

Mountains: Special places to be protected? An analysis of worldwide nature conservation efforts in mountains

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Mountains are regularly a focus of international efforts to conserve the environment and promote sustainable development. The present article analyses the extent of protection in mountainous compared to non-mountainous areas, sheds light on the rationales behind the establishment of mountain protected areas, and proposes directions for future conservation endeavours with reference to mountain protected areas. Results show that the surface covered by protected areas did not change much between 1930 and 1960. After which it grew exponentially, benefiting from the emergence of coordinated global conservation efforts. In 2005, total protected areas covered 16.3 million km² (11.1%) of the land surface. Compared to the total respective surfaces, the proportion of mountain protected areas is slightly greater (11.4%) than the proportion of non-mountainous areas (11.0%). The main reasons for this can be found mainly in biophysical (biodiversity hotspots, endemism) and culturally embedded (uniqueness, sacredness) features, as well as in the relative remoteness and lower human population densities of mountains. However, in order to realise future sustainable conservation efforts in mountains (and elsewhere), people-oriented conservation approaches that call for ecologically sound, feasible and socially just protected area development will be needed.

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