



ADAPTIVE MANAGEMENT IN PROTECTED AREAS – EXPERIENCES FROM THE GEF-5 PROTECTED AREA PROJECT



South African
NATIONAL PARKS



INTRODUCTION

This publication is part of a series showcasing lessons learnt and insights from the GEF-5 PA Project titled Improving Management Effectiveness of the Protected Area Network.

The project is funded by the [Global Environment Facility](#) (GEF) through the [United Nations Development Programme](#) (UNDP) South Africa Country Office and is implemented by [South African National Parks](#) (SANParks).

The GEF-5 PA Project is supporting the Government of South Africa through the [Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment](#) (DFFE) to overcome barriers to expand the national Protected Area (PA) estate.

Other implementing partners are CapeNature, the Eastern Cape Parks and Tourism Agency (ECPTA), and the Kruger to Canyons Biosphere Reserve Non-Profit Company (K2C BR NPC) in partnership with Mpumalanga Tourism and Parks Agency (MTPA) and the Limpopo Department of Economic Development, Environment and Tourism (LEDET).

The project's goal is to effectively conserve globally significant biodiversity in South Africa through cost-effective protected area expansion and improved management effectiveness and financial sustainability of the protected area system.

The project's objective is to protect the biodiversity of South Africa from existing and emerging threats of degradation while improving land use and economic development of existing communities. The project began in 2015 and continues until 2021. It consists of three components:

- (1) to establish new protected areas,
- (2) to improve management effectiveness of existing and new protected areas, and
- (3) to improve the financial sustainability of the PA network.

This report - Adaptive Management in Protected Areas – Experiences from the GEF-5 Protected Area Project – falls under component 2.

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ADAPTIVE MANAGEMENT IN THE GEF-5 PA PROJECT

WHY ADAPTIVE MANAGEMENT?

The Project Document (ProDoc) of the GEF-5 PA Project, titled 'Improving Management Effectiveness of the Protected Area Network', states that South Africa provides international leadership in conservation, particularly in the fields of planning and adaptive management in protected areas (PAs). Component 2 of the project focused on improved management effectiveness of both new and existing PAs to sustain this lead into the future over a larger area with more diverse governance.

One of the barriers to attain this was the absence of some PA management plans, as required by law. As the Project Document (ProDoc) stated, this is mainly due to the cumbersome, time-consuming and expensive nature of management planning, and the lack of capacity in many private and community reserves to undertake and meet planning and effectiveness tracking and reporting requirements.

In addition, some existing management plans are not based on adaptive management and managers cannot respond in a systematic way to emerging challenges such as climate change and increased poaching or encroachment pressure.

One of the outcomes of component 2 was the enhanced protection of new and existing PAs. This was achieved through, among others, reviewing management effectiveness strategies at both the agency and site level and improving them where necessary and increasing agency adaptive management capacity.

“ The Project Document of the GEF-5 PA Project, states that South Africa provides international leadership in conservation. ”



HOW WAS ADAPTIVE MANAGEMENT APPLIED?

[South African National Parks \(SANParks\)](#), the project implementer, embarked on a review of their Strategic Adaptive Management process. [CapeNature](#), the conservation authority for the Western Cape Province and one of the implementing partners, piloted the Conservation Standards adaptive management framework, to a critical climate change corridor that was supported by the GEF-5 PA Project. Both conservation agencies share their learnings.

SANPARKS: EVALUATION AND REVISION OF PMPs AND ASSOCIATED PROCESSES

The development of Park Management Plans (PMPs) is a legal requirement as stipulated in Sections 39, 40 and 41 of the National Environment Management: Protected Areas Act No 57 of 2003 (NEM:PAA). In SANParks, the processes for developing and revising, implementing and evaluating PMPs for national parks have co-evolved with the development and application of Strategic Adaptive Management (SAM). After more than a decade of using SAM as a framework for operationalising PMPs, it was time to step back and evaluate the effectiveness of these plans and their associated processes.

In 2020, SANParks initiated a review of the inter-related PMP processes both in terms of their operational utility (e.g., are these processes contributing to effective management of parks) and rigour (e.g. do these processes comply with principles of SAM). The evaluation was conducted through four 'reflective assessments'. One appraised the learning that takes place through SAM and the other three critically reflected on the planning, implementation and evaluation components of the PMPs respectively. Each study was conducted by a team of SANParks scientists and external thought leaders.

The studies were designed to draw extensively on the experiential knowledge of SANParks staff as well as benchmark current practices against international models. The overall study was overseen by a SANParks Steering Committee and quarterly progress reports were submitted to the GEF-5 PA Project.

Insights gained from the four reflective assessments were consolidated to reveal 19 broad shortcomings and problem areas. For each of these the research team put forward a potential response. The problems and proposed responses related to four broad themes: i) adaptive planning; ii) implementation and institutional aspects; iii) strengthening reflection and evaluation; and iv) engagement and co-learning with stakeholders. In a series of online workshops that reflected the four themes, SANParks staff deliberated the project findings, identified important contextual issues and proposed solutions.

Some of the issues that were identified and need to be addressed are that: a) national parks vary greatly in their complexity (e.g. open-access versus gated parks) and standardised approaches e.g. for stakeholder engagement and revision of management plans may not work optimally across all parks; b) all PMP amendments need approval by the Minister (according to NEM:PAA) and the considerable operational detail included in the current plans, which may require frequent adaptation, makes getting approval impractical; c) various evaluation tools exist and these are neither optimally integrated nor optimally used for learning and reflection; and d) for open-access parks and ecosystems (e.g. estuaries) characterised by multiple user expectations and overlapping governance regimes, it may be prudent to supplement adaptive management practices with those from adaptive co-management.

CAPENATURE: INSTITUTIONALISING A STRATEGIC ADAPTIVE MANAGEMENT FRAMEWORK FOR PROTECTED AREA MANAGEMENT

CapeNature manages protected area complexes and is subject to the provisions of the NEM:PAA. CapeNature's ability to account for the state of biodiversity within its protected areas is based on an understanding of the contribution of each individual protected area to the protected areas network and importantly, the condition of the biodiversity contained within protected areas.

Management effectiveness assessment was formally adopted by CapeNature during 2010. In 2015, protected area management effectiveness was evaluated against protected area management plans, operational plans, and state of biodiversity reports. This was done to establish how well existing planning frameworks were set up to facilitate adaptive management and evaluate outcomes. Results indicated that management plans aimed for adaptive management, yet few were structured in a way that enabled the adaptive management cycle to function fully.

In 2017, CapeNature initiated a process to strengthen adaptive management, with a focus on the planning phase. It piloted the application of the [Conservation Standards](#), a strategic adaptive management framework, to a critical climate change corridor, the Dassenberg Coastal Catchment Partnership (DCCP). The DCCP is a multi-stakeholder landscape and required strategic action to achieve its objectives. A planning team was set up for the pilot phase to demonstrate the value of the framework, capacitate participants and develop strategic actions for the DCCP.

The pilot confirmed the value of the Conservation Standards and CapeNature adopted the framework as the basis for protected area planning and management. Until completion of the GEF-5 PA Project twelve management plans have been developed using the Conservation Standards.

During 2021, it was time to assess how well the framework had been integrated. An audit of adaptive management capability within CapeNature indicated that generally the capability exists. Areas of improvement include financial and human resource capacity to implement planning, management, monitoring and evaluation at the appropriate scales, and adequate knowledge management systems.

The greatest impact of the Conservation Standards is consistency, articulating protected area values and their condition, and the identification of measures of success at the onset of planning. The process facilitates a clear definition of what must be conserved / protected / managed, i.e., protected area values, both natural and cultural. It helps to assess the current condition of values, and their desired state. As such, goals and objectives and strategies are directly linked to protected area values. For management to be effective, the adaptive management approach must be based on a foundation of well articulated values linked to goals. This enables managers to understand the extent to which a protected area is protecting values and achieving goals and objectives. Scientists and protected area managers cannot know everything, and the Conservation Standards make it possible to manage uncertainty. The process clarifies what management teams do not know.

It also helped to build stronger links between protected area values and human wellbeing. Stakeholder engagement and understanding of what CapeNature is working to achieve is improved, resulting in greater buy-in and support.

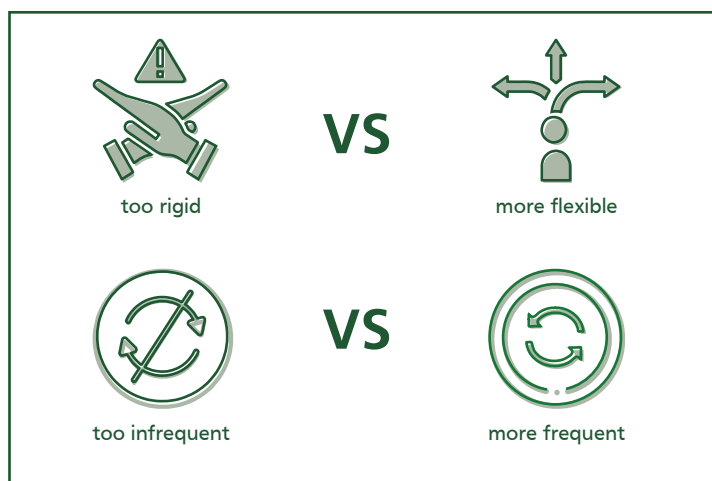
“**The greatest impact of the Conservation Standards is consistency, articulating protected area values and their condition, and the identification of measures of success at the onset of planning.**”

As CapeNature continues to mainstream the Conservation Standards, the focus is on the alignment of monitoring and evaluation programmes to protected area values and key attributes, and the refinement of the knowledge man-

agement system as a platform for implementation for protected area management plans, analysis, review, and adapting, and documenting and sharing learning.

WHAT ARE THE OUTCOMES?

With one of the project's focus areas being improved management effectiveness, the assessments by SANParks and CapeNature have contributed by identifying opportunities for ongoing improvement of PA management plans processes.



Management plans should be linked to evaluation tools which are linked to the PA values. This is guiding the effectiveness process and how PAs can be managed better and how adaptive management can assist to manage 'uncertainty'. The review process proposed more focused PA management plans with appropriate monitoring and evaluation, which will lead to increased conservation protection, which is the ultimate aim of the project. The full report 'Evaluation and Revision of SANParks' Park Management Planning and Associated Processes' here <https://gef5pa.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/SAN-Parks-Evaluation-and-revision-of-PMPs-Final-Report-Sept-2021.pdf>. A publication on one of the review components (adaptive planning) can be accessed here (<https://doi.org/10.1111/csp2.542>)

The GEF-5 PA Project provided the opportunity to learn about adaptive management from different angles. It presented CapeNature the prospect to trial and demonstrate a new methodology and process that is foundational to the application of adaptive management. It enabled CapeNature to achieve a point where adaptive management can be applied to its protected areas.

The outcome was the adoption of the Conservation Standards in CapeNature and the successful drafting of several PA management plans using the Standards. It enabled SANParks to embark on an in-depth and comprehensive review of the effectiveness of PMPs using SAM. The result is a report with recommendations sought for implementation to further improve the management effectiveness of protected areas.

The 'Case Study Protected Area Management: Institutionalising the Conservation Standards in a Parastatal, South Africa' here <https://gef5pa.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/CN-Protected-Area-Management-Planning.pdf>

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Improving Management Effectiveness of the Protected Area Network - **the GEF-5 PA Project**

