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# Policy Brief
## Decision–making toolbox
## for inclusive conservation
## in protected areas

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ENVISION

# Introduction

In early October 2021, the United Nations Human Right Council recognized a healthy environment as a human right[1]. The key sites for natural environmental conservation, protected areas (PAs), play not only a critical role for conserving biodiversity, but they are also crucial for human health and well-being. Thousands of PAs[2] have been designated by now, and their number will increase in future. Target 3 of the first draft of the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework under the Convention on Biological Diversity aims at ensuring that *"at least 30 per cent globally of land areas and of sea areas, especially areas of **particular importance for biodiversity and its contributions to people, are conserved through effectively and equitably managed, ecologically representative and well-connected systems of PAs** and other effective area-based conservation measures, and integrated into the wider landscapes and seascapes"*.[3] However, once a PA has been designated, it then needs to be effectively managed and monitored. One of the enabling conditions to the achievement of the 30% target is to ensure the relevant stakeholders are supportive and join forces to ensure its effective management. A ***participatory and inclusive whole-of-society approach*** is needed, a principle underpinning the ENVISION project.
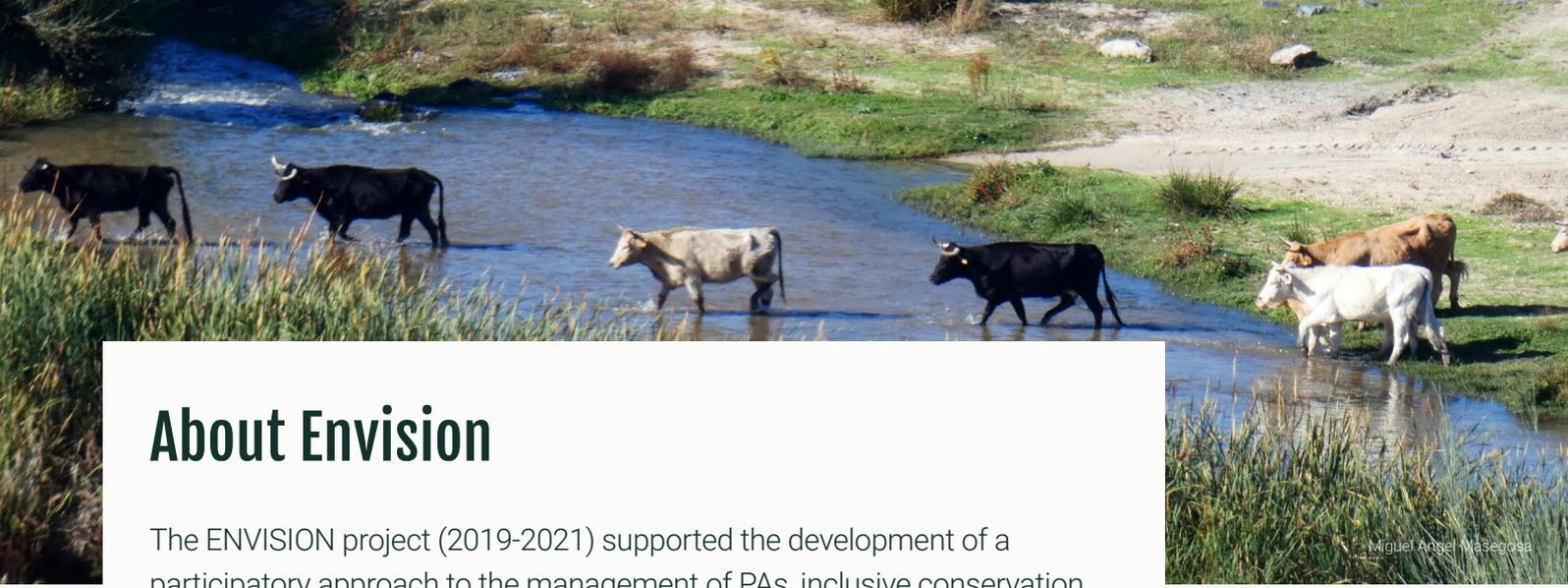
# About Envision

The ENVISION project (2019-2021) supported the development of a participatory approach to the management of PAs, inclusive conservation, with the aim of improving biodiversity and human well-being.

*Inclusive conservation is an approach for accommodating and balancing different stakeholder visions and values for PA management to achieve socially relevant and environmentally sustainable outcomes in PAs.*

A cornerstone of inclusive conservation is the application of multiple methods that function to expand the space for engagement and dialogue across the various stakeholders of a PA, such as recreational users, local residents, indigenous peoples, local businesses, land managers, farmers, researchers and local governments[4]. The approach considers different pathways to manage PAs, collectively defining new visions through social learning, assessing uncertainty and building resilience, acknowledging power relations and rethinking governance, while informing biodiversity and PAs management policy[5].
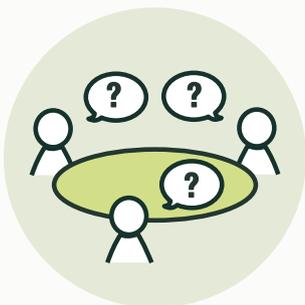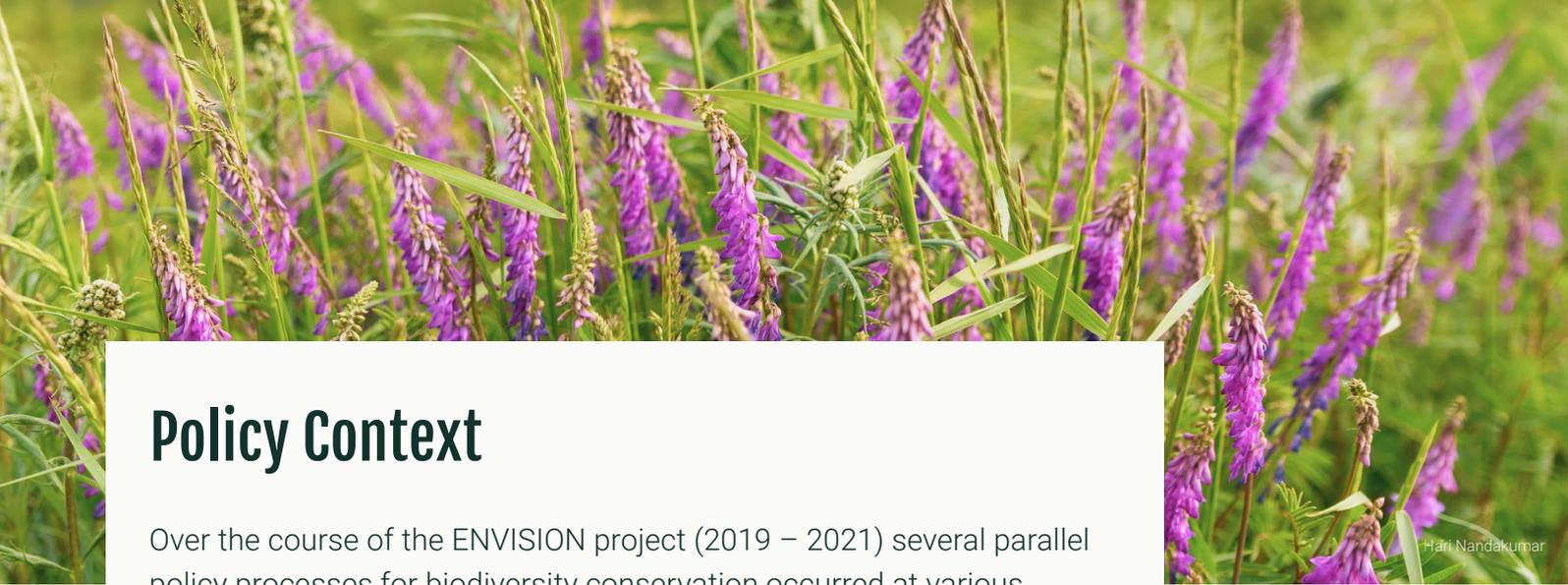
# Policy Context

Over the course of the ENVISION project (2019 – 2021) several parallel policy processes for biodiversity conservation occurred at various scales. In 2020, important policy developments were projected to include the adoption of a new global policy framework for biodiversity under the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)[6]. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the negotiations on this framework have been postponed multiple times. The First Draft[7] was released in July 2021, in the lead-up to the third meeting of the Open-ended Working Group on the post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF).

In Europe, since the release of the EU Green Deal, environment was the top of the political agenda. The EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 was published in May 2020, and helped Europe to establish itself as an ambitious leader in the global arena during the preparations for the future GBF.

As our case studies include a national park in the U.S., it is important to understand the corresponding national policy context for protected areas. The federal government owns about 30 percent of the nation's lands. The remaining 70% is private property, state and local government lands. The federal government assists state governments and private landowners through a number of conservation programs that significantly enhances and protects biodiversity on those lands and waters. The United States is not party to the CBD. Consequently, its federal government has not developed biodiversity policy specifically related to the post 2020 Framework. Nevertheless, positive actions to protect biodiversity are ongoing[8]. The Great American Outdoors Act, passed by the US Congress in 2020, enabled national parks and other

federal lands to repair and upgrade vital infrastructure and facilities, protect resources, and enable increased access for all visitors[9]. In January 2021, newly elected President Biden issued the Executive Order 14008, Tackling the Climate Crisis at Home and Abroad[10], in which he established the goal to conserve, connect, and restore 30% of US lands and waters by 2030.

In parallel with these policy developments, the ENVISION project contributed to a large body of research that is now underscoring the critical contribution of green spaces and PAs to human wellbeing .The notion of parks being critical public health and essential infrastructure is receiving increasing recognition and support[11].



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# The tools and their results

## Inclusive conservation toolbox

In partnership with local residents, PA managers and diverse stakeholders groups, ENVISION examined multiple visions for PA management in four case study areas: Kromme Rijn and Utrechtse Heuvelrug regions (The Netherlands), Sierra de Guadarrama (Madrid and Segovia, Spain), Västra Harg (Östergötland, Sweden) and Denali National Park (Alaska, United States). ENVISION researchers, in collaboration with PAs managers, **created a toolbox that introduces a set of participatory research tools to help PA managers and practitioners** enhance social engagement in conservation decision-making by identifying, navigating and balancing visions, tensions, and power relations between stakeholders. The toolbox is based on the approaches developed in the four study sites.

## STREAMLINE

Streamline is an open-source cartoon visualization tool that is flexible, cost-effective, user-friendly and adaptable to different contexts. It aims to explore local knowledge, views and values related to different aspects of a PA to build desired visions for the future. In the context of the ENVISION project, it helped identify visions for the PAs, including values that support them, perceptions of landscape changes and drivers of change, and management of the sites. STREAMLINE **facilitated in an interactive and creative way the development of desired futures for the PAs, and provided entrypoints for comparing and balancing visions for their management**[12].

## PARTICIPATORY MAPPING

Participatory mapping is a technique to collect, analyze, share or visualize the values, preferences or concerns of citizens and other social actors. Results can be overlaid with other spatial attributes to inform the social acceptability of land-use plans. In the context of ENVISION, it helped in **visualizing georeferenced data associated with different types of knowledge, perceptions of ecosystem services, and land-use conflicts[13]**.

## MENTAL, EMOTIONAL, POWER MAPS

Mental, emotional and power maps are used to understand how stakeholders characterize the social-ecological system of the PA in terms of cognitive, emotional, or power aspects. In Sierra de Guadarrama National Park they contributed to **collect local knowledge associated with the PA while capturing intertwined affective relationships and power dynamics. They also opened up dialogues to deal collectively with less-addressed topics in participation, such as emotional and power aspects[14]**.

## MATRIX TO CHARACTERIZE GOVERNANCE ARRANGEMENTS AND DELINEATE PARTICIPATORY MECHANISMS

An analytical matrix aims to understand how (formal and informal) governance arrangements are shaped in terms of stakeholders' responsibility (shared vs concentrated) and influence (equal vs unequal). In Sierra de Guadarrama National Park, the use of the matrix identified four different types of governance arrangements; it served as a **guidance to delineate and monitor participatory mechanisms through which two or more stakeholders interact to adopt governance arrangements[15]**.

## DELIBERATIVE PROCESSES BASED ON SOCIAL LEARNING AND KNOWLEDGE CO-PRODUCTION

Deliberative processes promote collective reflections among diverse stakeholders and guide them in creating visions of desired futures for PAs management. Their application in the four case studies of the ENVISION Project **created different future scenarios for the PAs management and collectively strategies to advance towards a more sustainable future**. Deliberative processes based on social learning are a powerful tool to **gain knowledge about diverse perspectives of the dynamics and uncertainties of human-nature interactions and their consequences for biodiversity conservation and human well-being, and building valuable relationships to increase community capacity for engaging in decision-making[16]**.

## CONTEXT-SPECIFIC BOUNDARY OBJECT TO FACILITATE COLLECTIVE ACTION

This tool facilitates stakeholder organization and identifies their willingness to take tangible joint action. Its application in Sierra de Guadarrama shaped a diversity of collective strategies in terms of stakeholders' diversity and willingness to take action to implement them. From a policy perspective, it helps **visualize potential action networks in which the willingness of each stakeholder is a constituent of collective action, and opens up dialogue for collectively implementing  the strategies[17]**.

For more information about the PANORAMA solutions, please check the links below:

**Sierra de Guadarrama National Park**

**Utrechtse Heuvelrug National Park and Kromme Rijn region**

**Västra Harg Nature Reserve**

**Denali National Park and Preserve**

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# Lessons for policy and practice

Some lessons for decision-makers and practitioners can be extracted from the co-created knowledge and experience accumulated during the lifetime of the project:

- **The need to effectively involve local communities, indigenous people,  government, business and NGOs in the management and in the designation process of PAs**
  In order to achieve Target 21[18] of the First Draft of the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework it is fundamental to incentivize the effective participation of all stakeholders when it comes to decision-making related to biodiversity. The participatory approach that the ENVISION project proposes is also in line with the theory of change for the Post 2020 Global framework; it *acknowledges the need for appropriate recognition of gender equality, women's empowerment, youth, gender-responsive approaches and the full and effective participation of indigenous peoples and local communities in its implementation*. Tools like the **matrix to characterize governance arrangements and delineate participatory mechanisms** can provide guidance to  understand how stakeholders participate in conservation governance, and it can help in monitoring and improving participatory approaches to foster social engagement in conservation.

- **Creating space for dialogue and social learning**
  Engaging residents in participatory research can link decision-making to local perspectives and facilitate shifts in values and preferences among all stakeholders including individuals and groups of residents, researchers, and managers. In Denali National Park, social learning occurred over the course of an **online discussion forum** and was attributed to the knowledge shared by others. Such dialogues can result in a shift of values and promote behaviours to eliminate unsustainable consumption patterns, as well as create an understanding and appreciation biodiversity. This is particular relevant when it comes to the achievement of Target 20 of the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework[19].

- **Understanding and recognizing visions of different groups of stakeholders**

  Diverging attitudes and priorities towards the conservation and use of landscapes, including ecosystem services, can lead to tensions and conflicts[20]. The results from the ENVISION project showed how **STREAMLINE, the participatory mapping tool and the deliberative process for participatory scenario planning,** represents an important input to develop management strategies considering the plurality of perspectives present in the PAs, contributing to preventing conflicts and involving the stakeholders and local community[21].

- **Promoting the use of creative engagement tools to inform conservation decision-making**

  The mental, emotional, and power maps and context-specific boundary object developed by the ENVISION researchers represented innovative and complementary tools to deal collectively with less-addressed topics in participatory approaches. Its application can help to address emotional and relational aspects, power relations around conservation governance, and stakeholders' willingness to get involved in collective action. Addressing these aspects can contribute to achieving more socially inclusive approaches that support the achievement of biodiversity targets.

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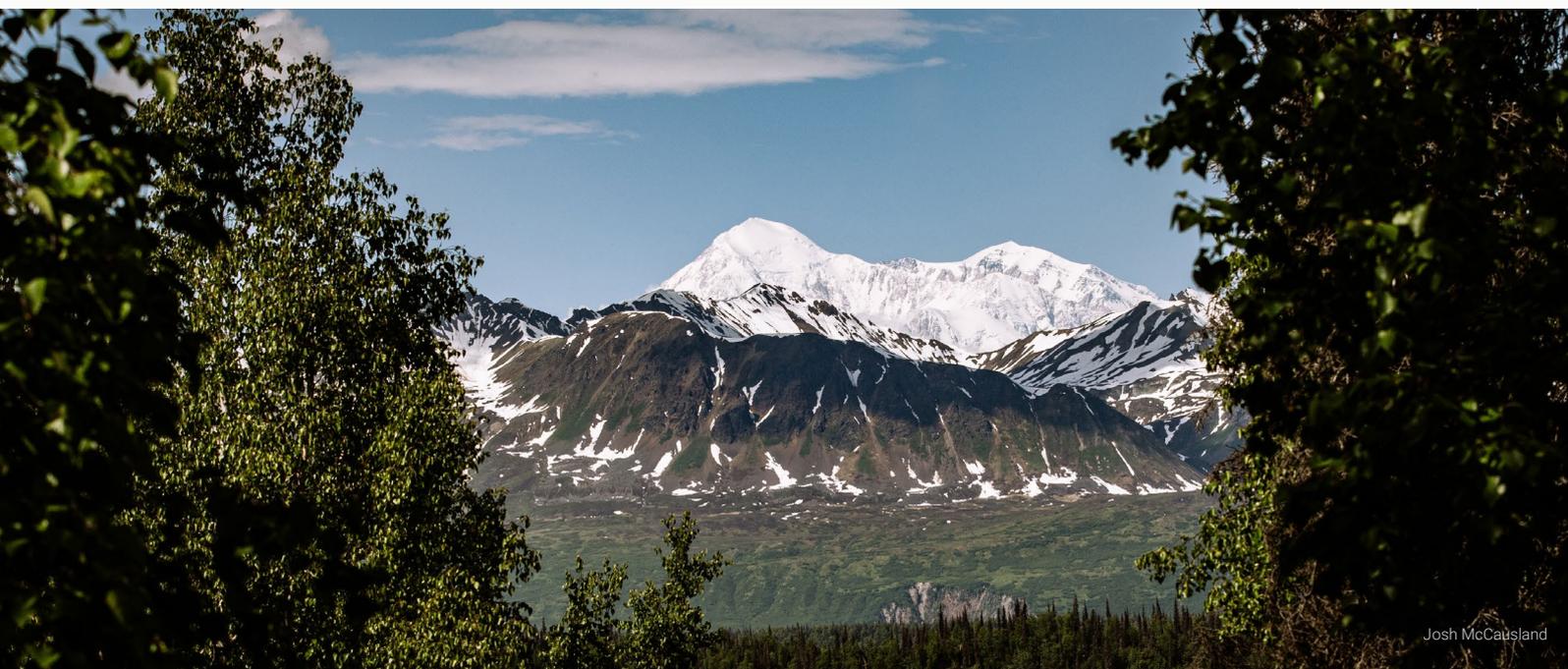
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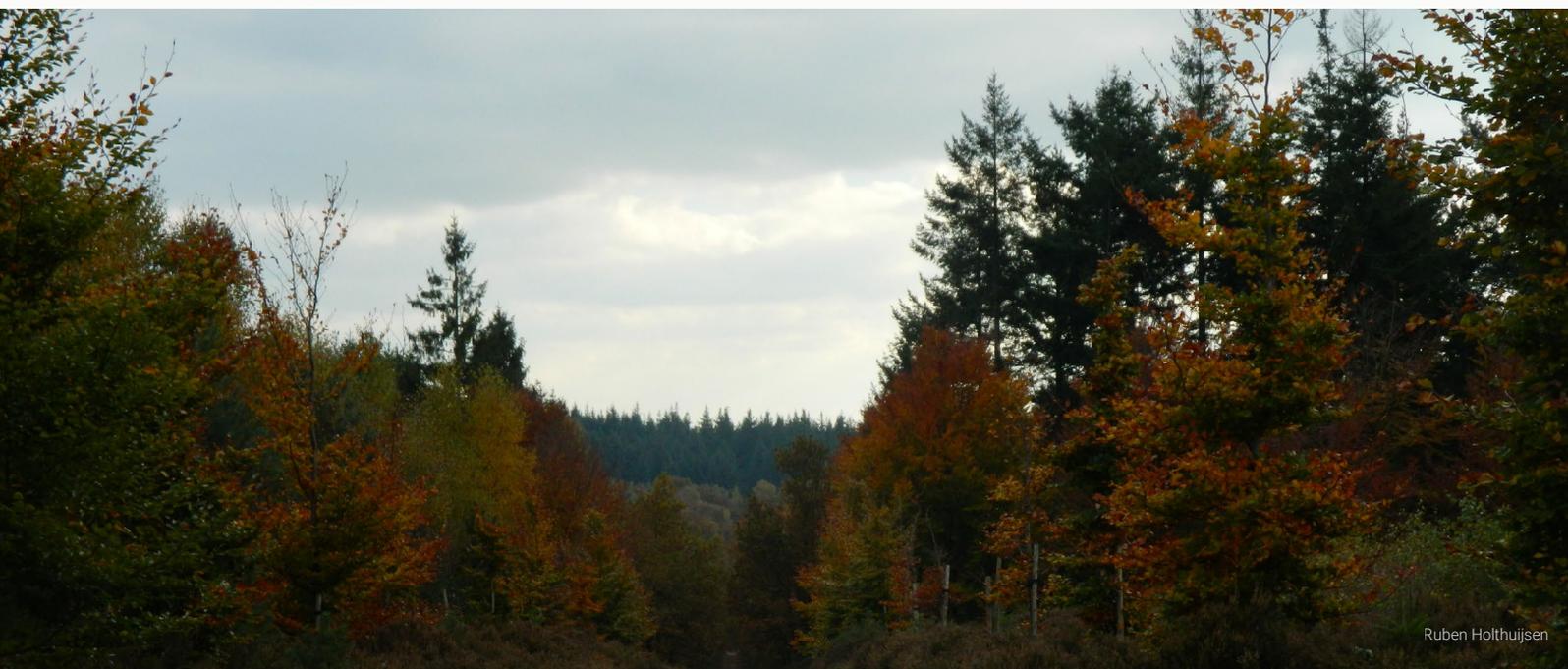
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18. *"Ensure equitable and effective participation in decision-making related to biodiversity by indigenous peoples and local communities, and respect their rights over lands, territories and resources, as well as by women and girls, and youth".*

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## Partners



## Funders



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