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**Tip Sheet: Identifying Critical Habitat using Existing Designations**

**INTERNAL ONLY**

***{DRAFT UNDER REVIEW}***

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The “critical habitat” definition in Performance Standard 6 was developed to align with existing definitions of “high value biodiversity areas” or “priority biodiversity areas” as designated by international conservation organizations. In some cases—though not all—the presence of legally protected and internationally recognized areas will automatically trigger a critical habitat designation per Performance Standard 6. In these cases, the work already done by conservation organizations in identifying such areas could unburden the client from the need to conduct a lengthy critical habitat assessment.

The question then becomes—for which areas is this the case? Is every legally protected area[[1]](#footnote-1) a critical habitat? Is every Important Bird Area a critical habitat? If no, which areas are to be treated as critical habitat and why? By unpacking the definitions of a number of common designations of high value biodiversity areas found globally, this Tip Sheet, in tandem with the “IBAT for IFC” tool, will help CES specialists better identify a critical habitat by using some of the existing designations[[2]](#footnote-2).

Common designations of “high value biodiversity areas” or “priority biodiversity areas” evaluated in this Tip Sheet are as follows:

* Legally Protected Areas (that are assigned an IUCN Protected Areas Management Category)
* Key Biodiversity Areas (as identified on IBAT)
* Important Bird Areas
* Ramsar Sites
* World Heritage Sites
* Regions of Conservation Importance

# Part 1 of this Tip Sheet provides a definition / background information on each of the types of area listed above.

# Part II provides a series of flowcharts to help the CES Specialists make critical habitat determinations based on the ‘critical habitat criteria’ included in paragraph 16 of PS6 and as provided in the table below.

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| Criterion | Description | GN6 References |
| 1 | Habitat of significant importance to Critically Endangered (CR) and/or Endangered (EN) species | GN71–78 |
| 2 | Habitat of significant importance to endemic and/or restricted-range species | GN79–84 |
| 3 | Habitat supporting globally significant concentrations of migratory and/or congregatory species | GN85–89 |
| 4 | Highly threatened and/or unique ecosystems | GN90–93 |
| 5 | Areas associated with key evolutionary processes | GN94–97 |

Note: GN references from Guidance Note 6 are given to guide further assessment and detailed definitions where necessary.

For each flowchart, the following color-coding system is used to designate the status of Critical Habitat or the need for further assessment.

Critical Habitat

Potential Critical Habitat. Further assessment required.

Not Critical Habitat

# PART 1: DEFINITIONS / BACKGROUND

# IUCN Protected Areas

An IUCN Protected Area Management Category[[3]](#footnote-3) is assigned to a legally protected area when the government registers the site with the World Database of Protected Areas (WDPA) (See Figure 1).[[4]](#footnote-4) These allow comparison between countries; unlike national naming designations (e.g. national park or forest reserve) which are not standardized internationally and do not necessarily convey information on management targets.

When clients are operating in legally protected areas meeting the IUCN definition quoted in footnote 1, (including areas officially proposed for protection), they are expected to comply with PS6 requirements for either natural or critical habitats—an assessment is required to determine which requirements apply, based on the biodiversity values present in that area. Note that natural or critical habitat requirements are in addition to paragraph 20 on “Legally Protected Areas / Internationally Recognized Areas.”

Legally Protected Areas with an IUCN Management Category of Ia (Strict Nature Reserve), Ib (Wilderness Area) and II (National Park) however receive more attention. Although these may not meet critical habitat thresholds, the client should take a precautionary approach given their special management status. Guidance Note (GN) 6 states that these areas are ‘treated’ as critical habitat*.[[5]](#footnote-5)* In this case (i.e., when critical habitat thresholds are not met), compliance with critical habitat requirements is determined based on the client’s ability to demonstrate ‘no measurable adverse impacts’ on the management objectives of the legally protected area as defined in the management plan (if there is one) *or* on the biodiversity values of the area as determined by a relevant stakeholder group. Net positive gain, which is a requirement when operating in critical habitats, would be determined in the same manner.

# Key Biodiversity Areas

Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs) are nationally mapped sites of global significance for biodiversity conservation that have been selected using globally standard criteria and thresholds (see Figure 2). Their identification follows best practice protected area guidelines developed by IUCN. KBAs comprise an “umbrella” set of internationally-recognized priority sites for biodiversity that include (i) [Important Bird Areas (IBAs);](http://www.biodiversitya-z.org/areas/17) (ii) [Important Plant Areas (IPAs);](http://www.biodiversitya-z.org/areas/18) (iii) Important Sites for Freshwater Biodiversity; and (iv) [Alliance for Zero Extinction (AZE) sites.](http://www.biodiversitya-z.org/areas/1)

Performance Standard 6 critical habitat criteria were strongly influenced by the KBA criteria; and, in IBAT for IFC, the global KBA network has been segregated in a manner to closely align with IFC’s critical habitat designation in PS6.

**Alliance for Zero Extinction** (AZE) sites, which are the highest priority sub-set of KBAs, will trigger Critical Habitat status due their extreme importance for the last populations of highly threatened species.

**Important Bird Areas** (IBAs) are key sites for the conservation of bird species, as designated by BirdLife International’s network of national partners (see Figure 3). These sites are small enough to be conserved in their entirety, often form part of a protected-area network, and are, as far as possible, different in character or habitat or ornithological importance from the surrounding area. They are a sub-set of the KBA network.

For more information see <http://www.birdlife.org/datazone>

Performance Standard 6 critical habitat criteria were strongly influenced by the BirdLife criteria.

# Ramsar Sites

Ramsar sites are nationally important wetland sites designed by national governments who are signatories to the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance especially as Waterfowl Habitat, 1971 (or the “Ramsar Convention”) (see Figure 4). Ramsar sites are designated based on nine different criteria. Some of these criteria are very close to critical habitat criteria as defined by PS6 and would automatically trigger a critical habitat designation, as listed in Figure 4.

Given the mixed management attention received by Ramsar sites around the world, an approach similar to that taken for legally protected areas is recommended. These areas are to be ‘treated’ as natural or critical habitat (using the flowchart for guidance) regardless of their biodiversity value. Given that they are internationally-recognized sites of importance, the client should take a conservative approach.

# World Heritage Sites

World Heritage Sites are globally important sites designated by United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) from submissions by countries who are signatories to the Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage, 1972 (see Figure 5). This designation covers protected and unprotected sites. It is intended to promote international cooperation for protecting these sites.

World Heritage Sites designated using criteria for Natural World Heritage Sites are treated as Critical Habitat. Cultural World Heritage Sites should be considered under PS8.

# Regions of Conservation Importance

Regions of Conservation Importance are coarse-scale broader regions of importance (see Figure 6). As a result of this scale and broad coverage, they are not considered Critical Habitat. Although the Regions of Conservation Importance are too large-scale to be considered critical habitat in their own right, they may contain biodiversity values that would trigger a Critical Habitat designation.

# PART 2: FLOWCHARTS

# Figure 1: Legally Protected Areas (IUCN Protected Area Management Categories) Versus Critical Habitat

Critical Habitat

Potential Critical Habitat. Further assessment required.

Not Critical Habitat

**Critical Habitat Determination**

See notes in Part 1 for the meaning of “treated” as critical habitat (see also GN57, GN115). Note that these requirements are addition to Protected Area requirements (see PS6, para 20).

Where an IUCN Management Category *has not been assigned*, assessment for Natural or Critical Habitat will be required.

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| IUCN Management Category | Definition |
| Ia: Strict Nature Reserve | Category Ia areas are strictly protected areas set aside to protect biodiversity and also possibly geological/geomorphical features, where human visitation, use and impacts are strictly controlled and limited to ensure protection of the conservation values. Such protected areas can serve as indispensable reference areas for scientific research and monitoring. |
| Ib: Wilderness Area | Category Ib protected areas are usually large unmodified or slightly modified areas, retaining their natural character and influence without permanent or significant human habitation, which are protected and managed so as to preserve their natural condition. |
| II: National Park | Category II protected areas are large natural or near natural areas set aside to protect large-scale ecological processes, along with the complement of species and ecosystems characteristic of the area, which also provide a foundation for environmentally and culturally compatible, spiritual, scientific, educational, recreational, and visitor opportunities. |
| III: National Monument or Feature | Category III protected areas are set aside to protect a specific natural monument, which can be a landform, sea mount, submarine cavern, geological feature such as a cave or even a living feature such as an ancient grove. They are generally quite small protected areas and often have high visitor value. |
| IV: Habitat/Species Management Area | Category IV protected areas aim to protect particular species or habitats and management reflects this priority. Many Category IV protected areas will need regular, active interventions to address the requirements of particular species or to maintain habitats, but this is not a requirement of the category. |
| V: Protected Landscape/Seascape | A protected area where the interaction of people and nature over time has produced an area of distinct character with significant, ecological, biological, cultural and scenic value: and where safeguarding the integrity of this interaction is vital to protecting and sustaining the area and its associated nature conservation and other values. |
| VI: Protected Area with sustainable use of natural resources | Category VI protected areas conserve ecosystems and habitats together with associated cultural values and traditional natural resource management systems. They are generally large, with most of the area in a natural condition, where a proportion is under sustainable natural resource management and where low-level non-industrial use of natural resources compatible with nature conservation is seen as one of the main aims of the area. |

**Figure 2: Key Biodiversity Areas (as listed in IBAT) versus Critical Habitat**

Critical Habitat

Potential Critical Habitat. Further assessment required.

Not Critical Habitat

**Critical Habitat Determination**

Key Biodiversity Areas are nationally mapped sites of global significance for biodiversity conservation. They are selected using globally standard criteria and thresholds developed by IUCN and partners. KBAs comprise an “umbrella” set of internationally-recognized priority sites for biodiversity that include (i) Important Bird Areas (IBAs); (ii) Important Plant Areas (IPAs); (iii) Important Sites for Freshwater Biodiversity; and (iv) Alliance for Zero Extinction (AZE) sites.

Alliance for Zero Extinction (AZE) sites are the highest priority KBAs. AZEs will trigger Critical Habitat status due their extreme importance for the last known populations of highly threatened (CR and EN) species.

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| KBA Trigger (as listed in IBAT) | Definition (note that these are triggers for the designation of a KBA, which are similar but different from IFC’s critical habitat triggers). |
| Critically Endangered (CR) & Endangered (EN) species | Regular occurrence of at least one individual at the site. |
| Vulnerable (VU) species | Presence of 30 individuals or 10 pairs at the site. |
| Endemic and Restricted Range species | Presence of species with a global range less than 50 000 sq.km; Presence of species with at least 5% of global population at the site. |
| Migratory species and species that form congregations | Presence of species with large but clumped distributions with at least 5% of global population at site; Presence of species with at least 1% of global population seasonally at the site; Site is responsible for maintaining 1% of global population. |
| Bioregionally restricted species | To be defined. Currently there are slightly different definitions in use by different organizations. |

**Figure 3: Important Bird Areas versus Critical Habitat**

Critical Habitat

Potential Critical Habitat. Further assessment required.

Not Critical Habitat

**Critical Habitat Determination**

Important Bird Areas (IBAs) are key sites for the conservation of bird species, as designated by BirdLife International’s network of national partners.

Important Bird Areas are a subset of Key Biodiversity Areas.

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| IBA Criteria | Definition |
| A1. Globally threatened, i.e. CR, EN or VU species | The site is known or thought regularly to hold significant numbers of globally threatened species, or other species of global conservation concern. |
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| A2. Restricted-range species | The site is known or thought to hold a significant component of a group of species whose breeding distributions define an Endemic Bird Area (EBA) or Secondary Area (SA). |
| A3. Biome-restricted species | The site is known or thought to hold a significant component of the group of species whose distributions are largely or wholly confined to one biome. |
| A4. Congregations | A site may qualify on any one or more of the four criteria listed below: i). Site known or thought to hold, on a regular basis, at least 1% of a biogeographic population of a congregatory waterbird species; ii). Site known or thought to hold, on a regular basis, at least 1% of the global population of a congregatory seabird or terrestrial species; iii). Site known or thought to hold, on a regular basis, at least 20,000 waterbirds or at least 10,000 pairs of seabirds of one or more species; iv). Site known or thought to exceed thresholds set for migratory species at bottleneck sites. |

**Figure 4: Ramsar Sites Versus Critical Habitat**

Critical Habitat

Potential Critical Habitat. Further assessment required.

Not Critical Habitat

**Critical Habitat Determination**

Ramsar sites are nationally important wetland sites designated by national governments who are signatories to the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance especially as Waterfowl Habitat, 1971 (or the “Ramsar Convention”).

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| Ramsar Criteria | Definition |
| RS Criterion 1 | Contains a representative, rare, or unique example of a natural or near-natural wetland type found within the appropriate biogeographic region. |
| RS Criterion 2 | Supports vulnerable, endangered, or critically endangered species or threatened ecological communities. |
| RS Criterion 3 | Supports populations of plant and/or animal species important for maintaining the biological diversity of a particular biogeographic region. |
| RS Criterion 4 | Supports plant and/or animal species at a critical stage in their life cycles, or provides refuge during adverse conditions. |
| RS Criterion 5 | Regularly supports 20,000 or more waterbirds[[6]](#footnote-6). |
| RS Criterion 6 | Regularly supports 1% of the individuals in a population of one species or subspecies of waterbird. |
| RS Criterion 7 | Supports a significant proportion of indigenous fish subspecies, species or families, life-history stages, species interactions and/or populations that are representative of wetland benefits and/or values and thereby contributes to global biological diversity. |
| RS Criterion 8 | Important source of food for fishes, spawning ground, nursery and/or migration path on which fish stocks, either within the wetland or elsewhere, depend. |
| RS Criterion 9 | Regularly supports 1% of the individuals in a population of one species or subspecies of wetland-dependent non-avian animal species. |

**Figure 5: World Heritage Sites Versus Critical Habitat**

Critical Habitat

Potential Critical Habitat. Further assessment required.

Not Critical Habitat

**Critical Habitat Determination**

World Heritage Sites are globally important sites designated by United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) from submissions by countries who are signatories to the Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage, 1972

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| World Heritage Criteria | Definition |
| WH Criterion 1 | Represents a masterpiece of human creative genius. |
| WH Criterion 2 | Exhibit an important interchange of human values, over a span of time or within a cultural area of the world, on developments in architecture or technology, monumental arts, town-planning or landscape design |
| WH Criterion 3 | Bear a unique or at least exceptional testimony to a cultural tradition or to a civilization which is living or which has disappeared. |
| WH Criterion 4 | An outstanding example of a type of building, architectural or technological ensemble or landscape which illustrates (a) significant stage(s) in human history. |
| WH Criterion 5 | An outstanding example of a traditional human settlement, land-use, or sea-use which is representative of a culture (or cultures), or human interaction with the environment especially when it has become vulnerable under the impact of irreversible change. |
| WH Criterion 6 | Directly or tangibly associated with events or living traditions, with ideas, or with beliefs, with artistic and literary works of outstanding universal significance. |
| WH Criterion 7 | Contain superlative natural phenomena or areas of exceptional natural beauty and aesthetic importance. |
| WH Criterion 8 | Outstanding examples representing major stages of earth's history, including the record of life, significant on-going geological processes in the development of landforms, or significant geomorphic or physiographic features. |
| WH Criterion 9 | Outstanding examples representing significant on-going ecological and biological processes in the evolution and development of terrestrial, fresh water, coastal and marine ecosystems and communities of plants and animals. |
| WH Criterion 10 | Contain the most important and significant natural habitats for in-situ conservation of biological diversity, including those containing threatened species of outstanding universal value from the point of view of science or conservation. |

**Figure 6: Regions of Conservation Importance Versus Critical Habitat**

Critical Habitat

Potential Critical Habitat. Further assessment required.

Not Critical Habitat

**Critical Habitat Determination**

Although the Regions of Conservation Importance are too large-scale to be considered critical habitat in their own right, they may contain biodiversity values that would trigger a Critical Habitat designation.

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| Regions of Conservation Importance | | Definition |
| Endemic Bird Areas | Regions where the distributions of two or more restricted-range bird species overlap. Identified by BirdLife International. | |
| Biodiversity Hotspots | Regions of defined by the presence of high levels of threat (at least 70% habitat loss) in areas with high levels of species endemism (at least 1,500 endemic plant species). Identified by Conservation International. | |
| High Biodiversity Wilderness Area | Large areas (at least 10,000 km2) consisting of regions defined by their relatively undisturbed nature (at least 70% intact) and high level of species endemism (at least 1,500 endemic plant species). Identified by Conservation International. | |
| WWF Ecoregions | Relatively large units of land or water containing a distinct assemblage of natural communities sharing a large majority of species, dynamics, and environmental conditions. Ecoregions represent the original distribution of distinct assemblages of species and communities. Identified by World Wildlife Fund. | |
| Tiger Conservation Landscapes | Landscapes of importance for tiger conservation. Identified by World Wildlife Fund and Wildlife Conservation Society | |
| Bird Migration Flyways | Broad outline of main flyways used globally by migrating birds, based on the shared distributions and common migration routes of individual migratory bird species. Identified by BirdLife International. | |

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| *Keywords: Performance Standard 6, Guidance Note 6, Critical Habitat, Legally Protected Areas, Internationally Recognized Areas, Biodiversity*  *Information Classification: Internal use only*  *Contact: Lori Anna Conzo (lconzo@ifc.org)*  [*www.ifc.org/sustainability*](http://www.ifc.org/sustainability) |

1. Note that Performance Standard 6 recognizes legally protected areas that meet the IUCN definition: “A clearly defined geographical space, recognized, dedicated and managed, through legal or other effective means, to achieve the long-term conservation of nature with associated ecosystem services and cultural values.” It also includes areas proposed by governments for such designation. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Note that there are those cases where known priority biodiversity areas have become so degraded since their designation, that they lose their biodiversity value. In these cases, an assessment is needed to determine if the area still qualifies as critical habitat. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. For more information see, <http://www.iucn.org/about/work/programmes/gpap_home/gpap_quality/gpap_pacategories/> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. For more information see, <http://www.wdpa.org/>. Also available via IBAT for IFC. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. As defined in paragraphs GN43–97 in Guidance Note 6. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Defined broadly as all birds predominantly associated with water, either ecologically or taxonomically. By the criteria of all organizations, loons, grebes, pelicans, cormorants, bitterns, egrets, herons, ibises, rails, coots, gulls, terns, and skimmers are waterbirds. We include in our definition waterfowl (ducks and geese), shorebirds (oystercatchers, stilts, plovers, sandpipers, and phalaropes), and seabirds (albatrosses, petrels, shearwaters, murrelets, auklets, and puffins), which are considered by some to be separate groups. We also include other species of birds that are affiliated with water and wetland habitats, such as ospreys, kingfishers, and several kinds of passerines (e.g., some species of flycatchers, swallows, warblers, sparrows, and blackbirds), even though their families are not generally associated with bodies of water. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)