



Regional Consultancy to Assess the Training Needs and Develop MPA Management Training Materials

MPA Management Training Curriculum

Module 1.3 Introduction to Conservation Frameworks



2026

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Module information

- Focus Areas: International Law, Regional Treaties, and National Policy
- Level: Foundational / Introductory
- Total Sections: 4

1.2 Module Description

This module provides a comprehensive overview of the key legal and policy instruments that underpin global efforts in biodiversity conservation and sustainable resource management, from high-level international conventions to national action plans.

1.3 Overall Learning Outcomes

Upon successful completion, learners will be able to:

1. Distinguish and define core legal and operational terms (e.g., MEAs, Treaties, Protocols).
2. Differentiate between international, regional, and national frameworks.
3. Evaluate the role of these frameworks in achieving conservation goals.

1.4 Module Content Outline

Section 1: Concepts and Terminologies:

- Frameworks,
- Conventions,
- Treaties
- Protocols
- Multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs)

Section 2: International Frameworks:

- BBNJ agreements (High Seas Treaty)
- Convention on Biological Diversity (PoWPA, Aichi targets, GBF)
- Convention on Migratory Species (CMS)
- Ramsar Convention
- UNESCO Man and the Biosphere (MAB) Programme
- UNESCO World Heritage Convention (WHC)
- United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)

Section 3: Regional Frameworks:

- UNEP Regional Seas Programme - Cartagena Convention (SPAW protocol)

Section 4: National Frameworks:

- National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plans (NBSAPs)
- Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs)

1.5 Estimated Time Required

An estimate of 60 minutes per section is reasonable to ensure a deep understanding of the core principles. It is therefore estimated that the module should take anywhere between 4 – 5 hours to complete.

1.6 Assessment Strategy

The module includes targeted assessment consisting of:

1. Multiple Choice: For factual recall of principles and definitions.
2. Matching: For categorizing services and frameworks.
3. Scenario Analysis: For applying critical thinking to real-world conservation challenges.

2 MODULE GLOSSARY

This glossary serves as a translation guide for the diverse legal, scientific, and diplomatic terms used throughout the module. It is categorized by section to help learners navigate the hierarchy of global conservation governance.

2.1 Concepts and Terminology

- **Convention / Treaty:** A formal, legally binding agreement between sovereign states (e.g., CBD).
- **Framework Convention:** A legal instrument that establishes broad principles and a governance structure but leaves specific details for later Protocols or Decisions.
- **Hard Law:** Legally binding instruments that impose mandatory obligations on states (e.g., Ratified Treaties).
- **MEAs (Multilateral Environmental Agreements):** The umbrella term for any international legal agreement between three or more states concerning the environment.
- **Party:** A state (country) that has formally ratified an agreement and is legally bound by its provisions.
- **Protocol:** A specialized legal agreement that plugs into a parent treaty to add specific, actionable requirements (e.g., the Nagoya Protocol).
- **Ratification:** The formal process by which a national government (usually through parliament) accepts a treaty as domestic law.
- **Soft Law:** Non-binding instruments, such as Targets or Declarations, that represent political commitment but lack legal penalties for non-compliance.

2.2 International Frameworks

- **BBNJ (Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction):** Also known as the High Seas Treaty. A landmark agreement that entered into force on January 17, 2026, allowing for the creation of MPAs in international waters.
- **Blue Carbon:** Carbon captured and stored by coastal and marine ecosystems, such as mangroves, seagrasses, and salt marshes.
- **Cali Fund:** A global fund launched in 2025/2026 to share benefits from the use of Digital Sequence Information (DSI) on genetic resources.
- **COP (Conference of the Parties):** The supreme decision-making body of a convention, where member states meet to vote on new rules and targets.
- **EBSA (Ecologically or Biologically Significant Marine Area):** A site identified by the CBD as being of global importance to the health of the oceans.
- **EEZ (Exclusive Economic Zone):** The area of the sea (up to 200 nautical miles) over which a coastal state has sovereign rights for resources and environmental management under UNCLOS.
- **GBF (Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework):** The global roadmap adopted in 2022 containing 23 targets to be met by 2030 (including 30x30).
- **OUV (Outstanding Universal Value):** The cultural and/or natural significance so exceptional as to transcend national boundaries, required for UNESCO World Heritage status.
- **Range State:** Any nation that exercises jurisdiction over any part of the range of a migratory species (critical for CMS).
- **Wise Use:** The sustainable utilization of wetlands for the benefit of humankind in a way compatible with the maintenance of the natural properties of the ecosystem (Ramsar).

2.3 Regional Frameworks (The Caribbean)

- **Cartagena Convention:** The only legally binding regional environmental treaty for the Wider Caribbean Region.
- **LBS Protocol:** The regional agreement specifically targeting Land-Based Sources of Marine Pollution, such as sewage and agricultural runoff.

- **RAC (Regional Activity Centre):** Specialized technical hubs (like SPAW-RAC or RAC-REMPEITC) that assist Caribbean countries in implementing the convention's protocols.
- **SPAW Protocol:** The regional agreement for Specially Protected Areas and Wildlife, focusing on biodiversity and endangered species in the Caribbean.

2.4 National Frameworks

- **Headline Indicators:** Standardized metrics used in Seventh National Reports (7NR) to track global progress toward the GBF targets.
- **Mainstreaming:** The process of embedding biodiversity goals into the mainstream of government, such as finance, agriculture, and infrastructure planning.
- **NbS (Nature-based Solutions):** Actions to protect, sustainably manage, and restore ecosystems that address societal challenges (like climate change) effectively and adaptively.
- **NBSAP (National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan):** A country's primary policy document for implementing its CBD obligations at the national level.
- **NDC (Nationally Determined Contribution):** A national climate action plan to cut emissions and adapt to climate impacts under the Paris Agreement (currently in the NDC 3.0 cycle).
- **7NR (Seventh National Report):** The mandatory report card due by February 28, 2026, documenting national progress toward the 2030 biodiversity targets.

3 SECTION 1 - CONCEPTS AND TERMINOLOGIES

3.1 Description

This foundational section demystifies the legal and administrative language used in global conservation. Learners will explore the Legal Hierarchy, moving from high-level Frameworks and Conventions to the specific, actionable Protocols and Targets. By understanding the mechanics of Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs), learners will gain the clarity needed to navigate complex international policy documents and understand how global intent becomes national obligation.

3.2 Learning objectives

By the end of this section, learners will be able to:

- Define and differentiate between a Convention, a Treaty, and a Protocol.
- Explain the role of a Framework in providing a structure for subsequent legal agreements.
- Identify the primary MEAs that govern global biodiversity and resource management.
- Describe the relationship between international aspirational goals (e.g., Aichi/GBF) and legally binding requirements.

3.3 Content

3.3.1 The Legal Hierarchy

To understand conservation frameworks, one must understand how they are built. Think of it as a house:

- The Framework (The Blueprint): Sets the broad vision (e.g., We must protect the climate).
- The Convention/Treaty (The Foundation): A legally binding agreement between states.
- The Protocol (The Rooms): Specific, detailed additions to a treaty that address a sub-topic (e.g., the Nagoya Protocol on genetic resources under the CBD).

Term	Simple Definition	Example
Convention	A formal, binding agreement between states.	CBD (Convention on Biological Diversity)
Protocol	A supplementary agreement that adds specific detail.	Cartagena Protocol (on Biosafety)
Ratification	When a country's government formally signs off and accepts the treaty as law.	National Parliament vote.
Party	A country that has ratified and is now bound by the agreement.	The Parties to the Ramsar Convention.

3.3.2 Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs)

An MEA is simply an agreement between three or more countries. They are the primary tool for solving transboundary issues like migratory species or plastic pollution in the ocean. we move from the 'what' to the 'who and how'. MEAs are the primary legal vehicles for global environmental governance. Since nature doesn't respect political borders, whales migrate through high seas, and rivers flow through multiple countries, MEAs provide the shared rules of engagement.

An MEA isn't just a piece of paper; it's a living organization. To understand how they work, learners need to recognize these four components:

- The COP (Conference of the Parties): The 'Governing Body' - This is the big meeting (usually every 2 years) where all member countries vote on new targets or rules.

- The Secretariat: The ‘Administrative Office’ - They coordinate meetings, manage the budget, and monitor progress (e.g., the UNEP-hosted secretariats).
- Subsidiary Bodies: The ‘Technical Experts’ - These are committees of scientists and lawyers who provide the data the COP needs to make decisions.
- The Financial Mechanism: The ‘Bank’ - Most MEAs use the Global Environment Facility (GEF) or the Global Biodiversity Fund to help developing nations afford conservation projects.

A key concept is that MEAs generally lack teeth. Unlike domestic law, there is no ‘International Environment Police’, Enforcement relies on:

- Peer Pressure: Public reporting on progress (or lack thereof).
- Trade Sanctions: (e.g., CITES can ban a country from trading certain wildlife products if they violate rules).
- Capacity Building: Providing funding and technology to help countries comply.

3.3.3 Legally Binding vs. Non-Binding

It is vital to distinguish between Legally Binding (Treaties) and Non-Binding (Targets). This is why some global efforts succeed while others struggle. In the world of conservation, the distinction between Hard Law (Treaties) and Soft Law (Targets) is the difference between a legal obligation and a political promise.

1. Legally Binding: The Hard Law (Treaties & Protocols)

When a country ratifies a treaty, it enters a contract with the rest of the world.

The Obligation: The state is legally bound to align its national laws with the treaty. Failure to do so can lead to formal non-compliance procedures.

Enforcement Mechanisms:

- Trade Sanctions: CITES can recommend that all other countries stop trading wildlife products with a non-compliant nation.
- Funding Withdrawal: Access to the Global Environment Facility (GEF) can be tied to treaty compliance.
- Reporting: Mandatory National Reports that are scrutinized by other countries (peer review).

2. Non-Binding: The Soft Law (Frameworks & Targets)

These are policy instruments that guide action but do not carry the threat of legal penalty.

- The Purpose: They create a shared global vision. They allow 190+ countries to reach a consensus quickly because the sovereignty risk is lower.
- The Kunming-Montreal GBF Example: The GBF is technically a Decision of the COP, not a new treaty. While the parent treaty (CBD) is binding, the specific 30x30 target (protecting 30% of land and sea) is a political commitment.
- Why they matter: Even without teeth, these targets:
 - Set the agenda for International Aid and Philanthropy.
 - Provide Civil Society and NGOs with a yardstick to hold their governments accountable.

Feature	Legally Binding (Treaty/Protocol)	Non-Binding (Target/Framework)
Legal Status	Hard Law – Must be followed.	Soft Law – Aspirational/Commitment.
Example	Nagoya Protocol (Access/Benefits).	Target 3 of the GBF (30x30).
Domestic Impact	Requires formal change in national law.	Influences policy and funding priorities.
Failure to Meet	Possible sanctions or formal shaming.	Missed deadline (e.g., Aichi Targets).

3.4 Further reading and resources

- InforMEA E-Learning Platform:
 - Introductory Course to International Environmental Law: This is the gold standard for beginners. It covers the sources of international law and the basic architecture of MEAs.
 - The InforMEA Glossary: An excellent tool for quickly looking up the specific legal nuance between terms like Access and Benefit-sharing vs. Sustainable Use.
- The NBSAP Forum: Provides practical resources and webinars on how global targets are translated into National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plans.
- UNEP: Multilateral Environmental Agreements Negotiator's Handbook: While designed for diplomats, the introductory chapters provide a brilliant behind-the-scenes look at how treaties are actually written and why certain terminology is chosen.
- The Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (Full Text): Direct access to the 23 targets for 2030. Essential for comparing Soft Law ambitions with the Hard Law obligations of the CBD.
- The Green Customs Guide to MEAs: A very practical guide that explains how MEAs (like CITES or the Basel Convention) affect real-world trade and border control.
- GlobaLex: A Basic Guide to International Environmental Legal Research: An open-access, comprehensive guide that explains the history of environmental law and how to find primary legal documents.
- Shelton, D. (2025). International Environmental Law (4th ed.). Brill. (For advanced learners): This updated text covers the triple planetary crisis and the latest legal developments in biodiversity and climate change.

3.5 Discussion Point: The Ambition Loop

- Non-binding Targets (like the GBF) raise the level of global ambition.
- This pressure leads countries to develop Legally Binding national laws (NBSAPs) to meet those targets.
- The successes of those laws then inform the next generation of global treaties.

3.6 Assessment

This assessment moves from basic terminology to the practical application of how these frameworks function in the real world.

Part A: Terminology Match

Match the following terms with their correct functional description.

Term	Description
1. Protocol	A. The administrative office that manages the daily operations of an MEA.
2. Ratification	B. A supplementary agreement that adds specific, actionable detail to an existing treaty.
3. Secretariat	C. A country that has formally signed and accepted a treaty, becoming legally bound by it.
4. COP	D. The formal process by which a national government accepts a treaty as domestic law.
5. Party	E. The governing body meeting where member countries vote on new rules or targets.

Part B: Multiple choice

Select the best answer for each question.

6. Which of the following best describes a Framework Convention?
 - A. A detailed list of specific fines for environmental damage.
 - B. A blueprint that sets a broad vision and structure for later, more specific agreements.
 - C. A non-binding suggestion made by NGOs to the United Nations.
 - D. A national law passed by a single country's parliament.
7. Why might a country prefer Soft Law (Non-binding targets) over Hard Law (Treaties)?
 - A. Soft law requires an immediate change to national criminal codes.
 - B. Soft law is never monitored by the international community.
 - C. It allows for quick global consensus because the sovereignty risk is lower.
 - D. Soft law is only used for climate change, not biodiversity.
8. If a country is found to be in non-compliance with CITES (a legally binding treaty), which tooth is most likely to be used?
 - A. Arrest of the country's Head of State by the International Environment Police.
 - B. A recommendation to other countries to suspend trade in wildlife products with them.
 - C. Immediate expulsion from the United Nations.
 - D. There are no consequences because MEAs are only political promises.

Part C: Short Answer & Application

Apply your knowledge of the Ambition Loop and the Legal Hierarchy to the following scenarios.

9. The 30x30 Challenge: The Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) includes a target to protect 30% of the planet's land and sea by 2030. Is this specific target 'Hard Law' or 'Soft Law'? Explain one reason why this target still matters even if it doesn't carry a legal penalty for failure.

10. The House Analogy:

Using the House analogy provided in the content, explain where NBSAPs (National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plans) fit. If the Treaty is the foundation, what role does the NBSAP play in a specific country?

11. The Expert's Role: You are a scientist working for a Subsidiary Body of the CBD. The COP is meeting in six months to decide on new rules for marine plastic. What is your primary responsibility in this process?

3.7 *Answer Key*

- Answer 1: B
- Answer 2: D
- Answer 3: A
- Answer 4: E
- Answer 5: C
- Answer 6: B
- Answer 7: C
- Answer 8: B
- Answer 9: Soft Law. It matters because it sets the agenda for international aid/philanthropy and gives civil society a yardstick to hold governments accountable.
- Answer 10: NBSAPs represent the interior finishing or the occupancy of the house—they are the specific way a country lives within the legal structure (foundation/blueprint) provided by the international community.
- Answer 11: Your role is to provide the scientific data and technical expertise the COP needs to make an informed vote.

4 SECTION 2 – INTERNATIONAL FRAMEWORKS

4.1 Description

This section provides a comprehensive deep dive into the specific international treaties and programs that form the backbone of global biodiversity governance. Moving from the Constitution for the Oceans (UNCLOS) to the specialized protections for migratory species (CMS) and wetlands (Ramsar), learners will explore how these frameworks interact to protect nature across different scales and jurisdictions. Special emphasis is placed on the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) as the overarching global mandate and the newly operational BBNJ Agreement, which brings the rule of law to the final frontier: the high seas.

4.2 Learning objectives

By the end of this section, learners will be able to:

- Evaluate the role of UNCLOS as the legal ‘umbrella’ for all ocean activities and identify how the BBNJ Agreement (High Seas Treaty) fills existing governance gaps as of 2026.
- Contrast the focus areas of the CBD, specifically comparing the historical Aichi Targets with the current Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) and its 2030 targets.
- Explain the ecological necessity of the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) in managing transboundary animal pathways (flyways, swimways, and migratory corridors).
- Distinguish between UNESCO’s dual track protections: the site-specific cultural/natural value of World Heritage versus the sustainable development focus of the Man and the Biosphere (MAB) program.
- Identify the ‘Wise Use’ principle of the Ramsar Convention and explain its unique status as the only treaty dedicated to a specific ecosystem type.

4.3 Content

4.3.1 Key frameworks at a glance

Framework	Primary Focus	Distinction
UNCLOS	All Ocean Activities	The ‘Constitution for the Oceans’; defines national vs. international zones.
BBNJ (High Seas Treaty)	Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction	New (2026): Allows for the creation of Marine Protected Areas in the High Seas.
CBD	All Global Biodiversity	The main framework for the 30x30 goal (protecting 30% of Earth by 2030).
CMS	Migratory Species	Focuses on animals that cross international borders.
Ramsar	Wetlands	Focuses on ‘Wetlands of International Importance’ and sustainable water use.
UNESCO MAB	People & Nature	Uses ‘Biosphere Reserves’ to test how humans can live sustainably with nature.
UNESCO WHC	Exceptional Sites	Protects sites of ‘Outstanding Universal Value’ for future generations.

4.3.2 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)

Often called the ‘Constitution for the Oceans’, the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) is the comprehensive legal framework that governs all activities in the sea. It balances the rights of countries to use the ocean with their duty to protect it.

1. The Jurisdictional Map: Maritime Zones

UNCLOS divides the ocean into specific zones. As a vessel moves further from the coast, the Coastal State (the country) loses some control, and the High Seas (the global commons) begin.

- **Internal Waters:** All water on the landward side of the coast. The state has full sovereignty here (think of it like land).
- **Territorial Sea (12 Nautical Miles):** The state has sovereignty, but foreign ships have the right of ‘Innocent Passage’ (passing through quickly without threatening peace or security).
- **Exclusive Economic Zone / EEZ (200 Nautical Miles):** The most critical zone for conservationists. The state has exclusive rights to the resources (fishing, oil, minerals) and the responsibility to protect the environment.
- **The High Seas / The Area:** Waters beyond 200 miles. No single nation owns these waters. They are governed by the principle of the ‘Common Heritage of Humankind’.

Zones

Zone	Distance	Coastal State Authority
Territorial Sea	0–12 nm	Full sovereignty (with innocent passage).
EEZ	12–200 nm	Sovereign rights over resources and environment.
High Seas	200+ nm	No state sovereignty; shared Common Heritage.

2. Part XII: Protection and Preservation of the Marine Environment

While UNCLOS is often discussed in terms of rights (fishing, mining), Part XII is its environmental heart. It establishes that:

- **General Obligation:** All states have a positive legal duty to protect and preserve the marine environment.
- **Pollution Control:** Countries must take all necessary measures to prevent, reduce, and control pollution from any source (land-based, ships, or dumping).
- **Habitat Protection:** Measures must include those necessary to protect rare or fragile ecosystems and the habitats of depleted or endangered species.
- **Scientific Research:** UNCLOS grants states the right to conduct marine scientific research but requires that this research be done for peaceful purposes and with respect for the environment.

3. The Three Implementing Agreements

UNCLOS is a Framework Convention, meaning it set the broad rules in 1982 but allows for Implementing Agreements to handle modern problems. Think of these as the Software Updates to the original constitution:

- **Part XI Agreement (1994):** Deals with deep-seabed mining.
- **UN Fish Stocks Agreement (1995):** Deals with migratory fish that move between different countries' waters.
- **BBNJ Agreement (2026):** The newest update, specifically for biodiversity in the High Seas.

4. Key Dispute Resolution Bodies

Because ocean boundaries are often contested, UNCLOS created three specialized institutions to settle arguments:

- ITLOS (International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea): A court specifically for ocean-related legal battles.
- ISA (International Seabed Authority): Manages mining on the deep-sea floor.
- CLCS (Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf): Reviews data when countries want to claim a larger underwater territory.

4.3.3 Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ) - High Seas Treaty

Building on the UNCLOS foundation, the BBNJ Agreement is the most significant addition to international ocean law in decades. It was specifically designed to address the ‘regulatory vacuum’ in the High Seas. The BBNJ Agreement is a 2026 High Seas Milestone which officially entered into force on January 17, 2026. For the first time in history, the international community has a legally binding mechanism to:

- Establish High Seas MPAs: Protecting biodiversity in the 60% of the ocean that lies outside any country's control.
- Conduct Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs): Requiring countries to evaluate the damage of activities like deep-sea mining.
- Share Marine Genetic Resources: Ensuring that discoveries (like new medicines from deep-sea sponges) benefit all of humanity, not just the wealthiest nations.

To simplify its complex legal structure, the BBNJ is organized into four main pillars which can be thought of as the ‘tools’ the world now has to manage the High Seas:

1. Area-Based Management Tools (ABMTs), including Marine Protected Areas (MPAs):

- The Power: For the first time, a legal mechanism exists to establish MPAs in international waters.
- The Goal: This is the primary vehicle for achieving the 30x30 target (protecting 30% of the ocean by 2030).

2. Marine Genetic Resources (MGRs):

- The Benefit: Focuses on the digital sequence information of deep-sea life (e.g., sponges or bacteria with medicinal properties).
- Equity: It ensures that the financial and scientific benefits of these discoveries are shared equitably with developing nations, not just the wealthy states with the technology to reach the deep sea.

3. Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs):

- The Requirement: Countries must now assess and report the potential environmental damage of activities they sponsor in the High Seas (e.g., new cable laying or experimental ocean fertilization).

4. Capacity Building and Transfer of Marine Technology:

- The Support: Ensures that all nations, including Small Island Developing States (SIDS), have the scientific data and technology needed to participate in ocean governance.

Why It Matters: Closing the High Seas Loophole

Before January 2026, the High Seas were a free-for-all for many activities. While UNCLOS provided the general duty to protect the environment, it lacked the specific how-to rules.

Key Changes under BBNJ:

- From Fragmentation to Coordination: Instead of different bodies (fishing, mining, shipping) ignoring each other, the BBNJ creates a Conference of the Parties (COP) to oversee high-seas biodiversity as a whole.
- Science-Led Decision Making: A new Scientific and Technical Body has been established to review MPA proposals based on the best available data, rather than just political interest.

The BBNJ Institutional Framework

Body	Role
BBNJ COP	The decision-making body that votes on new MPAs.
Secretariat	The administrative office (currently supported by the UN Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea).
Scientific & Technical Body	The expert committee that reviews environmental impact assessments and MPA science.
Clearing-House Mechanism	An open-access platform for sharing data, technology, and information.

4.3.4 Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)

Understanding the CBD requires looking at its evolution from the early 2000s to the present day. The CBD is not static, it evolved from the PoWPA (Program of Work on Protected Areas) to the Aichi Targets, and now to the Kunming-Montreal GBF. The GBF is the ‘Peace Treaty with Nature’ that guides all current global conservation funding.

1. The Strategic Evolution

The CBD does not just set rules; it sets decadal goals. To understand where we are in 2026, learners must see the path that led here:

- PoWPA (2004): The Programme of Work on Protected Areas. This was the first major push to create a global network of land and sea parks.
- Aichi Targets (2011–2020): A set of 20 ambitious goals. While most were not fully met, they created the momentum of 30—the idea that we need significant percentages of the planet under protection.
- Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) (2022–Present): Often called the Paris Agreement for Nature, this is the current active roadmap. It replaced the Aichi Targets with 23 Action Targets for 2030.

2. Key Pillars of the GBF (2030 Targets)

The GBF is built on the 30x30 ambition but includes several other critical targets that affect conservation frameworks:

- Target 3 (The 30x30 Target): Ensure that at least 30% of terrestrial, inland water, and coastal and marine areas are effectively conserved and managed by 2030.
- Target 2 (Restoration): Ensure that at least 30% of areas of degraded terrestrial, inland water, and coastal and marine ecosystems are under effective restoration.
- Target 19 (Resource Mobilization): A commitment to mobilize \$200 billion per year for biodiversity, including \$30 billion in international finance from developed to developing countries by 2030.

3. Recent 2026 Milestone: The Cali Fund and COP17

As of early 2026, the CBD has moved into a high-stakes implementation phase:

- The Cali Fund (Launched 2025/26): Following COP16 in Cali, Colombia, a landmark mechanism was operationalized to share benefits from Digital Sequence Information (DSI).

This means companies using genetic data from nature (like for new medicines) now have a formal path to pay into a fund that supports Indigenous peoples and local communities.

- Yerevan 2026 (COP17): Scheduled for October 2026 in Armenia, this will be the first Global Stocktake where countries must prove they are actually on track to meet the 2030 targets.

4. CBD vs. BBNJ: How They Connect

The CBD and the BBNJ (High Seas Treaty) are now legally ‘interlocked’.

- The CBD provides the Targets (e.g., ‘We need to protect 30% of the ocean’).
- The BBNJ provides the Legal Tool to actually do that in international waters.
- EBSAs (Ecologically or Biologically Significant Marine Areas): The CBD has already identified over 300 EBSAs worldwide based on scientific criteria. The BBNJ will use these existing CBD maps to decide where the new High Seas MPAs should be placed.

The CBD Hierarchy

Instrument	Role	Status
The Convention	The legally binding Constitution.	Active since 1993.
The GBF	The 10-year Strategic Plan.	Active 2022–2030.
NBSAPs	The National Translation of the plan.	2026 Deadline: Most countries are updating these right now.
Protocols	Specific sub-treaties (Nagoya/Cartagena).	Legally binding for those who sign.

4.3.5 Convention on Migratory Species (CMS)

Animals don't have passports. The CMS (Bonn Convention) is the only global agreement for species that cross borders. It uses Range State Agreements where all countries along a bird's flight path or a whale's swimway agree to common protection standards.

1. The Political Definition of Migration

In the CMS, migration is defined not just biologically, but politically. To be protected under CMS, a species must cyclically and predictably cross one or more national jurisdictional boundaries.

- Unique Inclusion: Even species that don't migrate in the traditional sense, like mountain gorillas, are included because their small home ranges happen to straddle national borders.
- The Goal: To ensure that a species protected in Country A isn't hunted or losing habitat as soon as it crosses into Country B.

2. Levels of Protection

The CMS functions through two lists that dictate how countries must behave:

- Appendix I (Endangered: at risk of extinction) - Strict Protection: Parties must prohibit the taking (hunting/killing) of these animals and conserve their habitats.
- Appendix II (Unfavourable Status: needs help) - International Cooperation: Encourages countries to sign Agreements or MoUs to manage the species together.

3. Key Mechanism: Range State Agreements

The CMS is famous for its flexible legal tools. If a full treaty is too difficult to sign, countries can sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU).

- Examples: The MoU on the Conservation of Migratory Sharks or the AEWA (Agreement on the Conservation of African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbirds).
- Concerted Actions: These are priority conservation projects for specific species (like the Atlantic Humpback Dolphin) that require immediate, coordinated effort across several countries.

4.3.6 Ramsar Convention on Wetlands

The Ramsar Convention on Wetlands is unique: it is the only global environmental treaty dedicated to a specific ecosystem. In 2026, it has taken center stage as the primary vehicle for achieving water-related goals under the Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF).

1. The Wise Use Concept

The heart of Ramsar is the philosophy of Wise Use. Unlike some frameworks that focus on strict no-touch preservation, Ramsar recognizes that humans depend on wetlands for water, food, and livelihoods.

- Definition: The maintenance of the ecological character of wetlands through the implementation of ecosystem approaches, within the context of sustainable development.
- The Global Scope: It covers everything from rivers and lakes to coral reefs, mangroves, and even human-made sites like rice paddies and salt pans.

2. The Three Pillars of Implementation

Parties to the convention commit to three specific actions:

- Wise Use: Working toward the sustainable use of all wetlands in their territory.
- The Ramsar List: Designating Wetlands of International Importance based on specific ecological criteria (e.g., supporting 20,000 or more waterbirds).
- International Cooperation: Sharing data and management strategies for transboundary wetlands (like a river that flows through three countries).

Comparison: Ramsar vs. Other Water Frameworks

Feature	Ramsar Convention	UNCLOS / BBNJ
Primary Focus	Wetlands (Inland and Coastal).	Marine environments (Saltwater).
Key Metric	Ecological Character.	Maritime Jurisdiction.
Human Role	Emphasizes Wise Use (Sustainable dev).	Emphasizes Sovereign Rights and Freedom.
2030 Goal	Target 2 & 3 of the GBF (Inland water).	Target 3 of the GBF (Marine/High Seas).

4. Discussion Concept: Blue Carbon

In 2026, Ramsar is increasingly seen as a climate treaty. Wetlands like mangroves and peatlands store significantly more carbon than tropical forests. Protecting a Ramsar Site is now considered a vital part of a country's Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) under the Paris Agreement.

4.3.7 UNESCO Man and Biosphere (MAB)

Man and the Biosphere (MAB) is about Sustainable Integration. A Biosphere Reserve has a protected Core, a Buffer zone for research/education, and a Transition area where people live and work. UNESCO's Man and the Biosphere (MAB) Programme represents a shift from fortress conservation to a model where humans are considered an integral part of the ecosystem. It is an intergovernmental scientific program that uses Biosphere Reserves as living laboratories to test sustainable development.

1. The Three Functions of a Biosphere Reserve

A site cannot be designated as a Biosphere Reserve unless it fulfills three equal and complementary roles:

- Conservation: Protecting genetic resources, species, ecosystems, and landscapes.

- Sustainable Development: Fostering economic and human development that is socio-culturally and ecologically sustainable.
- Logistic Support: Providing a physical space for research, monitoring, education, and information exchange.

2. The Zonation Model

The most distinctive feature of the MAB program is its spatial planning. It uses a target or concentric design to balance protection with human activity:

- Core Area: A strictly protected zone (often a National Park) where the primary focus is conserving biological diversity and monitoring minimally disturbed ecosystems.
- Buffer Zone: Surrounds or adjoins the core. Only activities compatible with conservation (like environmental education, recreation, and ecologically sound research) can take place here.
- Transition Area (Area of Cooperation): The large outer area where local communities, management agencies, and businesses work together to manage and sustainably develop the region's resources.

3. 2026 Milestone: The Hangzhou Strategic Action Plan

As of January 2026, the MAB program has entered a new era. Following the 5th World Congress of Biosphere Reserves in late 2025, the Hangzhou Strategic Action Plan (2026–2035) was adopted.

Key 2026 Priorities:

- The World Network of Biosphere Reserves (WNBR): Now includes 785 sites in 142 countries, covering approximately 5% of the Earth's land surface.
- Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) Alignment: The new plan explicitly positions Biosphere Reserves as primary sites for reaching the 30x30 target, focusing on Target 3 (protected areas) and Target 10 (sustainable management of agriculture and forestry).
- Total Territory Designation: In a historic 2026 move, São Tomé and Príncipe became the first nation to have its entire territory designated as a Biosphere Reserve, signaling a shift toward nation-scale sustainable planning.

4. Discussion Concept: Living Laboratories

In 2026, MAB sites are being used as the primary testing grounds for Climate Change Adaptation. Because they include human settlements (Transition Areas), they allow scientists to study how communities can adapt to rising sea levels or shifting rainfall patterns while still protecting the Core biodiversity.

4.3.8 UNESCO WHC

While the MAB Programme focuses on the connection between people and nature, the UNESCO World Heritage Convention (WHC) focuses on protecting sites that are so exceptional they belong to all of humanity. World Heritage is about 'Preservation' (don't touch the monument/forest).

1. The Core Concept: Outstanding Universal Value (OUV)

For a site to be inscribed on the World Heritage List, it must have OUV. This means the site is so important that its loss would be a loss to all of humanity.

- Integrity: The site must be whole and intact (especially for natural sites).
- Authenticity: The site must be genuine in terms of materials, spirit, and setting (especially for cultural sites).
- Protection and Management: The country must prove it has the legal and financial tools to keep the site safe forever.

2. The 2026 Update: A New Way of Managing

In February 2026, UNESCO and its advisory bodies released the new Managing World Heritage manual. This is a significant shift in conservation policy:

- **Breaking the Silos:** Historically, Natural sites and Cultural sites were managed separately. The 2026 manual promotes an integrated approach, recognizing that many natural landscapes are shaped by human culture (and vice versa).
- **People-Centered Conservation:** The 2026 framework mandates the active participation of Indigenous Peoples and local communities in site management, moving away from top-down government control.
- **Climate Resilience:** All World Heritage sites are now required to integrate climate change adaptation into their management plans.

3. The Five Cs Strategic Objectives

The World Heritage Committee operates under five strategic goals to ensure the convention stays relevant:

- **Credibility:** Ensuring the List represents the world's most truly exceptional places.
- **Conservation:** Ensuring the effective protection of the sites.
- **Capacity-building:** Helping countries (especially in the Global South) manage their sites.
- **Communication:** Increasing public awareness and support.
- **Communities:** Enhancing the role of local people in implementation.

UNESCO MAB vs. World Heritage

Feature	MAB (Biosphere Reserves)	World Heritage Convention
Primary Goal	Reconciling people and nature.	Preserving Outstanding Universal Value.
Human Role	Humans are central to the model.	Humans are often external (visitors/custodians).
Zonation	Mandatory: Core, Buffer, Transition.	Not mandatory, though often used.
Legal Basis	Soft Law (Statutory Framework).	Hard Law (1972 Convention).
Focus	Sustainability & Science.	Heritage & History.

4.4 Further reading

BBNJ & UNCLOS

- UNTC: BBNJ Agreement Status & Full Text: Access the certified true copy of the High Seas Treaty. Crucial for reviewing Article 68, which triggered its January 17, 2026 entry into force.
- EU Directorate-General for Maritime Affairs: The High Seas Treaty Milestone: A concise 2026 news summary explaining how this framework fills the gaps in UNCLOS, specifically regarding high-seas MPAs.

Strategic Planning for the Next Decade (2026–2035)

- UNESCO: Hangzhou MAB Strategic Action Plan (2026–2035): The definitive roadmap for Biosphere Reserves. Focuses on living laboratories and aligning the 700+ global sites with the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF).
- UNESCO WHC: Managing World Heritage (2026 Resource Manual): The updated foundational manual released in February 2026. It introduces the Heritage Place Approach and integrates the previously separate natural and cultural management manuals.

Conference & COP Portals (Active 2026)

- CMS COP15 Information Hub (Campo Grande, Brazil): Follow the updates from the March 2026 meeting. Key focus: The Samarkand Strategic Plan and the impact of linear infrastructure (fences/roads) on migration.
- CBD COP17: Taking Action for Nature (Yerevan, Armenia): The landing page for the October 2026 conference. This is the first global review of progress toward the 30x30 target.
- Ramsar COP15 Proceedings (Victoria Falls): Review the July 2025 outcomes, specifically the Freshwater Challenge and the use of Blue Carbon in national climate pledges.

Technical Guidance & Global Analysis

- IUCN: 2026 BBNJ Implementation Statement: A high-level analysis from the IUCN Director General on how the new BBNJ Agreement shifts the global ambition from target to achievable reality.
- Global Wetland Outlook 2025/2026: A report detailing why wetlands remain the world's most threatened ecosystem and the role of Global Swimways for migratory fish.

4.5 Assessment

This assessment is designed to test the learner's ability to apply the specific frameworks covered in Section 2 to real-world conservation challenges.

Part A: Framework Identification

Identify which international framework (BBNJ, CBD, CMS, Ramsar, UNESCO MAB, UNESCO WHC, or UNCLOS) is most relevant to the following scenarios.

1. **The Deep Sea Discovery:** A pharmaceutical company discovers a unique microbe on the deep ocean floor (the Area) that can be used to treat cancer. Under which framework must they now share the benefits of this Marine Genetic Resource? _____
2. **The Transboundary Flyway:** A species of Arctic Tern migrates through 15 different countries. A new treaty is being negotiated among these Range States to protect their nesting and feeding sites. _____
3. **The 30x30 Target:** A country is updating its national report to show it has protected 30% of its land and sea to meet the global goals set by the Kunming-Montreal agreement. _____
4. **The Wetland Milestone:** A coastal mangrove forest is recognized for its Ecological Character and Wise Use in supporting local fisheries and carbon storage. _____
5. **The High Seas MPA:** An international committee meets in early 2026 to vote on the first-ever legally binding Marine Protected Area located 300 miles away from any coast. _____

Part B: Critical Thinking & Comparison

Select the correct answer and provide a brief justification.

6. How does the BBNJ Agreement (Entry into Force: Jan 2026) change the status quo established by UNCLOS?

- A) It replaces UNCLOS as the Constitution for the Oceans.
- B) It provides the specific implementing machinery to create MPAs and conduct EIAs in the High Seas.
- C) It gives coastal states the right to claim up to 500 miles of the ocean.
- D) It bans all fishing in the High Seas globally.

Justification: _____

7. What is the primary difference between a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve (MAB) and a UNESCO World Heritage Site (WHC)?

- A) Only World Heritage sites allow people to live within their borders.
- B) MAB is a legally binding treaty (Hard Law), while WHC is a voluntary program (Soft Law).
- C) World Heritage focuses on Outstanding Universal Value, while MAB focuses on the sustainable integration of people and nature using a zonation model.
- D) There is no difference; they are the same designation.

Justification: _____

Part C: Case study application

Read the scenario below and answer the following questions.

Scenario: The Caribbean Corridor A rare species of sea turtle nests on the beaches of Barbados (national jurisdiction), swims through the Caribbean Sea (Regional Seas), and migrates into the High Seas of the Atlantic to feed. In 2026, a new deep-sea mining project is proposed in the international waters where these turtles feed.

8. **Jurisdictional Gap:** Before **January 17, 2026**, there was no legally binding framework to require an **Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA)** for the impact of this mining on biodiversity in the High Seas. Which new agreement now mandates this?

9. **Connectivity:** Using your knowledge of the **CMS (Convention on Migratory Species)**, explain what a Range State Agreement would look like for this turtle species. Who needs to be at the table?
10. **Site Protection:** If the nesting beach in Barbados is also a critical wetland, which 1971 convention would provide the Wise Use guidelines to ensure tourism doesn't destroy the nests?

4.6 Answer Key

- Answer 1: BBNJ (Marine Genetic Resources)
- Answer 2: CMS (Bonn Convention)
- Answer 3: CBD (GBF Target 3)
- Answer 4: Ramsar
- Answer 5: BBNJ (Area-Based Management Tools)
- Answer 6: **B.** Justification: UNCLOS provided the general duty to protect the ocean, but BBNJ provides the specific legal tools to implement that duty in international waters.
- Answer 7: **C.** Justification: WHC is about preserving a site's specific Universal Value, whereas MAB is a living laboratory where human activity is built into the transition and buffer zones.
- Answer 8: The BBNJ Agreement (High Seas Treaty).
- Answer 9: A Range State Agreement would involve all countries where the turtle nests, migrates through, or feeds. It ensures that protection in Barbados isn't undermined by activities in the High Seas or other Caribbean nations.
- Answer 10: The Ramsar Convention.

5 SECTION 3 – REGIONAL FRAMEWORKS

5.1 Description

This section explores the Cartagena Convention, the only legally binding regional environmental treaty for the Wider Caribbean. It focuses on the Three Pillars of the convention: Oil Spills, Land-Based Sources of Pollution (LBS), and Specially Protected Areas and Wildlife (SPAW). Learners will analyze how these regional agreements translate global ambitions (like the CBD) into specific actions tailored to the Caribbean’s unique ecosystems—such as coral reefs, mangroves, and seagrass beds—and the socioeconomic realities of tourism and fisheries.

5.2 Learning objectives

By the end of this section, learners will be able to:

- Explain the unique legal status of the Cartagena Convention as the only regional environmental treaty for the Wider Caribbean.
- Contrast the three technical Protocols (Oil Spills, SPAW, and LBS) and their specific roles in marine governance.
- Analyze the SPAW Protocol’s Annexes and the legal obligations they place on countries for the protection of endangered flora and fauna.
- Identify the role of Regional Activity Centres (RACs), specifically the SPAW-RAC in Guadeloupe, in facilitating regional cooperation.
- Describe how regional frameworks support global targets, such as the alignment between SPAW-listed sites and the 30x30 target of the GBF.

5.3 Content

5.3.1 The Three Protocols: The ‘How-To’ of the Caribbean

While the Convention provides the broad rules, its three Protocols are the technical instruction manuals for the region.

Protocol	Focus Area	Key Action (2026 Context)
Oil Spills (1983)	Emergency Preparedness	Coordinating regional response to ship-based oil and chemical spills.
SPAW (1990/2000)	Biodiversity & Species	Managing the network of 37+ SPAW-listed sites and endangered species like the West Indian Manatee.
LBS (1999/2010)	Pollution from Land	Tackling untreated wastewater and nutrient runoff—the #1 threat to Caribbean coral reefs.

The Oil Spills Protocol

1. National Contingency Plans (NCPs)

Under the Protocol, every country is required to maintain an NCP. Think of this as the emergency playbook. It must include:

- Risk Assessment: Where are the most sensitive areas (mangroves, coral reefs, tourist beaches)?
- Resource Inventory: What booms, skimmers, and dispersants are available?
- Command Structure: Who is in charge when a spill occurs?

2. Regional Cooperation & Mutual Assistance (The OPRC Plan)

Because many Caribbean nations are small, they cannot afford the massive equipment needed for a major Tier 3 spill. The Protocol allows:

- The Caribbean OPRC Plan: A regional agreement where countries can request help from neighbors and international partners (like the US Coast Guard or IMO).
- CARIBPOLREP: The standardized reporting system used to notify neighbouring islands immediately when a spill is detected.

3. 2026 Focus: New Risks and Deep-Sea Assets

As of February 2026, the Oil Spills Protocol has shifted its strategy to address the Changing Risk Profile of the Caribbean:

- Offshore Energy Expansion: With new oil and gas developments in Guyana, Suriname, and Trinidad, the 2026-2027 Workplan emphasizes updating regional plans to include deep-water blowout scenarios.
- HNS Integration: Regional planning now explicitly includes Hazardous and Noxious Substances (chemicals other than oil) following the increase in container shipping.
- RETOS™ Tool: RAC-REMPEITC is currently deploying the updated RETOS (Readiness Evaluation Tool for Oil Spills) to all member nations to help them audit and improve their national response capabilities by the end of 2026.

The Hub: RAC-REMPEITC-Caribe

Located in Curaçao, this Regional Activity Centre is the engine room of the Protocol. It provides:

- Training: Courses on Shoreline Cleanup Assessment Technique (SCAT) and Incident Command.
- GIS Database: A regional map showing where oil tankers are moving and where sensitive ecosystems are located.
- Direct Support: Assisting countries in drafting their maritime legislation to comply with international standards.

The SPAW Protocol

The SPAW Protocol is arguably the most critical tool for conservationists in this region. It uses a unique Annex system to categorize protection levels:

- Annex I & II (Strict Protection): Total prohibition on the taking, killing, or commercial trade of endangered species (e.g., all Caribbean Sea Turtles, Queen Conch in some jurisdictions, and the Nassau Grouper).
- Annex III (Regulated Use): Species that can be used sustainably but require management plans to prevent depletion (e.g., certain timber species or fisheries).

1. 2026 Implementation Milestone

As of early 2026, the SPAW Sub-Programme has launched a Regional Online Workshop series to help countries align their NBSAPs with SPAW obligations.

- The Goal: Ensuring that when a country creates a national park, it meets the SPAW Criteria for inclusion in the regional network, which unlocks technical support and funding from the SPAW-RAC.
- Marine Mammal Protection: In late 2025/early 2026, a new proposal for a Marine Mammal Regional Activity Network (MM-RAN) was greenlit to better coordinate whale and dolphin protection across the Caribbean ‘swimways’.

2. Institutional Machinery: The RACs

The Cartagena Convention is powered by Regional Activity Centres (RACs) hosted by member countries. These are the primary points of contact for data and training:

- SPAW-RAC (Guadeloupe): The hub for biodiversity data, protected area manager training, and small grants.

- RAC-REMPEITC (Curaçao): The hub for oil spill training and maritime safety.
- IMA (Trinidad & Tobago) & CIMAB (Cuba): The hubs for monitoring land-based pollution and water quality.

3. Discussion Concept: Sargassum & Regional Cooperation

A major 2026 focus for the Cartagena Convention is the Sargassum Action Plan. Since sargassum blooms are a transboundary issue that affects tourism and fisheries across every Caribbean nation, the Convention is being used as the primary legal platform to coordinate monitoring and sustainable reuse of the seaweed.

LBS Protocol

The LBS Protocol (Protocol Concerning Pollution from Land-Based Sources and Activities) is often considered the most challenging yet critical pillar of the Cartagena Convention. In the Caribbean, approximately 80% of marine pollution originates from the land. Without this protocol, the efforts of the SPAW protocol (protecting species) would fail because the habitats themselves would be degraded by toxins and nutrients.

1. The Big Three Pollutants

The LBS Protocol prioritizes specific pollutant loads that cause the most damage to Caribbean ecosystems:

- Domestic Wastewater (Sewage): Untreated sewage introduces pathogens and high levels of Nitrogen and Phosphorus, which lead to eutrophication—algal blooms that smother coral reefs.
- Agricultural Runoff: Excessive fertilizers and pesticides from farms wash into rivers and eventually the sea.
- Sedimentation: Deforestation and poor construction practices lead to soil runoff that chokes reefs and prevents seagrasses from photosynthesizing.

2. The Technical Annexes: Setting the Standards

The LBS Protocol is unique because it provides specific effluent limits. This means it tells a country exactly how clean their water must be before it is discharged into the sea.

- Annex I: Identifies priority source categories and pollutants (e.g., sugar processing, petroleum refining, and chemical manufacturing).
- Annex II: Sets specific regional standards for Domestic Wastewater. In 2026, many Caribbean nations are using these standards to redesign their urban water treatment plants.
- Annex III (The 2026 Nutrient Focus): Focuses on the management of agricultural non-point sources of pollution.

3. The 2026 State of the Convention Report

In early 2026, the CIMAB (Cuba) and IMA (Trinidad & Tobago) Regional Activity Centres released a joint report showing that while point-source industrial pollution has decreased, nutrient loading is increasing.

Key 2026 Initiatives:

- The Caribbean Regional Nutrient Strategy: This 2026 update provides a roadmap for countries to reduce the fertilizer footprint that contributes to massive Sargassum blooms.
- Wastewater as a Resource: Shifting the narrative from waste to resource, the protocol now encourages the reuse of treated wastewater for irrigation to combat the 2026 regional droughts.

4. Institutional Support: The LBS-RACs

Two main centers provide the technical data needed to enforce this protocol:

- CIMAB (Center of Engineering and Environmental Management of Coasts and Bays) in Cuba: Focuses on the northern and western Caribbean.
- IMA (Institute of Marine Affairs) in Trinidad & Tobago: Focuses on the southern and eastern Caribbean.
- These centers conduct Water Quality Monitoring (WQM) training, helping islands transition from manual sampling to the 2026 automated real-time sensor networks.

Comparison of the protocols

Protocol	The Problem	The Result
SPAW	Biodiversity loss.	Healthy Ecosystems.
LBS	Land-based pollution.	Clean Water (Supporting SPAW).
Oil Spills	Maritime accidents.	Disaster Resilience (Protecting SPAW/LBS).

5.4 Further reading and resources

Foundational Governance & The State of the Sea

- UNEP: Cartagena Convention Home & Secretariat: The primary hub for the convention. Look specifically for the SOCAR (State of the Cartagena Convention Area) Report, which provides the scientific baseline for pollution and habitat health across the Caribbean.
- Cartagena Convention Data Platform: An interactive 2026 platform supported by UNEP/GRID-Geneva. It allows learners to visualize national reporting on oil spills, LBS, and SPAW obligations through real-time maps.

SPAW Protocol (Biodiversity)

- SPAW-RAC Workplan 2026–2027: Review the recently adopted biennium workplan. Key focus areas include the Nassau Grouper conservation strategy and the new Marine Mammal Regional Activity Network (MM-RAN).
- SPAW Listed Sites Interactive Map: A database of the 37+ protected areas that have been formally recognized as being of regional importance.

LBS Protocol (Pollution)

- GEF CReW+: Integrated Water & Wastewater Management: The flagship project for implementing the LBS Protocol. The Resources section contains technical toolkits for small islands on converting wastewater into a resource and reducing agricultural nutrient runoff.
- Caribbean Regional Nutrient Strategy and Action Plan (2021-2030): The primary policy document for addressing the Sargassum-Nutrient nexus, providing standards for Nitrogen and Phosphorus loads.

Oil Spills Protocol (Disaster Response)

- RAC-REMPEITC-Caribe: Homepage & Readiness Tools: Access the RETOS™ (Readiness Evaluation Tool for Oil Spills). This tool is used by Caribbean governments in 2026 to audit their national contingency plans.
- Wider Caribbean Oil Spill Information System (WCOSIS): A technical report on the 2026 push for satellite surveillance of oil spills, a key project for detecting illegal bilge dumping in Caribbean waters.

5.5 Assessment

This assessment focuses on the application of the Cartagena Convention and its three Protocols within the specific ecological and political context of the Wider Caribbean Region.

Part A: Protocol Categorization

Identify which Protocol of the Cartagena Convention (SPAW, LBS, or Oil Spills) applies to the following scenarios.

1. **The Coral Reef Crisis:** A hotel is found to be discharging untreated sewage directly into a nearby reef, causing a massive algal bloom. _____
2. **The Marine Mammal Corridor:** Three Caribbean nations are collaborating to create a shared protection zone for humpback whales during their winter calving season. _____
3. **The Tanker Collision:** A vessel carrying crude oil loses power and runs aground on a sandbar near a major tourist beach. _____
4. **The Species Ban:** A local fisher is caught with a catch of Queen Conch during the closed season, violating the regional management rules for Annex II species. _____
5. **The Agricultural Runoff:** High levels of phosphorus from inland banana plantations are detected at the mouth of a river, leading to coastal degradation. _____

Part B: Technical Knowledge & Application

Select the correct answer and provide a brief justification.

6. What is the role of the RETOS™ Tool being deployed by RAC-REMPEITC in 2026?

- A) To identify new species of coral for the SPAW Annexes.
- B) To provide a standardized audit for countries to evaluate their oil spill readiness.
- C) To calculate the fine for illegal wastewater discharge.
- D) To monitor the movement of sargassum via satellite.

Justification: _____

7. How does a site become a SPAW-Listed Site?

- A) Any national park is automatically added to the list.
- B) The country must demonstrate that the site meets specific regional ecological criteria and is managed effectively.
- C) It is chosen by the UN Secretary-General.
- D) It must be a site that has no human activity allowed.

Justification: _____

Part C: Case Study: The Multi-Threat Incident

Read the scenario and answer the questions using your knowledge of the Cartagena Convention.

Scenario: In April 2026, a cargo ship carrying industrial chemicals (HNS) and fuel oil catches fire 20 miles off the coast of St. Lucia. Due to the prevailing currents, the spill is moving toward a SPAW-listed Marine Protected Area in St. Vincent and the Grenadines. Simultaneously, heavy rains have caused a breach in a coastal landfill nearby, sending plastic and leachate into the same current.

8. **Regional Notification:** Which standardized reporting system should the St. Lucian authorities use to immediately alert St. Vincent and the Grenadines about the approaching spill?
9. **Expert Support:** Which Regional Activity Centre (RAC) would provide the technical modeling to predict where the oil and chemicals will land?
10. **Legal Overlap:** This incident involves both a maritime accident and land-based pollution (landfill breach). Which two Protocols must be activated to address the long-term recovery of the SPAW-listed site?

5.6 Answer Key

- Answer 1: LBS Protocol
- Answer 2: SPAW Protocol
- Answer 3: Oil Spills Protocol

- Answer 4: SPAW Protocol
- Answer 5: LBS Protocol
- Answer 6: **B.** Justification: RETOS is the specific tool used by RAC-REMPEITC to help nations identify gaps in their National Contingency Plans.
- Answer 7: **B.** Justification: Listing is a formal process where the SPAW Scientific and Technical Advisory Committee reviews the site's regional importance and management status.
- Answer 8: **CARIBPOLREP** (The Caribbean Marine Pollution Report).
- Answer 9: **RAC-REMPEITC-Caribe** (Curaçao).
- Answer 10: The **Oil Spills Protocol** (for the ship) and the **LBS Protocol** (for the landfill/leachate).

6 SECTION 4 – NATIONAL FRAMEWORKS

6.1 Description

This section examines how nations operationalize their global commitments through two primary instruments: National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs) and Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs). Learners will explore the Whole-of-Government approach, where biodiversity is no longer just an environmental issue but a core component of national finance, agriculture, and climate resilience.

6.2 Learning objectives

By the end of this section, learners will be able to:

- Analyze the structure of an NBSAP and its role as the primary tool for translating the 23 GBF targets into national law.
- Evaluate the Climate-Nature Synergy by identifying how updated NDCs (NDC 3.0) incorporate Nature-based Solutions (NbS).
- Describe the Biodiversity Finance landscape, including the role of the Cali Fund and national biodiversity credits in funding these frameworks.

6.3 Content

6.3.1 National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs)

The NBSAP is a country's Roadmap to 2030. Under the Kunming-Montreal GBF, every country is required to align its national plan with the 30x30 and restoration goals. As the primary vehicle for implementing the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) at the national level, the NBSAP has evolved significantly. In 2026, it is no longer just a document in an environment ministry; it is a cross-sectoral economic strategy.

1. The New Generation of NBSAPs

Following COP15 (2022) and the subsequent review at COP16 (late 2024), NBSAPs have shifted from Aichi-aligned to GBF-aligned. A modern NBSAP is characterized by three core pillars:

- **National Targets:** Every country must set its own specific targets that contribute to the 23 global goals. For example, if the global goal is 30% protection, a country might set a national target of 25% if they are land-constrained, while another might aim for 50%.
- **The Monitoring Framework:** This is the most technical update in 2026. Countries are now required to use Headline Indicators—standardized metrics that allow the UN to add up global progress (e.g., Indicator A.2: Extent of natural ecosystems).
- **The Finance Plan:** A modern NBSAP must include a strategy for how it will be paid for, often involving a mix of national budgets, the Global Biodiversity Framework Fund (GBFF), and private-sector nature credits.

The Integration Challenge: As of early 2026, about 70 countries have submitted revised NBSAPs. A major shift in these new plans is Mainstreaming—ensuring that the Ministry of Finance and Ministry of Agriculture are legally responsible for biodiversity targets, not just the Ministry of Environment.

Case Study: Saint Vincent and the Grenadines (2026): In early 2026, SVG validated its NBSAP 2026-2030, which specifically targets sustainable tourism and marine resource management as national economic priorities.

2. Mainstreaming: Biodiversity in All Departments

A key lesson from the Aichi Targets was that environment ministries cannot save nature alone. The 2026 NBSAP standard requires Mainstreaming (Targets 14 & 15 of the GBF):

- Ministry of Finance: Integrating biodiversity values into national accounting and eliminating harmful subsidies (e.g., government payouts that encourage overfishing or deforestation).
- Ministry of Agriculture: Transitioning to regenerative farming that protects soil health and pollinators.
- Private Sector: Large businesses are now being asked to disclose their impacts on biodiversity through frameworks like the TNFD (Taskforce on Nature-related Financial Disclosures).

6.3.2 The Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC) 3.0 Cycle (February 2026)

We are currently in the Third Generation of NDCs. These are the most ambitious climate pledges yet, and for the first time, they are almost entirely nature positive. As of early 2026, most nations have submitted their third-generation NDCs (NDC 3.0). These new plans are notable for three major trends:

1. The Integration of Blue Carbon

Following the entry into force of the BBNJ (High Seas Treaty) in January 2026, coastal nations have significantly ramped up the inclusion of seagrasses, salt marshes, and mangroves in their NDCs.

- The Logic: These ecosystems sequester up to 10x more carbon than tropical forests. By protecting them, a country can claim carbon credits while meeting CBD Target 3 (30x30).
- Ocean-Based Climate Action: 85% of coastal and island nations now include at least one Blue Carbon or ocean-based action in their NDCs.

2. Synergies with NBSAPs (The Twin Track Approach)

Historically, the Ministry of Environment handled NBSAPs (Biodiversity) and a separate Climate Office handled NDCs (Climate). In 2026, the global standard has shifted to Integrated National Planning.

- NDC 3.0 now frequently references the Kunming-Montreal GBF.
- Approximately 95% of updated NDCs now include direct references to nature and biodiversity as primary tools for climate resilience.
- Research from late 2025 shows that 74% of actions in NDCs are now directly reinforced by NBSAPs. For example, a country might use the same mangrove restoration project to claim carbon credits (NDC) and meet its 30% restoration target (NBSAP).

3. NDC funding: Conditional vs. Unconditional Targets

- Unconditional: Actions the country will take using its own national budget.
- Conditional: Ambitious extra targets that the country will only meet if they receive international support (finance or technology) from the Green Climate Fund or the Cali Fund.

Feature	NDC (Paris Agreement)	NBSAP (CBD)
Primary Goal	Temperature control (1.5°C).	Halting biodiversity loss.
Key Mechanism	Carbon Sequestration / Emissions.	Ecosystem Health / Protected Areas.
Update Cycle	Every 5 years.	Aligned with Global Frameworks (GBF).
Common Ground	Nature-based Solutions (NbS) like reforestation and wetland restoration.	

The 2026 Deadlines

Immediate timelines facing conservation professionals right now:

- February 28, 2026: The global deadline for Parties to submit their Seventh National Reports to the CBD. This is the report card that shows if countries are actually making progress on the GBF targets.

- October 19–30, 2026: CBD COP17 in Yerevan, Armenia. This will be the Midpoint Assessment for the 2030 goals.
- November 2026: UNFCCC COP31 in Antalya, Turkey, where the final round of NDC 3.0 commitments will be analyzed for their collective ambition.

To help countries meet the 2026 NBSAP deadlines, the NBSAP Accelerator Partnership (launched by Germany, Colombia, and the UN) provides:

- Matchmaking: Connecting countries that need technical expertise (e.g., satellite monitoring of forests) with those that have it.
- Facilitation: Helping governments coordinate between different ministries to ensure the NBSAP isn't just a paper exercise.

Discussion Concepts:

- Biodiversity Credits: A major debate heading into COP17 in Yerevan (2026) is the rise of Biodiversity Credits. Unlike carbon credits (which just measure CO₂), these are financial tools where the private sector pays for verified nature-positive outcomes (e.g., increasing a bird population or restoring a hectare of reef).
- The Double Dividend: In 2026, we talk about the Double Dividend of conservation frameworks. When a country protects a peatland under its NDC to prevent carbon release, it simultaneously protects a rare habitat under its NBSAP. This co-benefit approach is the most effective way for resource-strapped nations to manage their conservation obligations.

6.4 Further reading and resources

NBSAPs: From Policy to Practice

- [The NBSAP Forum 2.0](#): The global community of practice for biodiversity planning. It contains a massive library of 2026-specific guidance on target setting, indicators, and the use of spatial data.
- [NBSAP Accelerator Partnership News: From Dialogue to Delivery](#): A January 2026 report summarizing what countries learned from the 2025 regional dialogues. It covers the latest on 7th National Reports and national monitoring systems.
- [WWF: Breaking Silos—Enhancing Synergies between NDCs and NBSAPs](#): A technical brief that explains the how-to of integrated planning. It's essential for understanding how to avoid duplication of work between climate and biodiversity departments.

NDC 3.0: The Climate-Nature Nexus

- [The NDC 3.0 Navigator](#): This is the definitive 2026 tool developed by the NDC Partnership and the UNFCCC. It provides Routes to Ambitious NDCs and specifically highlights how to integrate ocean and land-based conservation into climate pledges.
- [IUCN: Guide for Including Nature in NDCs \(2nd Edition\)](#): A practical manual for technical experts. It offers 15 recommendations for 2025/2026 on how to ensure Nature-based Solutions (NbS) in NDCs have high environmental integrity.
- [UNDP: Quality Assurance Checklist for NDC 3.0](#): Released in early 2025, this checklist is used by governments to audit their new NDCs before submission. It is a great resource for learners to see what success looks like in a climate pledge.

Reporting & Compliance

- [CBD Online Reporting Tool \(ORT\)](#): While the actual submission portal is for government officials, the public-facing webinars and manuals explain how countries are currently measuring their progress toward the 2030 targets.
- [AIPP Policy Brief: Indigenous Peoples and NBSAP Implementation](#): A critical 2026 perspective on the Implementation Gap, highlighting the need for rights-based approaches and direct financing for local communities.

6.5 Assessment

This assessment is designed to test the integration of national policy with global targets, focusing on the current 2026 reporting cycle and the operationalization of biodiversity finance.

Part A: The Policy Match

Match the national instrument to its primary function and 2026 milestone.

Instrument	Primary Function	2026 Milestone
1. NBSAP	A. National pledge for 1.5°C goal.	I. Seventh National Report due Feb 28.
2. NDC 3.0	B. Strategy for the 23 GBF targets.	II. Submission of updated Nature-Positive plans.
3. Cali Fund	C. Sharing benefits from genetic data (DSI).	III. First global finance review at COP17.

Part B: Multiple choice

Select the best answer based on the 2026 conservation landscape.

4. What is the significance of the February 28, 2026 deadline for CBD Parties?
 - A) It is the final date to sign the BBNJ Agreement.
 - B) It is the deadline for submitting the Seventh National Report (7NR) via the Online Reporting Tool.
 - C) It is the date the Aichi Targets officially expire.
 - D) It is the start of the hurricane season in the Caribbean.
5. Which statement best describes NDC 3.0 in the context of conservation?
 - A) It is a purely technical document that ignores biodiversity.
 - B) It represents the third generation of climate pledges, with a heavy focus on integrating Nature-based Solutions (NbS).
 - C) it is a regional agreement only for European nations.
 - D) It is the name of the new satellite used to track sargassum.
6. The Cali Fund is unique in international finance because:
 - A) It is funded entirely by a tax on international flights.
 - B) It is the first UN-backed fund where private companies using genetic data (DSI) contribute a share of their revenue/profit.
 - C) It only provides funding to developed nations.
 - D) It is managed by a single country rather than the UN.

Part C: Applied Scenario: The 30x30 Auditor

You are a consultant hired to audit a country's progress toward its international commitments in July 2026.

The Data:

- **NBSAP Target:** Protect 30% of coastal mangroves by 2030.
- **NDC 3.0 Action:** Restore 10,000 hectares of mangroves for carbon sequestration and storm surge protection.
- **7th National Report (submitted Feb 2026):** Currently at 18% protection; 2,000 hectares restored.

Questions:

7. **Synergy:** How does the mangrove restoration project serve both the NDC and the NBSAP? (1-2 sentences)
8. **The Reporting Gap:** The 7th National Report shows only 18% protection. If the country wants to reach 30% by 2030, what specific Headline Indicator from the GBF would you recommend they track to prove progress to the UN?

9. **Finance:** If the country lacks the \$5 million needed to finish the restoration, which new 2026 financial mechanism might they apply to, especially if their mangroves contain unique genetic resources?

6.6 Answer Key

- Answer 1: B-I
- Answer 2: A-II
- Answer 3: C-III
- Answer 4: B
- Answer 5: B
- Answer 6: B
- Answer 7: It is a Nature-based Solution (NbS) that provides a Double Dividend: carbon storage for the NDC and habitat restoration/protection for the NBSAP.
- Answer 8: Indicator A.2 (Extent of natural ecosystems) or Indicator 3.1 (Coverage of Protected Areas).
- Answer 9: The Cali Fund (for DSI/Genetic benefits) or the Global Biodiversity Framework Fund (GBFF).

7 FINAL ASSESSMENT

Section 1: Concepts and Terminology

1. Which of the following best describes a Framework Convention in international environmental law?
 - A. A legally binding agreement that provides specific, exhaustive technical rules for all member states.
 - B. A non-binding political declaration that lacks any governing structure or secretariat.
 - C. A legal instrument that establishes broad principles and governance but leaves specific details for later Protocols.
 - D. A temporary agreement that expires once a specific national conservation target is met.
2. What is the primary difference between Hard Law and Soft Law in the context of conservation?
 - A. Hard Law refers to land-based treaties, while Soft Law refers to marine-based agreements.
 - B. Hard Law is legally binding with mandatory obligations; Soft Law is non-binding but carries political weight.
 - C. Soft Law is easier to enforce because it relies on voluntary participation and community trust.
 - D. Hard Law only applies to developed nations, whereas Soft Law applies to all countries.

Section 2: International Frameworks

3. The BBNJ Agreement (High Seas Treaty) entered into force on January 17, 2026. What legal vacuum does it primarily address?
 - A. The lack of sovereignty in the 12-nautical-mile territorial sea.
 - B. The absence of a framework for establishing Marine Protected Areas in international waters.
 - C. The regulation of tourism in coastal mangrove forests.
 - D. The definition of maritime boundaries between neighboring island states.
4. Target 3 of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) is known as 30x30. What is its main objective?
 - A. Planting 30 billion trees in 30 different countries by 2030.
 - B. Protecting and conserving 30% of the Earth's land and sea areas by 2030.
 - C. Reducing the extinction rate of endangered species by 30% every decade.
 - D. Increasing biodiversity finance to \$30 billion per year for all developing nations.
5. The Cali Fund was operationalized in early 2026. Who is expected to contribute to this fund?
 - A. Tourists visiting UNESCO World Heritage Sites.

- B. Commercial users of Digital Sequence Information (DSI) on genetic resources.
- C. Countries that fail to meet their 30x30 targets by the end of 2026.
- D. Non-governmental organizations working in the High Seas.

6. Which framework is specifically designed to protect species that cross national jurisdictional boundaries cyclically and predictably?

- A. Ramsar Convention
- B. CITES
- C. Convention on Migratory Species (CMS)
- D. UNESCO MAB

7. The Wise Use concept is the core philosophy of which international convention?

- A. World Heritage Convention
- B. Ramsar Convention
- C. UNCLOS
- D. The Paris Agreement

8. In a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve, what is the primary function of the Transition Area?

- A. A strictly protected zone for monitoring minimally disturbed ecosystems.
- B. An area where local communities and businesses work together to sustainably manage resources.
- C. A zone used exclusively for environmental education and low-impact research.
- D. A temporary area that is removed once a species population has recovered.

Section 3: Regional Frameworks

9. What is the only legally binding regional environmental treaty for the Wider Caribbean Region?

- A. The SPAW Protocol
- B. The Cartagena Convention
- C. The CARICOM Treaty
- D. The Abidjan Convention

10. Which Cartagena Convention protocol targets treated and untreated wastewater as a primary pollutant?

- A. Oil Spills Protocol
- B. SPAW Protocol
- C. LBS Protocol
- D. The Sargassum Protocol

11. Which center in Curaçao provides regional training for oil spill preparedness and maritime safety?

- A. SPAW-RAC
- B. RAC-REMPEITC-Caribe

- C. IMA (Institute of Marine Affairs)
- D. The Caribbean Environment Programme (CEP) HQ

12. What is the specific legal requirement for species listed under Annex I and II of the SPAW Protocol?

- A. They can be hunted for local consumption only.
- B. Parties must prohibit the taking, possession, or commercial trade of these species.
- C. They are only protected when they enter international waters.
- D. They must be moved to a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve for safety.

13. Which framework provides the Legal Passport for a humpback whale migrating from the North Atlantic to the Caribbean?

- A. LBS Protocol
- B. CMS (Bonn Convention) and the SPAW Protocol
- C. CITES and UNCLOS
- D. The Ramsar Convention

14. The RETOS™ tool is used primarily for which of the following activities?

- A. Identifying new migratory pathways for sharks.
- B. Auditing a country's readiness and capacity to respond to oil spills.
- C. Measuring the carbon sequestered by a seagrass meadow.
- D. Scanning the genetic code of plants for pharmaceutical use.

Section 4: National Frameworks

15. What does a Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) represent under the Paris Agreement?

- A. A report card on efforts to stop the illegal trade of wildlife.
- B. A national climate action plan to reduce emissions and adapt to climate impacts.
- C. A list of all protected areas a country plans to establish by 2030.
- D. The amount of money a country pays into the Cali Fund every year.

16. The Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) replaced which previous set of global targets?

- A. The Paris Agreement Targets
- B. The Aichi Biodiversity Targets
- C. The Millennium Development Goals
- D. The Sustainable Development Goals

17. A country uses mangrove restoration to store carbon (Climate) and protect bird habitats (Biodiversity). What term describes this alignment?

- A. Jurisdictional Overlap
- B. Policy Synergy through Nature-based Solutions (NbS)
- C. Financial Decoupling
- D. National Regulatory Fragmentation

18. What is the primary role of an NBSAP (National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan)?
- A. To coordinate a country's response to maritime oil spills.
 - B. To translate global biodiversity targets (GBF) into national law and policy.
 - C. To regulate the trade of agricultural products between CARICOM nations.
 - D. To provide a list of all cultural heritage sites in a country.
19. In 2026, Mainstreaming biodiversity refers to which of the following?
- A. Teaching conservation only in primary schools.
 - B. Integrating biodiversity values into the policies of ministries like Finance and Agriculture.
 - C. Focusing only on the most famous species, like whales or tigers.
 - D. Moving all national parks into international waters to avoid land-use conflicts.
20. What is the role of Headline Indicators in the Seventh National Report (7NR) in 2026?
- A. They are the names of the politicians who signed the treaty.
 - B. Standardized metrics that allow the UN to aggregate and compare global progress on GBF targets.
 - C. They are the flags flown over a country's most important national park.
 - D. A list of the 10 most endangered species in each country.
21. Under the CMS, what must a country do for a species listed in Appendix I?
- A. They must allow limited commercial hunting to fund conservation.
 - B. They must provide strict protection, prohibiting the taking or hunting of these animals.
 - C. They must only protect the species if it is inside a zoo.
 - D. They must encourage other countries to hunt them to reduce competition.
22. What is the Double Dividend in the context of 2026 conservation policy?
- A. When a country gets paid twice for the same carbon credit.
 - B. When one conservation action provides both biodiversity health and climate resilience benefits.
 - C. When a tourist pays both a national tax and a UNESCO fee.
 - D. When a country has two separate NBSAPs for land and sea.
23. In 2026, which fund is primarily responsible for helping countries bridge the gap between their climate and biodiversity finance?
- A. The International Monetary Fund (IMF)
 - B. The Global Biodiversity Framework Fund (GBFF) and the Cali Fund
 - C. The World Heritage Endowment
 - D. A tax on sargassum harvesters
24. What happens if a country misses the February 28, 2026 reporting deadline for the CBD?
- A. They are immediately expelled from the United Nations.

- B. They may lose priority access to international biodiversity funds and face peer pressure at COP17.
- C. The UN takes over their national parks until the report is filed.
- D. Nothing; reporting is purely voluntary and has no consequences.

25. Which framework would be most relevant to a project protecting Blue Carbon in a Caribbean mangrove forest?

- A. CITES and UNESCO World Heritage
- B. Paris Agreement (NDC) and Ramsar Convention
- C. UNCLOS and the Cali Fund
- D. The 1982 Law of the Sea only

7.1 Answer key

1.C, 2.B, 3.B, 4.B, 5.B, 6.C, 7.B, 8.B, 9.B, 10.C, 11.B, 12.B, 13.B, 14.B, 15.B, 16.B, 17.B, 18.B, 19.B, 20.B, 21.B, 22.B, 23.B, 24.B, 25.B

8 **USEFUL RESOURCES**

- [Conventions](#)
- [National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plans \(NBSAPS\)](#)
- [Webinar: ABS in the Global Biodiversity Framework: NBSAPs and monitoring framework](#)
- [Webinar: Hands-on training on the Online Reporting Tool for the 7th National Report](#)
- [Webinar 3: From Planning to Action: Implementing NDCs and NAPs through Nature-based Solutions](#)
- [UN InforMEA](#)