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First China Conservation Biology Conference Highlights CPAs and OECMs

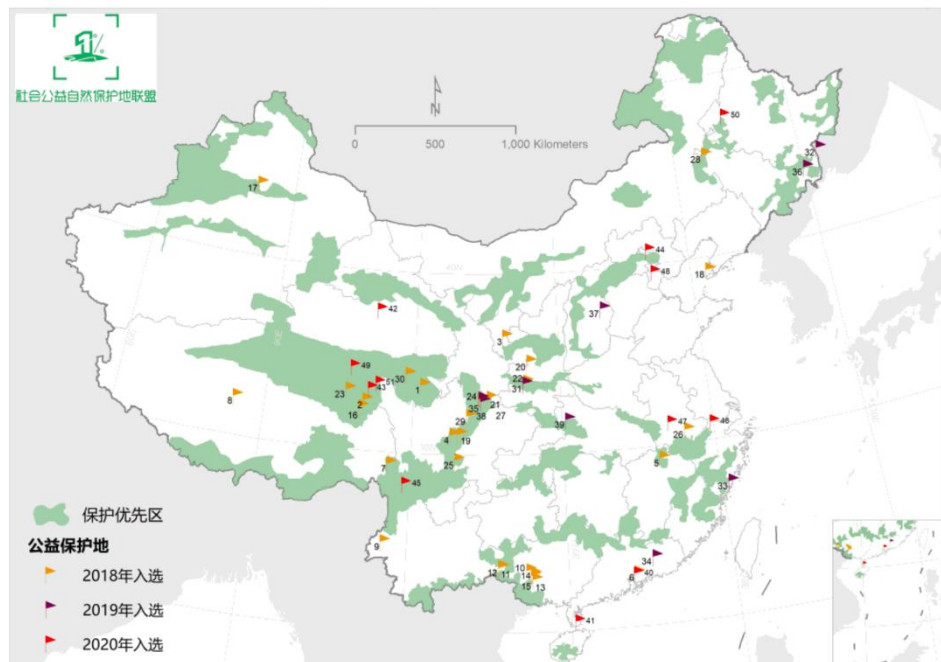
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December 18, 2023*

The first China Conservation Biology Conference was held in Guangzhou, China, November 24-17. The event attracted 920 participants, including researchers and conservation professionals from 208 institutions nationwide. It served as a platform for a cross-sector exploration of Civic Protected Areas (CPAs) and Other Effective Conservation Mechanisms (OECMs) that are integral for China to meet its conservation and biodiversity goals.

The SEE Foundation, which focuses on environmental fundraising, and the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) co-hosted a special symposium on CPAs aimed to explore how multi-stakeholder collaboration and diverse engagement can enhance protected-area management and contribute to land and biodiversity conservation goals.

Representatives from research institutions, nonprofit organizations, businesses, and other sectors shared practical experience and reflections on CPAs, presenting a variety of perspectives on the mechanism.

Tong Jin, Science Director of The Nature Conservancy China (TNC China) and ILCN steering committee member, introduced the practice and current status of CPAs in China. Jin said that CPAs are significant



As of September 2021, there were 51 recognized civil protected areas in China, covering 1,031,100 hectares, 0.1 percent, of the country. Source: <http://www.civilpa.org>

partly because they complement the existing natural protected area system. Grassroots efforts of all kinds have been growing this network using various tools for decades. This work includes sacred mountains and lakes in early traditional culture, community co-management and agreement-based protection work beginning in the 1980s and 1990s, and contributions from individuals, businesses, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) throughout the years.

Since 2017, the China Civic Protected Area Alliance—launched by 23 nonprofit organizations to encourage civil society to participate in natural area protection—has been exploring CPAs. The alliance’s goal is to protect 1 percent of China’s land area by 2030.

By September 2020, 51 CPAs, covering 10,311 square kilometers, were recognized in China. Philanthropic donations are the primary funding source for these areas, though some CPAs are exploring more sustainable sources, such as using protected land to provide nature education or produce ecological products. The Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework for 2030 created space for CPAs to be developed and the alliance is expected to play a key role in promoting China’s conservation efforts more broadly.

During the CPA symposium, Yiyun Sun from the IUCN explained the background and current significance of Other Effective Area-Based Conservation Measures (OECMs). She said that, with the support of the SEE Foundation and TNC China, the IUCN is reviewing policies and practices for OECMs in China based on difference governance types. An expert group was established in May 2023 to conduct this work and plans to eventually release a report on OECMs in China.

Other speakers shared cases of potential OECMs. Jiang Nan from the Shan Shui Conservation Center presented on the Nai Lang Valley Tibetan community conservation area. Monastery monks, local communities, research teams, and pilgrims work collaboratively to protect the area, bring the public’s attention to it, and boost awareness about the need for its conservation. The group plans to enhance the guiding role of monasteries, facilitate deeper involvement from various parties in conservation, and create a model for natural protection areas in Tibet that can extend to Lhasa residents and the broader region.

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