



Verified Conservation Areas

Implementing the CBD Strategic Plan, hectare by hectare

Under the CBD Strategic Plan, our governments have committed to conserve 17% of terrestrial areas and 10% of marine areas, and to restore 15% of degraded ecosystems by 2020. Reliance on legally protected areas is necessary, but insufficient.

With the growing human population and its increasing levels of prosperity, the pressures on biodiversity are great. We need to expand our conservation efforts across the planet. Hence the Strategic Plan also calls for sustainable production & consumption including use within safe ecological limits, and for managing agriculture, aquaculture & forestry areas managed to ensure biodiversity conservation.

The area-based **VCA Approach** scales up conservation efforts by encouraging new stakeholders to engage, enabling collective action, channelling new financing towards conservation, and providing the assurance that money invested is well spent.

Core elements of the VCA Approach

1. A **Verified Conservation Area (VCA)** is a geographically-defined area listed on the VCA Registry and managed to conserve nature.
2. The **VCA Registry** is a voluntary listing of area-based conservation and a public platform for demonstrating conservation efforts to stakeholders.
3. The VCA Approach is inclusive. VCAs can be managed by public, private or community organisations. they may be managed for profit or not-for-profit.
4. VCA registration requires submission of a verified conservation management plan. Alternatively, an area can be listed with a proposal to submit a verified plan within two years.
5. To stay registered, VCAs must submit verified performance reports annually.
6. Audits of plans and reports are undertaken by Board-approved **VCA Auditors**.
7. VCA management plans, performance reports and verification audits are published on the Registry providing accountability and assurance.
8. Requirements for plans, reports and audits are set out in the **VCA Standard**. These are aligned with the **IFC Performance Standard** on biodiversity conservation and sustainable use.
9. The **VCA Toolkit** recommends best available guidance for conservation management planning and reporting.
10. The **VCA Approach** is hosted by Earthmind and the Global Footprint Network. It also offers conservation planning and financing advice to VCAs and their supporters.





The benefits of the VCA Approach for the Strategic Plan

1. The VCA Approach recognises and encourages the efforts of committed individuals, communities, local governments, NGOs, and companies to conserve and restore our natural capital.
2. It provides an effective mechanism for innovative conservation initiatives beyond legally protected areas to be recognised, celebrated and supported.
3. VCAs enable companies, public agencies, NGOs, foundations, and individuals to invest directly in verified conservation by providing standardised, transparent, monitored, and effective conservation management.
4. The VCA Approach enables conservation to be visible and gives assurance that money invested in conservation is well spent.
5. It provides transparency and public accountability in recognising management plans, which address the biodiversity mitigation hierarchy - avoid, minimize, restore and offset.
6. The VCA Approach establishes a new, CBD-compliant platform for verified sustainable land management which connects to the demands of stakeholders including local communities and public authorities.
7. It encourages voluntary action and creates new and exciting opportunities to connect conservation area owners and managers with impact investors.
8. The VCA Approach addresses the Aichi Targets - 4 on sustainable production and consumption; 7 on agriculture, aquaculture & forestry areas; 11 on area-based conservation; 15 on restoring ecosystems; and 20 on mobilising financing.



The CBD and the VCA Approach

As voluntary measure to recognise and encourage restoration and conservation beyond protected areas, the VCA Approach aims to create an inclusive alliance of stakeholders who are caring for our planet, hectare by hectare.

Today, the VCA Approach includes core partners, supporting organisations, conservation auditors, a governing board, a management team, and a growing network of friends of verified conservation. It is fully operational with several pilot VCA listings.

CBD recognition, however, is now needed to strengthen credibility and to scale up. The Parties have an opportunity to recognise innovative area-based conservation measures, such as the VCA Approach, which encourage broader voluntary stakeholder engagement in implementing the CBD Strategic Plan.

Recognise the VCA Approach at CBD COP13