



Red Sea
Global

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Paper Topic – Integrating Privately Protected Areas within Hospitality Assets of RSG

Session – 379 | The Biodiversity Significance of Some Modified Habitats: Implications for Impact Assessment

Summary Statement:

This paper showcase efforts made by RSG in utilizing survey data to integrate the Private Protected Areas (PPA) concept in hospitality assets planning\development around sensitive habitats.

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Integrating Privately Protected Areas within Hospitality Assets of RSG

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1. Introduction:

As the global travel and tourism sector evolves, there is a growing recognition on the importance of sustainable and regenerative practices that prioritize environmental conservation, while fostering economic growth (UNWTO, 2019). In alignment with Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 (Saudi Arabia Vision 2030, 2016), a transformative initiative aimed at diversifying the economy and enhancing the local environment, Red Sea Global (RSG) is mandated to develop tourism and hospitality assets along the country's coastline (Red Sea Global, 2021). This initiative not only highlights the region's pristine natural environment but also aims to set a benchmark for a regenerative tourism development model that integrates with the surrounding ecosystem.



Figure 1. Nujuma, a Ritz Carlton Reserve, The Red Sea

Operating within areas of rich biodiversity presents few challenges, including the preservation of sensitive ecosystems, protection of endangered species, and the mitigation of development impacts on the natural resources and cultural values. By adopting environmental considerations into the development concept, each project aims to support sustainable tourism ecosystem that supports both the local community and the natural environment. This model was needed to integrate conservation requirements

within the sustainable tourism framework that RSG is developing. RSG is introducing strategies to minimize ecological footprint, enhancing habitat restoration, and promoting wildlife conservation, all while ensuring that tourism development meets the expectations of RSG and Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030.

RSG is committed to incorporating conservation and enhancement of natural ecosystems and habitats through regenerative approaches across all phases of its development projects. This commitment has led RSG to adopt the integration of Private Protected Areas (PPA) within their assets, where applicable, specifically focusing on the Habitat/Species Management Area and Strict Nature Reserve categories, as defined by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN Guidelines for Protected Area Management Categories, 2021).

The importance of this paper lies in its potential to contribute to the discussion on sustainable tourism practices within the context of Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030. By showcasing a model that prioritizes environmental stewardship and regenerative principles (UNEP, 2015,) it aims to inspire other developers and stakeholders in the travel and tourism sector to adopt similar approaches, ultimately fostering a more sustainable future for both the industry and the ecosystems it depends on.

2. Literature Review

Private Protected Areas (PPAs) are increasingly recognized by the IUCN, major global conservation, and environmental forums such as World Commission on Protected Areas (WCPA) and the United Nations, as an essential component of global conservation efforts. These areas, conserved by private individuals or entities, can be legally or effectively protected, playing a crucial role in safeguarding biodiversity.

According to IUCN guidelines, PPAs must align with national and regional conservation strategies, be transparently managed, and meet well-defined conservation objectives. While PPAs provide significant ecological benefits, including biodiversity protection and landscape connectivity, they should complement rather than replace public conservation efforts. The guidelines underscore the need to balance private land use with broader conservation goals, ensuring both ecological integrity and socio-economic sustainability for long-term biodiversity preservation.

Although global data on the prevalence of PPAs is limited, there has been a notable increase in their establishment. For example, the number of PPAs in Brazil's Atlantic Forest has surged by 80% over the past two decades (Stolton, 2014). This trend highlights a growing global interest in preserving biodiversity and natural resources, with PPAs offering valuable economic benefits and fostering cultural awareness in local

communities. The integration of PPAs with ecotourism presents a compelling opportunity to align conservation and sustainable development. As Boley and Green (2016) emphasize, hospitality businesses can contribute to biodiversity conservation by incorporating PPAs into their operations, thus promoting eco-friendly tourism that benefits both the environment and local economies. Furthermore, PPAs enhance landscape connectivity and biodiversity conservation, which align with the core principles of ecotourism that prioritize low-impact, environmentally conscious travel (Salafsky & Wollenberg, 2000).

This paper presents the integration of PPAs within the RSG hospitality destinations. The unique habitats of the Red Sea have prompted a strong commitment to preserving its unique biodiversity. Achieving a balance between development and conservation is crucial in order to provide the best possible regenerative tourism experience, ensuring both environmental sustainability and long-term economic benefits.

3. Methodology:

To inform the development process for each asset, baseline surveys were conducted to assess existing ecological conditions, identify sensitive habitats, and designate habitat boundaries for species of concern. Baseline established through these surveys provided essential insights into the biodiversity present in the project area, highlighted the need for a development framework that prioritizes both conservation and sustainable development. Baseline studies enabled RSG to establish development thresholds that safeguard sensitive habitats while promoting responsible tourism practices.



Figure 2. Hawksbill turtle



Figure 3. Sooty falcon

The integration of the PPA concept into the design process involved a systematic approach, using a step wise process that included stakeholder engagement, ecological assessments, and iterative design reviews (Al Sultan, 2024). This collaborative technique ensured that conservation priorities were embedded in the project from the planning phase, allowing for informed decision-making at every stage of development.



Figure 4. Example of the methodological approach in integrating PPA's

RSG's methodology complied with relevant regulatory frameworks and guidelines, ensuring compliance with national and international environmental standards, as well as best practices in environmental planning and assessment. This alignment not only facilitates the protection of biodiversity but also enhances the credibility of the project to stakeholders and regulatory bodies.

4. Findings and Discussion:

RSG is integrating conservation priorities into the early planning stages of hospitality assets, specifically through the establishment of PPAs. By developing these PPAs on or adjacent to hospitality assets, RSG aims to protect and maintain sensitive habitats. This approach not only fosters ecological resilience but also aligns with global standards in sustainable tourism (McLennan, C. 2018)

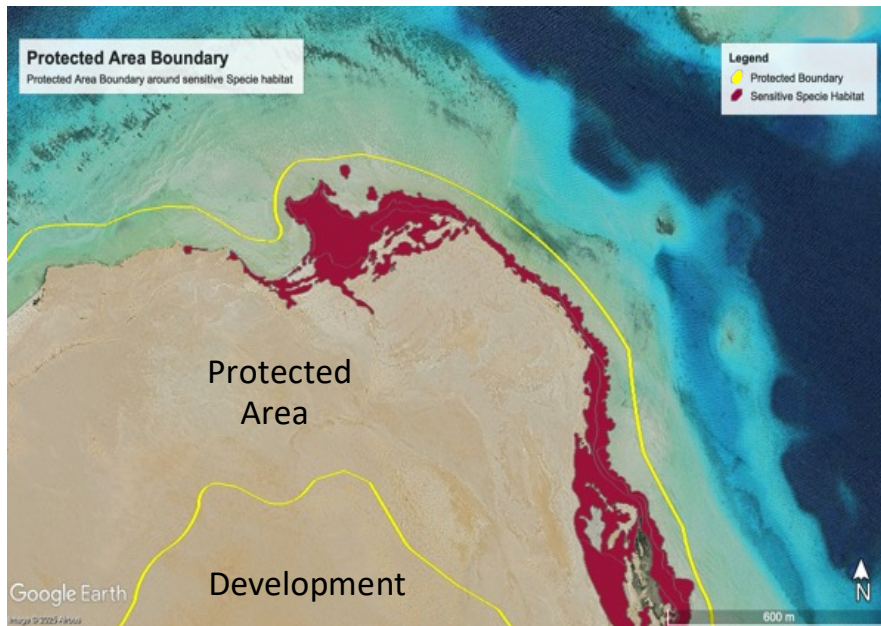


Figure 5. Sample of PPA around sensitive species habitat

Comprehensive ecological assessments that identify sensitive habitats and species present in the area have facilitated the integration of PPAs into the design process. These assessments inform the design framework, allowing to highlight conservation boundaries that dictate the spatial layout of hospitality developments. By proactively establishing these boundaries, RSG ensures that the design respects and preserves the integrity of the surrounding ecosystems (Spalding, M. D., 2013).



Figure 6. Recommended buffers around identified sensitive habitats.

RSG employs a multidisciplinary approach that incorporates ecological, social, and economic factors into the decision-making process. This perspective allows understanding of environmental sensitivities, which is important during design competition stages. Each

asset is evaluated for its potential impact on biodiversity and ecosystem services, ensuring that conservation remains a priority throughout the development lifecycle.

Current practices in integrating PPAs within hospitality assets demonstrate a commitment to sustainable development (Benavides, C., 2017). For instance, RSG has implemented habitat restoration initiatives and maintained wildlife corridors that facilitate animal movement between protected areas on the Red Sea coast. These practices not only mitigate the impacts of development but also enhance ecosystem services such as pollination, water purification, and climate regulation (Gibbons, J. M., & Mace, G. M., 2018).

This model has highlighted the importance of continuous monitoring and adaptive management to respond to changing environmental conditions and stakeholder needs. Regular assessments of biodiversity and ecosystem health can inform future interventions and enhance the effectiveness of conservation efforts. Furthermore, sharing lessons learned and success stories with other developers and stakeholders can promote wider adoption of PPA integration in hospitality asset planning.

5. Conclusion:

RSG's leading approach to integrate Private Protected Areas (PPAs) within the development of tourism and hospitality assets represents an advancement in sustainable tourism practices. By embedding conservation boundaries into the early planning stages, RSG not only safeguards critical habitats and protects endangered species but also enhances biodiversity in a region of high ecological sensitivity. This model aligns with Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030, emphasizing the importance of environmental stewardship while promoting economic growth through responsible tourism.

The comprehensive ecological assessments conducted by RSG have been instrumental in identifying sensitive habitats and informing the design framework, ensuring that development plans respect and preserve the integrity of the surrounding ecosystems. RSG's multidisciplinary approach to environmental management further reinforces the commitment to sustainability by considering ecological, social, and economic factors throughout the development lifecycle.

The strategic integration of Private Protected Areas within development footprints presents a compelling and multifaceted pathway towards achieving sustainable development, linking RSG as a contributor to activating Saudi Arabia Vision 2030. The identified opportunities underscore the transformative potential of PPAs, extending beyond mere conservation to actively contribute to ecological resilience and human well-being. By fostering awareness through targeted research and educational initiatives on critical habitats, species, and their vital interconnectivity, PPAs can cultivate a deeper public understanding and appreciation for biodiversity. Furthermore, they offer a crucial avenue for rehabilitation efforts, enabling the maintenance of healthy ecosystem balances

even amidst proposed development, and providing dedicated spaces for regeneration that actively enhance biodiversity. Finally, the immense potential for ecotourism, encompassing activities such as avitourism/bird watching and the establishment of eco-cabins, not only provides sustainable revenue streams but also strengthens local economies and connects visitors with nature. Embracing these opportunities through PPAs is not merely an environmental imperative but a strategic investment in a more harmonious and sustainable future, where development and conservation can mutually reinforce each other.

The implementation of habitat restoration initiatives and the protection of wildlife corridors illustrate RSG's dedication to enhancing ecosystem services, such as pollination and climate regulation. These practices not only mitigate the impacts of development but also create a resilient tourism ecosystem that benefits both the environment and local communities.

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