

Regulating Biodiversity Corridors: Lessons and Issues

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Connectivity conservation involves the protection, retention and rehabilitation of natural connections among habitats within ecosystems at the landscape level. Biodiversity conservation corridors are a physical expression of conservation connectivity. They are defined as areas of suitable habitat that provide functional linkages between protected areas. They have three main functions: (1) conserving habitat for species movement and for the maintenance of viable populations (2) conserving and enhancing ecosystem services, and (3) promoting and enhancing local community welfare through the conservation and use of natural resources.

Habitat loss and fragmentation are the main threats to biodiversity. While protected areas have a role to play in maintaining biodiversity, there is widespread recognition that protected areas are inadequate in themselves for securing biodiversity for the long term. The use of conservation corridors between protected areas offers a way of improving connections between habitats. Corridors provide land or water pathways that link protected areas with one another, allow plants and animals to disperse and migrate, and adapt to the pressures of changing climate and habitat conditions.

Establishment of ecological networks and biodiversity corridors in countries around the world has accelerated since 2000. The earliest laws enabling biodiversity corridors were adopted in the 1990s. Since 2000, at least nine countries have enacted legislation enabling biodiversity corridors at national or sub-national level.

International experience indicates that successful biodiversity conservation corridor initiatives require:

- a national vision and strategy coupled with high-level political commitment;
- a regulatory regime that at a minimum implicitly enables connectivity and preferably does so explicitly;
- a basis in comprehensive ecological assessments and sound scientific knowledge to maintain and enhance ecological coherence; and
- thinking beyond national level and working across international boundaries to bring additional conservation benefits through cooperation.

Lessons that emerge from international experience with conservation corridors and the laws that enable them indicate that a regulatory framework should:

- Be based on policy that outlines a clear national vision and strategy for connectivity conservation;
- Be based on a law that enables corridors and provides for implementing regulations;
- Harmonize sectoral legal instruments that govern aspects of connectivity conservation to eliminate conflicts that would create obstacles for creating and managing corridors;
- Mandate that planning and management of conservation corridors be linked to the national protected areas system and be included in local, sub-national and national land use planning and plans;

- Empower government institutions, community groups and individuals, research institutions and NGOs to initiate and participate in connectivity conservation initiatives;
- Provide for a variety of possible coordination mechanisms to manage connectivity conservation, ranging from local level to supra-regional and from national to international;
- Provide multiple complementary measures among which local authorities can choose in creating and managing corridors;
- Enable incentives for all stakeholders – the public and private sectors, communities and individuals;
- Mandate access to and sharing of information on connectivity conservation in general and on the issues involved with individual corridors in particular;
- Require monitoring and evaluation of the effectiveness of corridors and their contribution to local livelihoods and to biodiversity conservation objectives at the national, sub-national and local levels.