

Antarctic Protected Areas System: A Proposed Information Archive

Working Paper Submitted by the United Kingdom

Background

In accordance with Resolution 1 (1998), the Antarctic Treaty Consultative Parties have been revising management plans for Antarctic Specially Protected Areas (formerly Specially Protected Areas (SPAs) and Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs)) to conform to the requirements of Annex V to the Protocol on Environmental Protection to the Antarctic Treaty. The UK has been delegated responsibility for the revision of management plans for 13 sites in the Antarctic Peninsula region.

In the course of this review, the original values of the sites have been re-examined, and available data reviewed. In addition field visits were made to 6 sites during January-March 2001 to verify descriptions and address gaps in data, and a great deal of new information was collated on the sites.

During the review it became clear that the quality and accessibility of information plays a vital part in the effective management of special areas. If information is of poor quality – or of sufficient quality but inaccessible – the ability of visitors to follow management policies for access to and use of the sites may be severely constrained.

The review of management plans to meet the requirements of Annex V provided a timely opportunity for the UK to consider how it might make protected areas information more accessible, particularly with regard to Articles 9 and 10 of Annex V to the Environmental Protocol; dealing with information and publicity and exchange of information respectively.

In addition, protected area management plans generally encourage Parties, wherever possible, to deposit reports of visits to protected areas in a publicly accessible archive, and to maintain a record of usage, to assist both in reviewing management plans (required by Annex V at least every five years), and in organising scientific use of the areas.

Development of an Information Archive

With these obligations in mind, the UK has developed a simple computer-based archive to hold these types of information, with priorities for inclusion identified as:

1. A listing of sites, showing their location on maps;
2. Summary descriptions of the sites;
3. The Management Plans and their maps;
4. Bibliographies of literature relevant to each site;
5. Site visit data, such as records of permits and site visit reports;
6. Information on any significant changes to an area;
7. Information about scientific data held on a site; and
8. A photographic record for each site (digitally stored).

The information archive has been developed to take advantage of the power of the internet. This approach allows fast and distributed access to information using widely-available and standard

formats, and enables electronic searches. This was viewed as being the simplest and most effective means to facilitate access to the protected area information within the UK. It also carried the added advantage of allowing links to be made to other internet sites on which Antarctic protected areas information is stored. This approach also allows the information to be accessed world-wide which, given the international nature of activities in Antarctica, was viewed as potentially beneficial to other Parties, the scientific community, the tourist industry, and the wider public.

The resulting information architecture is summarised in Figure 1. At this stage, the archive mostly contains information on sites for which the UK has been responsible for revising management plans. The types of information included for these sites are shown at the lower levels of Figure 1. Links are made to on-line information available for other protected areas directly from the protected areas list, and also from the electronically linked maps showing site locations.

Proposal

The information archive aims to improve access to information on the Antarctic protected areas system. Such an archive could potentially serve the needs of the Committee and the ATCPs as the centrally held archive for all protected areas. The UK would welcome comments from other Parties on the usefulness of such a facility, and on the structure and content of the site, which could be adapted for this purpose. If seen as useful, the UK would be prepared to develop the site further by adding more detailed information and by making links to other available on-line data.

If the Committee sees merit in further development of the archive as the international repository of Antarctic protected area information, consideration should be given to its longer-term storage and maintenance. Options include adding or linking the site either to the CEP website, or to the ATCM / Secretariat website under development by Argentina.

The protected area information archive will be available on-line in time for the XXV ATCM in September 2002, at which time the UK will distribute updated information on the site content and how it can be accessed.

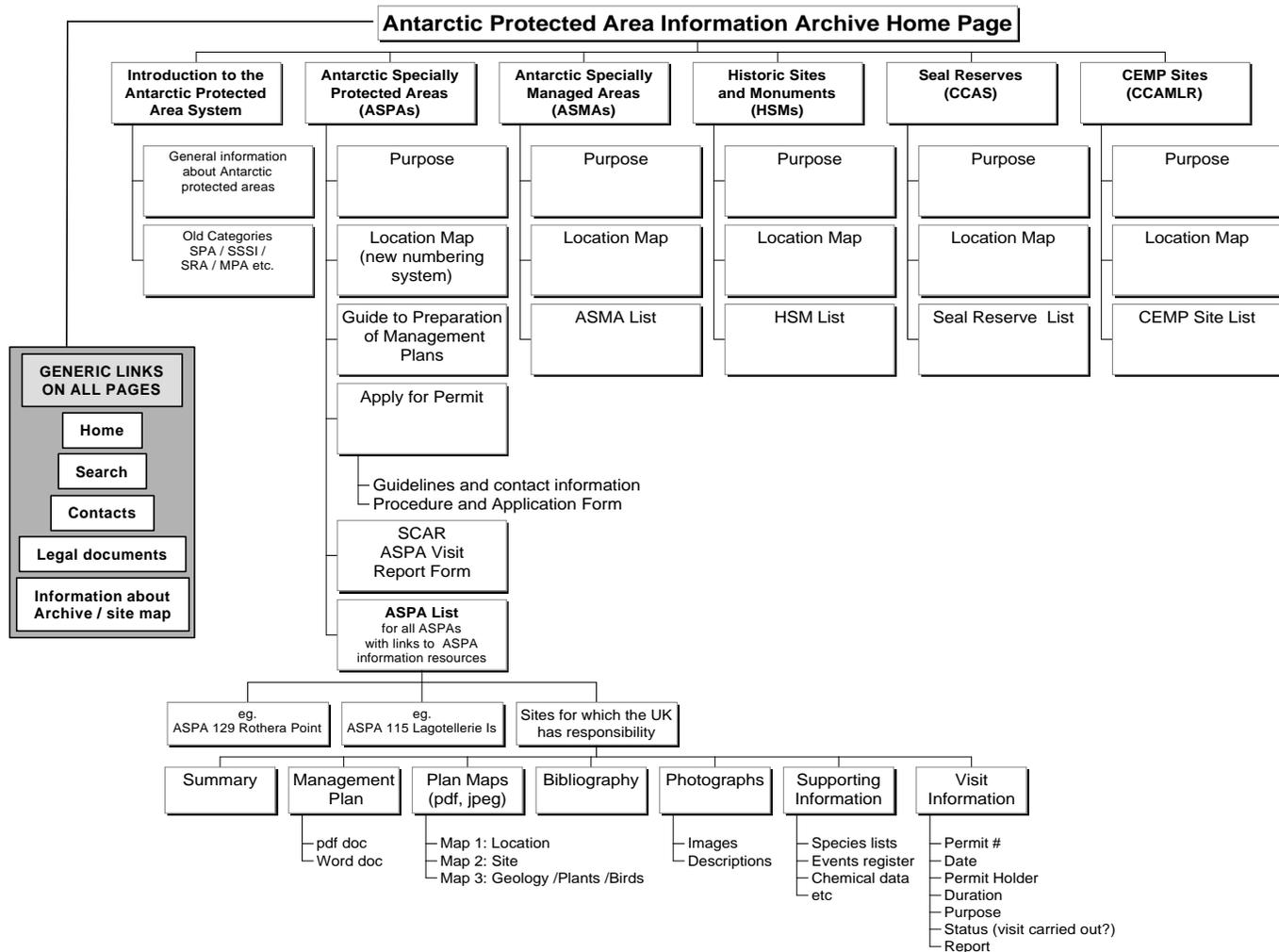


Figure 1: Antarctic Protected Area Information Archive, information architecture