

CONFERENCES & MEETINGS

FOURTH WORLD CONGRESS ON NATIONAL PARKS
AND PROTECTED AREAS, HELD IN CARACAS,
VENEZUELA, DURING 10–21 FEBRUARY 1992

On the above auspicious occasion the 1,840 participants from 133 different countries addressed collectively the major challenges facing protected areas in the 1990s, and, hopefully, beyond — based on the theme of 'Parks for Life'.

The Congress was opened by Venezuelan President Carlos Andrés Pérez, and there followed three technical plenaries — respectively on broad issues, expanding partnerships, and regional reviews. Then came four parallel symposia which examined the scientific, development, management, and social-economic, issues and introduced a week of workshops. Over 1,000 papers were presented to the 49 workshops, which all fed back to the fifth plenary, where the Congress Recommendations, Action Plan, and Declaration, were debated. A sixth plenary session showed how the new approaches that were discussed in the workshops are actually being applied in the field. The final plenary approved the Declaration and Congress Recommendations, and President Andrés Pérez handed the Declaration to Maurice Strong, Secretary-General of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, to pass on to the 'Earth Summit' in Rio in June.

In building on the experience of the past decade, the Congress provided advice on what is required to help people on the ground to carry out their important work more effectively than hitherto, while recognizing that every site has its own particular solutions to its often unique problems. More generally, the Congress provided policy advice to governments and international agencies to help to ensure that investments in development will help to support protected areas, and not degrade them.

The Caracas Action Plan details the elements of a major new effort to improve protected-area management, with 12 priority objectives. One of these objectives is to extend the protected-areas network to cover at least 10% of each major ecobiome by the year 2000. Another calls for establishing a global network of representative and well-managed marine protected areas.

To keep pace with the new realities that are facing protected areas in a time of increasing expectations and falling budgets, the Congress urged the development of new reward systems that reach local communities and spread the benefits of protected areas in a more equitable manner than is common nowadays. It initiated investment portfolios to draw on new financial support-mechanisms that have sprung up in the past decade. It urged that personnel be recruited from local communities — especially from tribal and other minorities. The Congress also recognized that the military, in a time of changing national-security needs, can play an important part in conservation, and called for greater efforts to involve them as allies in support of protected areas.

Finally, the IV World Congress recognized that training of protected-area managers needs to be far more sophisticated than hitherto, building skills in both natural and social sciences — including community relations, gender sensitivity, conflict resolution, and information management.

In seeking to convert these general recommendations into reality, the Congress called on IUCN to prepare a long-term programme for protected areas based on the Caracas Action Plan. The programme should set out what needs to be done, where and by whom, building on national

priorities and global environmental perspectives. Apart from the official documents, the Congress generated plans for more than 20 publications and dozens of sets of guidelines to appear over the next two-to-three years.

Congress participants had no illusions about the severity of the problems which they will be facing in the coming years. Tomorrow's conflicts will tend to be even more difficult than today's, as resource scarcity, economic imbalance, and continuing use of inappropriate technology, form a witch's brew of challenges to protected areas — and indeed to sustainable use of the environment as a whole. But participants were convinced that such challenges mean that protected areas have an ever-more-important part to play in securing a productive future for humanity.

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INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM ON PHYSICAL PROBLEMS OF ECOLOGY, ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT, AND RESOURCES CONSERVATION, HELD ON BOARD THE 4-DECKS' BOAT 'FYODOR CHALYAPIN'* IN A CRUISE MOSCOW-KAZAN-MOSCOW ALONG THE RIVER VOLGA, FROM 31 MAY TO 9 JUNE 1992

Representatives of Russia, Ukraine, Byelorussia, Kazakhstan, England, Germany, France, Italy, and other countries took part in this first such Symposium, the programme of which had been developed by an International Scientific Committee. The Institute of Scientific-Applied Researches 'AERO' (Izhevsk) was the principal organizer and sponsor, though among the organizers were also the Udmurt Scientific Centre of the Ural Branch of the Russian Academy of Sciences, the State Committee on Ecology and Environment Management of the Udmurt Republic, and the Scientific Research Centre on Computational Methods in Fluid Mechanics of the University of Marseilles, France.

The participants included 20 doctors and over 100 candidates of various sciences, academicians and corresponding members from different republican Academies of Sciences, chairmen of State Committees on Ecology from the Volga and Kama regions and the Urals, heads of enterprises, and leaders of scientific and industrial commercial concerns.

An exhibition of ecological devices, equipment, and technologies, was organized, and agreements on cooperation on scientific research work were negotiated and signed on board the 4-decker. The Symposium was held in a creative and fruitful atmosphere, and during stays in cities in the Volga region meetings took place with representatives of ecological societies and state ecological bodies.

The latest results in the fields of aerohydrodynamics, environment and microclimate of cities and settlements, ecological monitoring of populated areas, physico-chemical methods for investigating environmental situations,

* The great Russian bass singer, whose superb portrait, painted by my late Mother against the background of a Royal Albert Hall, London, evening-dressed audience, hangs in our dining-room. — Ed.