



Editorial

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Dear Readers,

Protected areas have played and continue to play an increasingly important role in sustainable mountain development. Although they offer nature conservation and economic opportunities for local communities, they also may be the source of conflicts. But it is recognized that mountains are vital for conserving the world's biodiversity and cultural heritage and for safeguarding water supplies. According to the Global Mountain Biodiversity Assessment, 32% of protected areas worldwide are currently located in mountains. The Mountain Theme of the World Commission on Protected Areas will guarantee that due attention is given to the important role that mountains play in conservation during the 5th World Parks Congress (WPC) by holding a pre-Congress Mountain Protected Areas Workshop.

The WPC (8–17 September 2003 in Durban, South Africa) will “demonstrat[e] the relevance of protected areas to the broader economic, social and environmental agendas for the world in the 21st Century.” The articles in this issue of MRD have taken up this multidimensional challenge ahead of the Congress and the Mountain Protected Areas Workshop. They examine how parks and protected areas can be designed and managed in such a way that they enhance the lives of mountain communities and visitors while also ensuring conservation of unique ecosystems for the benefit of all and well “beyond boundaries,” to take up the title of this year's WPC.

Threats to valuable mountain ecosystems include land degradation, pollution, fragmentation, invasive species, conflicts due to the dual aim of preserving natural resources and sustaining local livelihoods, and lack of institutional and financial support. In the Development section, the articles by C. Y. Jim and S. S. Xu and by R. Badola and S. A. Hussain, for example, analyze such problems and evoke possible solutions. Innovative ways of countering loss of biodiversity and culture while also ensuring that human needs are covered are presented by S. Benítez P., Yerena et al, and Gujja et al. Proposals include building corridors, involving people in planning and awareness raising, ensuring effective participation and ownership in conservation, and offering new economic opportunities for local communities.

In the Research section, Velázquez et al present a complex approach to conservation that integrates research and development. C. M. Pickering, J. Harrington, and G. Worboys assess how park managers' views of tourism impacts can be used to improve management of protected areas exposed to heavy tourism pressure. Nautiyal et al discuss the double impact of socioeconomic change and the creation of a biosphere reserve on a traditional livelihood system. Although not located in a protected area, the Aymara community on which Rist et al focus has managed to maintain a balance between use and conservation of natural resources over centuries of change, as shown in this transdisciplinary study. The well-being of mountain populations is the main focus of the last 3 papers, all of which take up the issue of health risks. The MountainNotes section in this issue of MRD is also primarily devoted to protected areas worldwide.

MRD and Editorial Advisory Board member Larry Hamilton have chosen to take up the WPC's challenge quoted above in this special issue for distribution in Durban, hoping to advance the mountain cause among a public who will understand its urgency and therefore help support it.

*Larry Hamilton, Guest Editor
and Vice-Chair of the World Commission on Protected Areas' Mountain Theme
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