management objectives focused on the desired or improved situation. The planning team must reflect critically on the issues, problems and limitations identified and the management objectives before formulating the management programs. Management programmes should be detailed for each stated management objective.

³ In Peru, article 23 of the Natural Protected Areas Law establishes that each area must be zoned according to its requirements and objectives, being able to strict protection and access areas when required (Amend et al. 2003).

16. Development of a Schedule for Plan Implementation and responsibility

Once activities to be undertaken for each management objective have been identified, the next step should be to prepare a *plan implementation schedule*. In identifying actions for implementation, only those activities that are cost effective, simple, technically and environmentally sound and feasible should be prescribed. Each of the activities should be budgeted for, have a time frame, and persons responsible for implementation. Activities should be prioritized reasonably. Some activities must be undertaken before others while some are more important for the maintenance of the integrity of the conservation area than others. A particular threat identified may require urgent redress. This would then have to be prioritized. Still, there are those activities whose implementation will have insignificant budgetary implications and can therefore be implemented immediately.

Responsibility for implementation of management plans is through the relevant designated authority. The link between preparing the plan and implementation must be explicit including priority setting and budgeting by the relevant agency. The financial implications of a management plan must be generally considered in the plan approval process.

17. Environmental Impact Assessment

Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) is the process of identifying the potential impacts of a project or policy before it goes ahead. The final output is an EIA document called the environmental statement (ES) which is used to decide whether or not the environmental impacts of a project are acceptable, and can be considered together with other project-related information when deciding whether or not a project can go ahead. EIA has become mandatory for proposed developments in many countries. It is imperative that a screening exercise is conducted for the proposed developments in the GMP to preset criteria to determine what requires EIA and what does not. This allows for budgeting for EIAs where they will be needed during plan implementation and further informs the scheduling of plan activities. The impacts considered in an EIA can include the effect of a project on species, habitats, landscapes, economies and health. To complete an EIA requires a combination of fieldwork, expert opinion and modelling. Always strive for a good ES.

18. Monitoring and Evaluation

Threats to protected areas must be eliminated if the protected areas are to meet their objectives and contribute to biodiversity conservation. It is fundamental that plan implementation is continuously monitored and evaluated. Monitoring and evaluation documents what happens in relation to what was proposed, expected results and, importantly, reasons for the variance. A basic monitoring plan should contain the action to be monitored and the objective that is to be fulfilled by the implementation of this activity as well as indicators for process and effectiveness (impact), means of verification, persons responsible for monitoring, target dates for achievement of the result, monitoring intervals and budget. Monitoring must be done regularly and the monitoring systems need not be complicated.

It is necessary to document the baseline condition against which future changes will be monitored. Standardized methods of data collection that as much as possible provide quantitative data should be employed. For example, if one of the programme activities was to grade roads, the monitoring indicator should be number of kilometres of road graded. The reporting interval on M&E plan should be indicated – a mid term review is mandatory.

IUCN established a framework for measuring effectiveness which considers: (a). issues related to appropriateness of management; (b). design of the protected area; and (c). whether the objectives of the protected area are being delivered. Inappropriate design may result in protected areas that are unable to meet their objectives. Design issues include considerations of size, shape, buffer zones and linkage to other areas. Without appropriate management threats may continue in spite of legal designation of protected status.

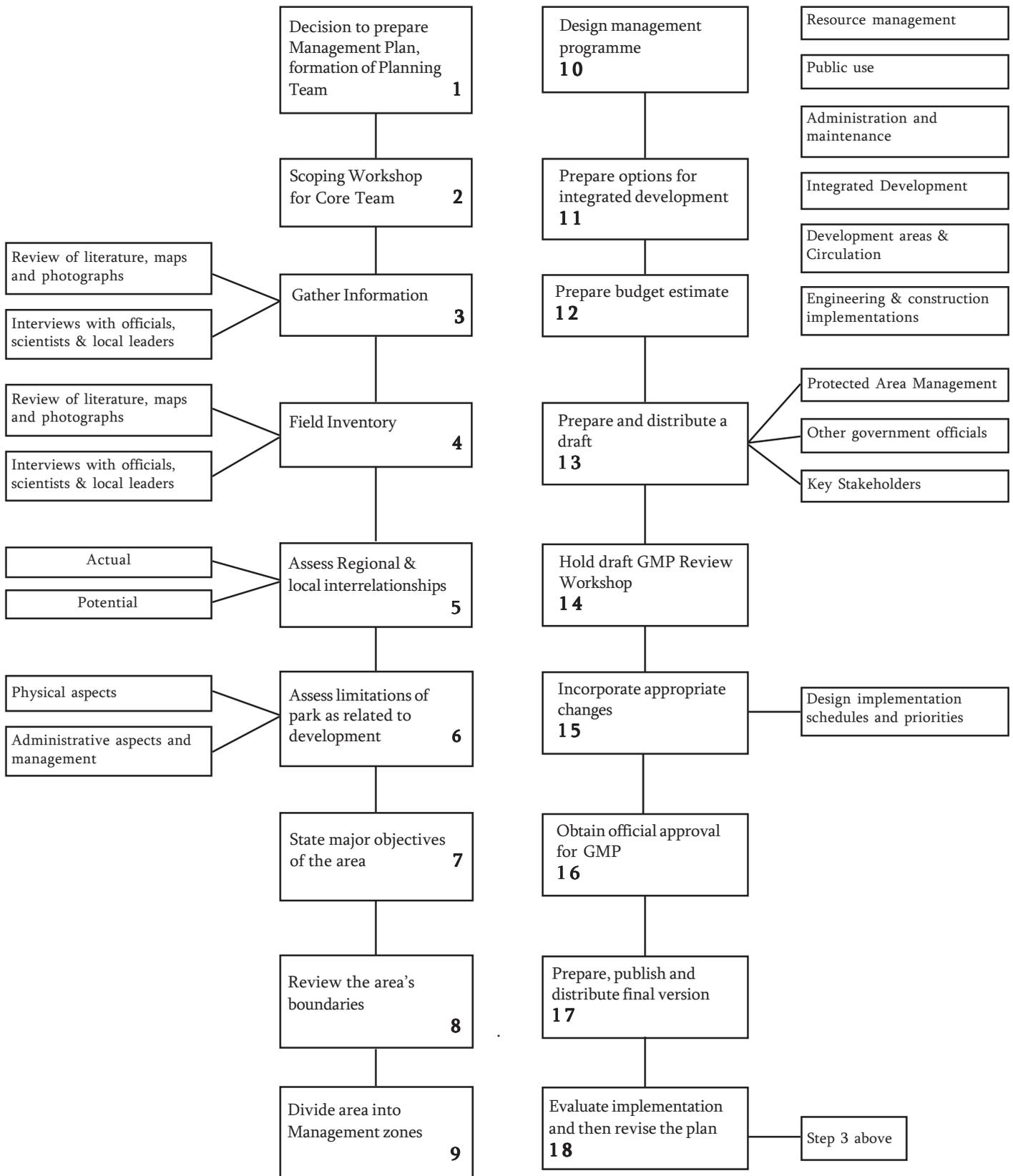
Assessment of the level to which protected areas are meeting their stated objectives involves evaluation of biological and social outcomes. These observations ensure that corrective action is taken at the appropriate time so that the plan goals and objectives may be achieved. Internal and external stakeholders should be accorded opportunity to provide feedback on what aspects of the plan have worked well and what have not as well as factors that have helped and hindered management performance.

19. Review of the management plan

The planning team should articulate when, or under what circumstances the plan will be reviewed. It is also not uncommon to find detailed subsidiary plans being prepared as necessary to give more detail, for example interpretation plans, fire management plans and conservation plans.



Figure 1: Flow Chart summarizing the GMP process



Appendix 1: Suggested Minimum Format for a Protected Area Management Plan

This format contains the minimum contents for a viable plan. Individual sites may add to this format if it is not adequate.

Front and Inside Covers: Contain the name of management authority, name of the plan and duration of the plan. The inside cover may contain financial assistance information, plan, citation details, and acknowledgements.

Foreword: Written by a high ranking official (e.g. director) of the managing authority, provides background and places current plan in context.

Approval Page: Contains a statement to the effect that implementation of the plan has been approved by the appointed officers of the relevant protected area authority and it is signed by those officers on behalf of the authority / board of trustees.

Amendment Table or Checklist: This checklist keeps track of the amendments made to the plan during its implementation indicating the date of amendment, pages removed, pages added and the reason for amendment.

Executive Summary: The executive summary provides the salient points in brief including the significance of the protected area, the critical management issues, management objectives, interventions, and brief budgetary and other resource requirements.

Chapter 1. General Management Plan Purpose and Planning Considerations
Chapter 2. Background Information
Chapter 3. Critical Management Issues
Chapter 4. Management Objectives
Chapter 5. Zoning plan
Chapter 6. Management and Development Programmes
Chapter 7. Environmental Impact Analysis
Chapter 8. Budgets and Cost Tables
Chapter 9. Monitoring and Evaluation
Bibliography

Appendix 2: “Good practices” in preparing a protected area management plan

A management plan should be written in simple, clear language understandable to those implementing it. It should be treated as an accountability document for every protected area manager and agency. At least within a country or agency there should be adopted a standard procedure and format.

The protected area should be placed in context – local, regional, national and international. Many plans fail to spatially integrate their protected areas with land use plans at local and regional level. There should be adequate articulation of the ecological role of the protected area in the larger landscape e.g. the part it can play in protecting the established migration of species in an ecosystem and the maintenance of ecological processes in a landscape. It is prudent to contextualize national policies and development processes; an aspect which many management plans gloss over.

A management plan is prepared for regular use by managers and staff. Managers should contribute immensely to planning of their areas. Planning can depend on experts who are not external to the protected area and are catalysts not arbiters. The planning team must seek to address user expectations as appropriate in the planning process. Local communities must be involved in the management planning process. Inadequate consideration of the socioeconomic and cultural relations of the park with its surroundings may lead to lack of legitimacy and social sustainability. Find out if the particular protected area agency has formal management planning system. The protected area authority must create its own policy structure and then hand it to the planners to produce plans not vice versa. On the other hand, you may encounter incoherent policy direction when trying to extract decisions from directorates on purposes and objectives for individual protected areas.

To ensure a smooth planning process and implementation, it is good practice to gain high level (director / agency) commitment. Consider entering an agreement ensuring that planning is initiated and completed. When it is completed, always ensure that a protected area management plan is approved. Some GMPs have had no approval pages meaning that no one will be responsible for buy-in or inaction.

Many protected areas cannot produce a management plan. Ensure that plan preparation is not expensive and does not require much time. Pay sufficient attention to

budgets and make realistic assumptions of management capacity based on your local situation. Prescriptions must be target-oriented not a wish list. The management plan must be handed to the local manager with clear instructions and authority to implement. Monitoring and evaluation of management plan implementation should also be allocated as a responsibility and outcomes fed back to management. Management plans should be sufficiently flexible to allow for change within their life such as those occasioned by unforeseen circumstances. The rationale for management planning for the particular area should be strong. Objectives should be realistic. Sometimes, the conservation and development objectives are promoted separately each to the detriment of the other. Ensure that the objectives are approved by the agency and other stakeholders before the detailed planning work starts in earnest. Prioritize among the objectives. Do not pay undue attention to only a few aspects of the plan. Some plans pay a lot of attention to describing the area to the detriment of the management programme and activity implementation sections. Ensure your management plan has clarity on purpose and rationale for conservation management zoning within the protected area. Planning must be seen as being a continuous task within the management cycle.

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