
[Mining Companies Muscle in on Protected Areas](#)

Mining companies were shocked by a 'Recommendation' passed by the World Conservation Congress in Amman in 2002, which called for an end to oil, mining and gas extraction from all protected areas in IUCN categories I, II, III and IV ('strict nature reserves', 'wilderness areas', 'national parks', 'natural monuments' and 'habitat management areas'). Many NGOs were equally surprised by the mining industries' reaction: what did the companies think these areas were meant to be protected from if not from unsustainable activities like mining? Indeed some went further, why does the Amman decision implicitly allow mining in protected areas in IUCN categories V and VI -- 'managed landscapes and seascapes' and 'managed resource protected areas'?

Controversy over the relationship between extractive industries and protected areas has rumbled on since that date. IUCN Council members and general members raised an outcry later last year when the IUCN Secretariat announced in the context of the World Summit on Sustainable Development that it was developing a new 'partnership' with the extractive industries. The language had to be toned down as a result of the outrage. The IUCN now speaks of being engaged in a 'dialogue' with the industries, but, whatever the term used, the reality is much the same.

The 'partnership' or 'dialogue' forms part of a wider strategy by the extractive industries' to rehabilitate their dirty image, tarnished by a trail of oil leaks, tanker wrecks, tailings dams bursts, cyanide and mercury spills, ruined landscapes, despoiled river systems, toxic waste dumps, polluted ecosystems, violated human rights and shattered livelihoods. The new talk of the industries' PR promoters and spin doctors is of 'sustainable mining', 'landscape restoration' and 'corporate responsibility' --the Global Mining Initiative is one part of this, the tie up with the IUCN another.

The fact is that the extractive industries need to be able to get access to minerals, oil and gas reserves wherever they are found in lucrative quantities: putting IUCN category I-IV areas off limits hurts them. Now they are wondering: just who decides how to apply these categories and what legal status do they have? To help answer such questions a number of companies including British Petroleum plc, Shell plc and the International Council for Mining and Metals are co-sponsoring a study co-financed by IUCN, WWF and Conservation International which will report to the World Parks Congress in September 2003. As it happens, the study itself, 'Speaking a Common Language', looks like being a useful one (www.cf.ac.uk/cplan/sacl/). Yet, the whole experience has come as a sharp jolt to those who put faith in the protected area system. If the system is not now to be undermined by the extractive industries, it will need vigilant policing by civil society and measures to ensure that the IUCN does not step out of line again.

By: Forest Peoples Programme, e-mail: info@fppwrm.gn.apc.org