

POLICY BRIEF

Management Planning for Protected Areas in Viet Nam



Dipterocarp forest, Yok Don National Park

Unprotected protected areas

During the last 50 years, Viet Nam has suffered high rates of environmental degradation. In that time, forest cover has reduced from 53% to 28%. Large areas of Viet Nam's natural forests have been irretrievably lost. Wildlife populations, not so easy to measure, have declined catastrophically during this period both outside and inside protected areas. Most of Vietnam's landscape displays the 'empty forest syndrome': brought about by the human ability to remove wildlife from the forest, by hunting and trapping, more quickly than it can be deforested.

Since Viet Nam's first protected area was established in 1962, a system of 126 protected areas has been established, covering more than 2.5 million hectares. This consists of Special Use Forests and wetlands (together covering 7% of the country's land area), and marine areas. More protected areas are being gazetted each year. However, the majority of these areas are poorly managed and unprotected from illegal exploitation of forest products, especially wildlife.

In September 2003, the Government approved and published the Management Strategy for a Protected Area System in Viet Nam 2002-2010 (MASPAS). This document was developed by the Government itself and specified management at the central

level by the Forest Protection Department, line ministries and agencies, and Provincial People's Committees. It set government priorities, defined a new categorization system for protected areas and established a wide range of policies covering planning, management and reformation of funding mechanisms for protected areas. It also established immediate priorities for improving the function of the protected area system, including revising the legal framework, overhauling the management planning system and increasing community involvement.

MASPAS tacitly recognised one important point: Viet Nam's protected area system is failing. The entire planning, investment and management system for protected areas is currently ineffective in meeting the objectives of protected areas as defined under law: '*the conservation of natural, standard examples of national ecosystems*'. While recognising this, MASPAS points the way forward, creating the policy framework for defining the problems facing protected areas and dealing with them. A principal action required is strengthening the way in which protected areas are financed and managed, as without effective conservation planning and financial provision to achieve this there can be no protection.

In line with the above, PARC Project has been developing an approach for management planning that is adapted to the current institutional and policy framework for protected areas in Viet Nam. This Policy Brief describes that approach and how operational planning, as opposed to international-style management planning, plays a central role in driving that process.



Conservation planning and PARC Project

Faced with the degradation of natural ecosystems and their components, including environmental stability, water systems, vegetation cover and wildlife, the Government of Viet Nam supported by international donors has searched for appropriate conservation planning mechanisms. PARC Project has taken on the particular challenge of revising management procedures for protected areas within the wider human-dominated landscape.

In Viet Nam at present, protected area management planning is in need of a stronger sense of strategic direction. A short to medium-term strategy is emerging from PARC Project, which demonstrates that the planning system can be improved incrementally within existing constraints. As the enabling environment for the planning system is improved through realisation of MASPAS, further refinement can take place. The aim would be a comprehensive international standard of management planning as defined for example by the IUCN World Commission on Protected Areas. That goal, however, is still some way off and requires a number of institutional and legislative revisions to be put into place.

PARC has purposely deviated from the traditional focus of developing a detailed management plan for individual protected areas. Traditional management plans are mostly developed in isolation from local communities and fail to address root causes of land degradation. Instead, PARC piloted a five-tier conservation planning process specifically adapted to the regulations of the government, prevailing land laws, and the devolved responsibilities of rural communities.

Practical conservation is based on the simplest and most pragmatic form of planning that will help the protected area

managers carry out their conservation tasks and that provides a clear picture to others of what the management objectives and programmes intend to do.

Development of a conservation strategy is a starting point. This not only involves determining conservation criteria across a landscape, but also integrating conservation values with resource use planning and the needs of local communities as described in *PARC Policy Brief: Integrating Conservation and Development through Participatory Resource Use Planning*.

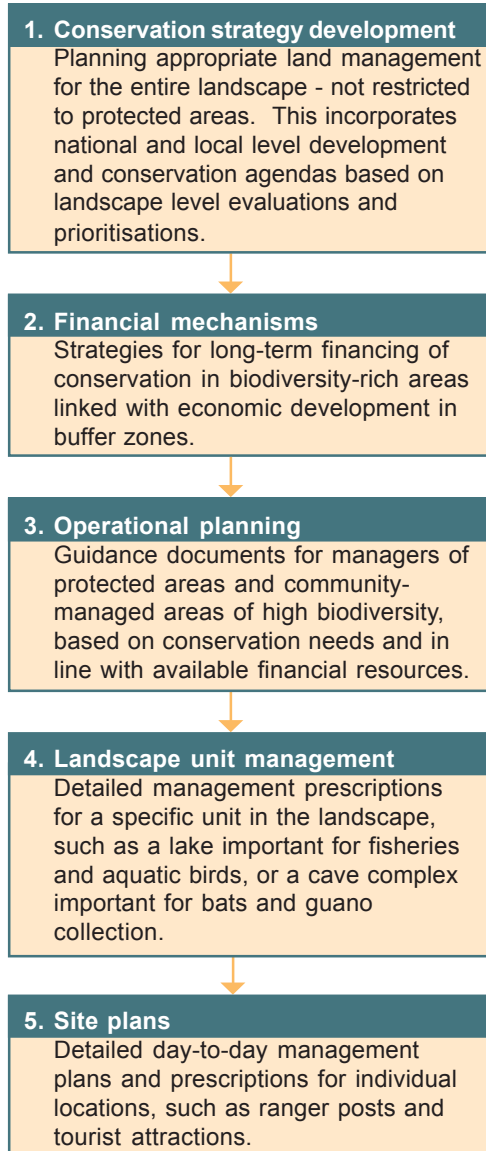
At present, relevant stakeholders in the community are frequently not a party to decision-making processes in which they have a legitimate interest. Community participation in planning has its costs, particularly in the time it requires. However, it also brings considerable benefits, not only for resolving planning issues but for building broader community understanding of conservation agendas and the responsibilities of protected area managers.

Of primary importance to implementing a given conservation strategy, as a component of land management, is developing a close linkage to the financial planning processes. Conservation planning must ultimately drive the budget cycle, rather than vice versa, or conservation is unlikely to be achieved. Past experience in Viet Nam is indicative of this: where conservation budgets are decided by national and provincial agencies whose primary responsibility is the achievement of development and growth targets, budgetary provisions do not even remotely reflect conservation needs.

So how should conservation needs be defined and planned? The key management tool used by PARC is the operational planning process, which has further elements of landscape unit management and site planning. How these tiers build up into a process for determining the overall conservation strategy and its implementation is discussed in the *PARC Policy Brief: Biodiversity Conservation*

through *Landscape Ecology*. This policy brief focuses on one crucial element of the process: how the operational plan is developed and how it guides the overall management strategies and the day-to-day operations of the protected areas to which it is applied.

PARC's five-tier planning process



Operational plan or management plan?

The approach adopted by PARC has been to develop a conservation management tool specifically adapted to the prevailing conditions facing protected areas in Viet Nam. A primary need in Viet Nam is guidance for the operations of the management authorities: an operational plan.

A standard international approach for protected area management is to develop a comprehensive management plan. This is an integrated and comprehensive document that provides an overview of the protected area and explains the management strategies, priorities, activities and budgets required to manage a protected area sustainably.

Documents of this type are typically produced by international consultants through donor projects, are very expensive and take a long time to prepare. While some documents termed 'management plans' have been prepared for protected areas in Viet Nam, they fall far short of the standards that might make them effective. Almost none of them are implemented as they fall outside of government financing and provincial priorities.

The operational plan is produced by the heads of technical sections or planning staff of a protected area themselves, in liaison with field conservation staff. The document aims to provide a clear, structured, realistic, and comprehensive outline of the management objectives and operations for a protected area. It provides the specific details needed by staff who are often poorly or inappropriately trained and yet must implement the plan. It is designed to be feasible and therefore actually applied by the managers and staff. Despite its apparent simplicity, achieving these objectives is much more difficult than it may appear at first.

Indicative Contents of an Operational Plan

Module	Title	Content	Updated
1	Introduction and summary	Supporting legal framework Summary of plan contents	Annually
2	Status of the protected area and surrounding landscape	Geographical scope and present status The importance of the protected area in the system of protected areas in Viet Nam Management objectives (long, medium and short-term) Brief description of the protected area Brief description of the local socio-economic conditions	Periodic (when changes occur to warrant revision)
3	Threats and constraints to management	Direct threats to habitats and biodiversity Conflict analysis Constraints to management Conservation strategy and implications	Periodic
4	Structure and function of the management authority	Existing staff and projections, recruitment External programme support Financial mechanisms	Periodic
5	Planning and administration activities	Planning and administration staff Policy development (legal framework and feasible operational policies) Institutional strengthening and training Infrastructure development Financial management Planning and reporting	Annually
6	Forest and wildlife protection activities	Forest protection staff Operational parameters of guard stations and other units Coordinated protection actions	Annually
7	Scientific and technical activities	Scientific and technical staff Strategic research programme Monitoring and evaluation programme Centres and facilities (botanical garden, herbarium, animal rescue centre, etc.)	Annually
8	Tourism and environmental education activities	Staffing Tourism and ecotourism activities Environmental education activities (including an environmental education centre)	Annually
9	Community development activities in the buffer zone	Village liaison Directly funded community development programmes (e.g. 661 Programme) Links with externally funded community development programmes	Annually
10	Budget for the operational plans	Funding sources and amounts Fund allocation for year Long-term fund allocations and prioritisations	Annually
A1	Job descriptions	Terms of reference for all protected area employees, from directorship to field staff	Periodic
A2	Detailed guard station operational plans	By guard station	Periodic
A3	Additional site plans	e.g. tourism sites or units of enclosed biodiversity, such as lakes or caves	Periodic

Structure of an operational plan

The duration of an operational plan can be any period of time, but typically it should cover the same period as the Government Investment Plan (financial plan) and be closely integrated with it (see next section). Unlike a typical management plan, the operational plan is modular and certain modules are designed for annual up-dating. This gives flexibility to the plan, making it an ever-present guide to annual and sub-annual work planning processes.

Modules 5-8 in the table correspond to activities of typical sections within a management authority and annual up-dating is the responsibility of the section heads. The remainder of the plan is typically up-dated by the Director and Vice-Director, with assistance from planning staff. The budget module (10) does not aim to document the various funding sources known to be available, but to cost out the management activities given in the various modules and thus to identify funding gaps, especially over the longer-term. Module 10 can then focus on fund-raising efforts of the authority for activities that are needed to manage the protected area effectively, and thus to meet the requirements of protected areas as defined under Decision 08¹.

Integrating operational planning with government financial planning

It is important to distinguish between integrative operational planning, as undertaken by PARC, and other forms of planning, such as investment plans, which are not management tools.

As protected areas are viewed within the context of Viet Nam's overall development strategy, they are considered by financial

managers as investments, with potential future returns through the provision of environmental services or tourism. The primary government funding mechanism for protected areas is thus an investment plan, sometimes more accurately-called a "Construction Investment Plan". This document is typically produced by one of only a few government organisations charged with this responsibility, and it follows a specific formula in its preparation. The plan, which generally does not involve much local consultation, defines funding needs to be decided upon by the central Ministry of Planning and Investment, which are bound by complex government tendering and auditing restrictions. Funds are generally directed towards large capital infrastructures, often in direct opposition, or at best unrelated to, the objectives of the protected area as defined by law. Once allocated, these funds cannot be managed or expended by the protected area managers themselves. They must be contracted out and thus they cannot support conservation operations such as patrolling, research and monitoring, which need to be conducted by the protected area staff.

For most protected area managers, the only funds available to support conservation operations are recurrent funds, provided on the basis of numbers of staff allocated to the protected area by government personnel departments. Recurring funds are also required to be approved by decentralised Departments of Planning and Investment. Again there is considerable pressure for the (quite small) funds, not directly tied up in staff salaries and allowances, to be allocated to capital items rather than to field operations.

The current system, as outlined above, means that conservation operations fall into a funding gap. As conservation outputs are largely abstract and not measurable or easily audited, conservation activities, such as patrolling and enforcement, community liaison, research, and monitoring, are generally disliked and excluded by government financial planners.

¹ Decision 08/2001/QĐ-TTg, on the management of special-use forest, protection forest and production forest.

The cases of Ba Be, Na Hang and Yok Don

PARC Project's five-tier planning process, centred on the development of an operational plan, has been officially piloted by the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development at three sites in Viet Nam. The protected area authorities are required to report back to the Ministry in 2005, after which time the approach is likely to be adopted nationwide.

The operational planning process was piloted in three sites: a centrally-managed national park (Yok Don), a provincially-managed national park (Ba Be) and a provincially-managed nature reserve (Na Hang). None of the three sites had previously been exposed to conservation planning, as outlined above. Two of the three sites were extremely poorly protected with almost no active management, the third (Na Hang) exercised a minimal level of patrolling and enforcement with support from an international non-governmental organization.

Experience from operational planning at these sites during the period from 1999 to 2004 raises the following key issues.

Ownership

Unlike management plans or investment plans, the operational plan is designed and updated by the staff that will implement the plan. Training is required in the planning process, such that managers appreciate the reasons for moving away from purely budgetary planning to planning based on management of information and decision-making processes. Targets are changed from 100% expenditure of funds to measurable management achievements, such as a percentage reduction of illegal activities. This has not previously been a requirement for protected area management.

The planning process becomes institutionalised and sustainable once training

is provided. Training involves the staff responsible for implementing the plan in its initial preparation, implementation and updating. To support the process of operational planning to further conservation management, the Ministry of Planning and Investment needs to adapt its funding processes for protected areas to fit the investment requirements for conservation activities within the operational plan. Both the individual protected areas and Government need to adopt and implement the revised planning process.

Community involvement

In adopting a landscape level approach, PARC has used the development of an overall conservation strategy as a tool to link resource use planning in the buffer zone and operational planning of the core zone of a protected area. There can be overlap between the two planning processes, where integration of community needs with core zone planning is necessary to reach resource use agreements. Examples of this can be seen in Nam Mau Commune in Ba Be National Park where local villages have agreed user rights for sedentary crop land within the park in return for reforestation of shifting agricultural areas, and where Ba Be Lake itself is managed under a community cooperative. Community co-management within protected areas remains problematic under law, but legal revisions are being undertaken and PARC planning approaches and field interventions provide useful experience for adoption in other protected areas.

Conflicts over planning priorities

Government personnel responsible for writing, approving and funding (and in some cases for implementing) protected area investment plans often lack sufficient knowledge of even the most basic principles of conservation and protected area management. This can lead to conflicts between government-funded investment in a protected area and the actual conservation functions of the given protected area.



A dam in Yok Don National Park built to provide water resources for wildlife in the dry season.



A natural waterhole in the dry season: one of many in Yok Don National Park.

For example, the approved investment plan for Yok Don National Park contained financial provision for the construction of a series of barrier dams across water-courses inside the national park. The rationale for this was that reservoirs were required to provide water sources for wildlife in the dry season. This assumption was not based on any surveys or monitoring of the wild animals, and was made in apparent ignorance of the presence of waterholes throughout the park, migration patterns of animals and of the co-evolution of plants and animals with the seasonal water regime over millennia. Threats assessment, biological surveys and monitoring, and the potential for disease communication between wild and domestic animals at permanent water sources quickly demonstrated the inappropriateness of these developments, but they continue to be implemented because they have been approved. In this case, an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) is being developed by PARC to demonstrate the inappropriateness of the developments,

but the requirement of an EIA before implementing the idea to build dams would have been more efficient.

The lesson here is that investment plans need to go through a more stringent approval process, conducted at least in part by scientists and protected area specialists, who should be able to remove inappropriate infrastructure development from the plan. The operational planning process provides the rationale for not allowing inappropriate infrastructure development by defining the actual priorities for the protected area in line with Decision 08. While this is particularly important in addressing inappropriate funding provided to the protected area itself through investment plans, this more objective and stringent approval process should also extend to Environmental Impact Assessment processes for nationally-funded infrastructure projects, such as construction of the Tuyen Quang Dam. Here again, on a larger scale, an infrastructure project has been imposed upon a protected area with no comprehensive EIA and, equally damagingly, with no associated funding to limit or mitigate impacts.

Operational funding gaps

The means to manage protected areas effectively can be defined under operational plans, but there is a gap between support funding for recurring operations and the requirements for these operations. For example, routine patrolling and forest management activities, research and monitoring, and maintenance of equipment and facilities are always under-funded. In Yok Don National Park, an analysis of why patrolling and management of the forest were ineffective, showed that there was a US\$150,000 gap in operational funding, thus preventing the management authority from effectively controlling activities throughout the protected area. This represents about one quarter of the amount spent annually on infrastructure not related to the aims of the national park. The issue of prioritisation and allocation of available funds is again paramount.

Changing the way protected areas are financed and managed

In Viet Nam there is currently no statutory requirement for either financial investment or operations within protected areas to be consistent with approved conservation plans. If there WAS such a requirement, there would be a stronger incentive to prepare conservation-oriented plans, and to use them as instruments for effective control over activities within the protected area.

MASPAS fully recognises that the current system of funding and managing protected areas is extremely ineffective and must change. Neither funding for investment plans nor funding for recurring costs are regulated by any form of management plan developed by the protected area concerned. Government plans remain potentially damaging when they are not based upon and fully consistent with a conservation plan or strategy that provides an explicit rationale for conserving the priority biodiversity values of the protected area.

Financing protected areas

The amount of government funding set aside for some protected areas in Viet Nam is among the highest of any country in the world (*PARC Policy Brief: Covering the Cost of Viet Nam's Protected Areas*). However, current systems for allocating this funding preclude the use of funds to achieve conservation objectives. The operational planning process is able to define these objectives as a basis from which to argue for realignment of funding mechanisms. MASPAS calls for operational funding to be provided to protected areas on a unit area basis, and for the practice of regular budget allocation based on staff numbers to be abandoned. Beyond this, funding should be reliant on and guided by the budgets developed through operational planning processes that define what exactly needs to be done to manage a protected area and how much it will cost.

The financial management system must be revised to allow adequate and accountable allocations for recurrent expenditures to support conservation operations, and to permit an appropriate balance between capital and recurrent allocations. In effect, financial planning (particularly the



Gaur (Bos gaurus) in Yok Don National Park: the current framework for financing protected area overlooks one of the primary objectives of protected areas, which is conservation of threatened species such as this.

prioritising of budgets) needs to be decentralised from the Ministry of Planning and Investment to allow those who actually implement plans to be involved in the decision-making process.

The government investment approval system must be revised such that investment decisions can only be made if they are shown to be consistent with an approved operational plan, which meets accreditation standards for biodiversity conservation (such as those developed by PARC). An independent assessor should be used, if necessary, to ensure that all investment decisions within a protected area are in line with Decision 08 and to the best interests of the protected area.

Prioritising conservation

Currently, the planning structure for protected areas in Viet Nam (indicated in Figure 1) presents three major weaknesses:

- Provincial development strategies are not linked to overall conservation strategies (where they exist) or to management needs of the protected area system.
- The development of investment plans follow formulas of Departments of Planning and Investment and are not guided by, or in any way linked to, conservation priorities of the national protected area authorities or individual protected areas within the system.

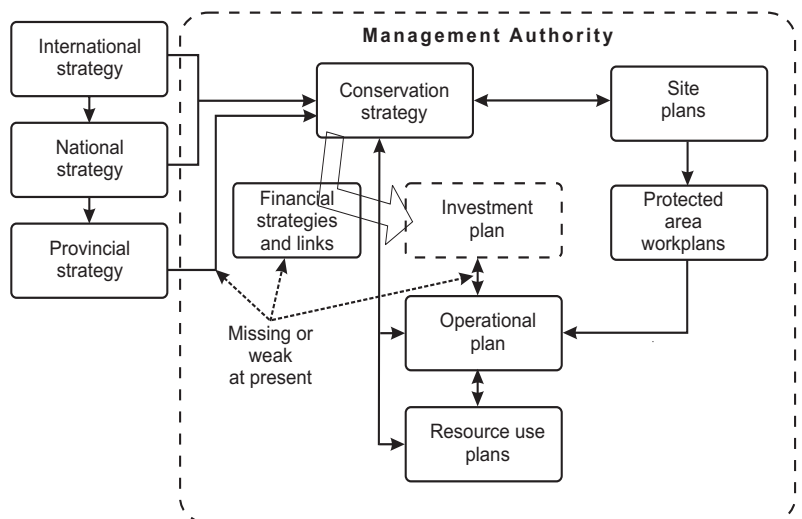
As a result:

- Investment plans are not responsive to conservation needs as defined in operational plans.

To overcome these weaknesses and become effective, operational planning needs to be prioritised and institutionalised within the planning structure of protected areas. The legislative basis for protected area management needs revising to include an explicit provision requiring that management decisions and operations take place only if they are provided for, and consistent with the priorities of an approved operational plan.

As a first stage, protected areas managers should be required to prepare an operational plan before they receive government (or donor) funding. This would be a powerful incentive for managers to change the way in which protected area planning is conceived. To reinforce this change, protected area managers should then commit themselves to manage the protected area in accordance with the approved plan. In the short term, a minimum requirement that an operational plan precede and guide the preparation of future investment plans would be a major improvement to prioritise conservation within the current planning structure of Viet Nam's protected areas.

Figure 1. Management structure



Protecting protected areas

The planning process introduced by PARC is an attempt to change the way in which protected areas are both financed and managed.

At present Viet Nam's protected areas are well financed in terms of the overall Government budget available (although funds are admittedly unevenly distributed among protected areas). Protected areas are often adequately staffed. Despite these advantages, almost all protected areas are incapable of fulfilling their function of adequately protecting forests and biodiversity. This is a reflection of the fact that financing guides management. If management guides financing, and if management is defined according to operational requirements for protecting forests and biodiversity, then Viet Nam's protected areas have the potential to be truly protected. MASPAS recognises this. The operational planning process gives the framework for achieving this.

The operational planning process represents a tool whereby protected areas can influence Government decision-making and budget allocation. Adoption of the operational planning process by a protected area forges a link between the requirements for management of the area and the funds available. It provides the basis for prioritising funding, whether it



Slow Loris (Nycticebus coucang) a nationally vulnerable species of Ba Be National Park and Na Hang Nature Reserve. Photo by author.

comes from investment funds, recurring funds or other sources. Government needs to recognise this decentralised demand-driven process, and in particular national and provincial Departments of Planning and Investment need to recognise the operational plan as the basis for decision-making. Funding allocations to protected areas need to be in line with prescriptions within the operational plans.

In developing and piloting the operational plan as a means to improve the effectiveness of protected area management, PARC has provided a process for adoption within MASPAS, and for replication throughout Viet Nam's protected area system, based on experience gained from current pilot sites. This operational planning process aims to assist protected areas to close the gap between the goal of protected areas and realisation of this goal. ■

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This policy brief draws from the report:

PARC Project and Management Planning for Protected Areas in Viet Nam by Adrian G. Davey, University of Canberra, Australia.

Other related PARC Project reports:

Available from:
www.undp.org.vn/projects/parc

Operational Plan for Ba Be National Park

Operational Plan for Na Hang Nature Reserve

Operational Plan for Yok Don National Park

A Conservation Strategy for the Ba Be / Na Hang Conservation Complex

PARC Project Sites

in Viet Nam



■ Ba Be National Park

Ba Be National Park was originally gazetted in 1977, then established as a national park in 1992. It covers an area of 7,611 ha including the 500 ha Ba Be Lake, the largest natural lake in Viet Nam. The national park was administered by the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development before being transferred to Bac Kan Province in 2002.

A network of rivers and streams connect the lake to evergreen forests that cover adjacent ranges of limestone karst mountains, giving the park a spectacular landscape. There is a high diversity of flora and fauna, in particular there are over 300 species of butterfly and about 80 species of freshwater fish. The national park is noteworthy for its small resident population of endangered Francois' Langurs.

■ Na Hang Nature Reserve

Na Hang Nature Reserve covers an area of 41,930 ha, comprised of limestone mountains under tropical moist forest, with smaller areas of mixed lowland evergreen and semi-evergreen broadleaf and bamboo forest.

The nature reserve has global biodiversity significance as the only known protected area with extant populations of the critically endangered and endemic Tonkin Snub-nosed Monkey. This species, once thought extinct, was rediscovered in 1992, which led to the forests of Na Hang being designated a nature reserve in 1994. It is managed by Tuyen Quang Province.

■ Yok Don National Park

Established in 1991, Yok Don National Park lies in Dak Lak Province in the Central Highlands of Viet Nam, next to the border with Cambodia. It is managed by the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development. In 2002, the park was expanded to cover a core zone of 115,545 ha (twice its original area) and a buffer zone of 133,890 ha. Most of this area was formerly managed as production forests.

The park occupies a relatively flat area with two small mountains to the south of the Srepok River. It is mainly under natural forest and includes the only protected area of dipterocarp forest in Viet Nam, as well as evergreen hill forests and riverine forests. The national park is an important site for the conservation of large mammals and regarded as one of the most important areas in the country for birds.

PARC Project

Creating Protected Areas for Resource Conservation using Landscape Ecology

PARC is an Integrated Conservation and Development Project of the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam. From 1999 to 2004, the project has piloted a landscape ecology approach for conserving Viet Nam's diverse biological heritage. This approach integrates conservation and development by using resource use planning as a basis for project activities at three sites: Yok Don National Park, Ba Be National Park and Na Hang Nature Reserve.

The project is co-financed by the Global Environmental Facility and the United Nations Development Programme. It is implemented by the Forest Protection Department of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development and the United Nations Office for Project Services. IUCN - The World Conservation Union provides technical assistance at the national level and Scott Wilson Asia - Pacific Ltd. provides technical assistance at the site level.

PARC Project policy briefs

This series of policy briefs describes the planning approaches taken by PARC Project as part of its framework of integrating biodiversity conservation and socio-economic development. As such, the series should serve to strengthen policy for protected area management in Viet Nam by sharing the experiences gained from the project.

1. Covering the costs of Viet Nam's protected areas
2. Biodiversity conservation through landscape ecology
3. Integrating conservation and development through participatory resource use planning
4. **Management planning for protected areas in Viet Nam**
5. Conservation and development modelling within the landscape

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