

4 .Natural Parks

On the basis of the Natural Parks Law, natural areas of outstanding scenic beauty are designated as National Parks, Quasi-National Parks or Prefectural Natural Parks. In these areas, the Ministry of the Environment conserves natural environment, including biodiversity, and promotes their proper use for visitor's enjoyment and experience in nature.

Natural Parks

(1) Summary of the System

On the basis of the Natural Parks Law, areas of outstanding scenic beauty and other areas of similar beauty are designated as National Parks and Quasi-National Parks, respectively. Natural areas that represent prefecture's scenic beauty are designated as Prefectural Natural Parks. They are collectively called "Natural Parks".

In August, 2007, an area of 19,023 hectares in the Tango Peninsula was designated as Tango-Amanohashidate-Oeyama quasi-national park. The area includes the coastal part of the peninsula, the Seya Highlands in its central part, and the Ooe Peaks in the southern part. In August, the Oze region of Nikko national park, Aizu-komagatake, and the areas surrounding Tashiroyama and Taisyakusan were combined into a 37,200-hectare area. This area was also designated as Oze national park. This designation of quasi-national parks are for the first time in 17, and that of national parks are for the first time in 20 years. This increase in the number of national parks in Japan has added up to 29 national parks, 56 quasi-national parks and 309 prefectural natural parks. Natural Parks cover some 14% of the total land area. In addition, 69 Marine Park Areas are designated within National and Quasi-National Parks to preserve unique and beautiful marine landscapes (as of 31 March 2009). These parks protect nature, and provide opportunities for people to experience nature, accepting 900 million visitors annually.

(2) Designation

①National Parks: Areas of greatest natural scenic beauty that represents the model scenic beauties of Japan. National Parks are designated by the Minister of the Environment after seeking the opinions of the Central Environmental Council. The national government is responsible for their management. To date, 29 parks, 2.09 million ha (5.5% of the total land area), have been designated.

②Quasi-National Parks: Areas of great natural scenic beauty next to the National Parks. Quasi-National Parks are designated by the Minister of the Environment at the request of the

prefecture(s) concerned, after seeking the opinions of the Central Environmental Council.

Prefectures are responsible for their management. To date, 56 parks, 1.36 million ha (3.6% of the total land area), have been designated.

③Prefectural Natural Parks: Areas of great natural scenic beauty that represents prefecture's scenic beauties concerned. Prefectural Natural Parks are designated and managed by the prefectures in accordance with prefectural ordinances. To date, 309 parks, 1.96 million ha (5.2% of the total land area), have been designated.

(3) Park Plans

The Park Plan (consisted of regulatory and work plans) is formulated for each park for its appropriate protection and use.

The regulatory plan provides specific measures for scenic landscape protection under appropriate public use restrictions according to a zoning classifications determined by the characteristics of the landscape and necessity of protection from use pressure. There are Special Protection Zones, Class I, II and III Special Zones, and Ordinary Zones in terrestrial areas, and Marine Park Zones and Ordinary Zones in marine areas. Regulated Utilization Areas are designated within the Special Zones and Marine Park Zones to achieve conservation of ecosystems and sustainable use of the park under rules and controls.

In September, 2007, Nishi-odai area of Yoshino-Kumano national park became the first Regulated Utilization Area in Japan. Sustainable use of this outstanding national environment under certain rules has begun. The work plan provides for planned development of use facilities, such as trails and campsites, and nature restoration facilities for landscape conservation. The nature restoration facilities aim at restoring the degraded natural process and vegetation.

Biodiversity Conservation in Natural Parks

The Natural Parks Law was amended as follows in June, 2009 so as to strengthen the conservation of the natural environment and actively help ensure the biodiversity in natural parks.

<Revision of the Purposes> Conservation of biodiversity was added to the purposes of the law by the amendment.

<More Effective Measures to Conserve Ecosystems> Restrictions were introduced on the release of animals and plants that could have an adverse impact on the ecosystems and on the act of causing damage to trees and bamboos in the (natural) parks.

<Marine Park Zone System> After the amendment, the Marine Park Zone System newly covers on-the-sea besides undersea. The new system aims to promote the conservation of such areas as

wetlands and rock reefs, where both the undersea and on-the-water parts together form one ecosystem and create rich biodiversity. Furthermore, the revision has made it possible to apply the Regulated Utilization Area System to the Marine Park Zones in order to restrict excessive use, conserve the marine ecosystems and promote sustainable use of the areas.

<The Ecosystem Management Work> The Ecosystem Management Work" aims to promote the conservation and restoration of the ecosystem in the natural parks and carry out such measures as building (guard) fences to prevent deer's feeding damage to the ecosystem in the National Parks and other natural parks.

(4) Management Structure of National Parks

Park rangers for nature conservation are posted to every National Park, performing duties such as nature conservation, support for appropriate use of parks and nature guide service for park visitors. Since 2005, "Active Ranger" (assistant park rangers for nature conservation) has been playing an active role in a wide range of activities such as patrolling the park, doing research and promoting outdoor activities.

(5) Nature Conservation in Natural Parks

① Restrictions on Activities

In Special Protection Zones, Special Zones and Marine Park Zones within National Parks, development activities, such as the building of structures, require permission from the Minister of the Environment or the governor of the prefecture concerned. In Ordinary Zones, certain activities require prior notification to the Minister of the Environment or the governor of the prefecture concerned. The number of applications for permission to perform various activities in: Special Protection Zones and in Special Zones within National Parks totaled 4,606 in FY2007.

Natural Parks Systems in Japan

In Japan, the authority can designate Natural Park without obtaining the land within the boundaries and impose certain regulations to achieve the purpose of the park. The original landowners continue to own the land after designation. This system is effective in the creation of protected areas on lands that are already densely used, as is often the case in Japan. It is also effective in conservation of not only pristine nature but also cultural landscapes and secondary natural landscapes formed through people's livelihood activities. On the other hand, management requires extensive coordination with respect to people's property right and various businesses in the areas concerned. This demands partnerships with the local stakeholders.



② Restriction of Access to Designated Areas

In order to prevent vehicles, such as snowmobiles and allterrain vehicles, from damaging vegetation, wildlife habitats and breeding sites, vehicle entry has been restricted in 35 areas in 18 National Parks and 17 areas in 10 Quasi-National Parks. The Minister of the Environment may restrict access to designated areas to protect natural environment sensitive to trampling, such as wetlands and alpine plant communities.

③ Ecosystem Management in National Parks

Agriculture and forestry, and ecosystem nationwide have been suffering more and more serious damage caused by wildlife such as deer. Urgent countermeasures are needed in the national parks, too. So, Ministry of the Environment (MOE) and the authorities concerned are taking necessary measures to prevent deer's feeding damage to ecosystem in such areas as Shiretoko, Oze, Odaigahara, Minami Alps (the southern part of the Japan Alps). In some islets with fragile ecosystem like Ogasawara islands, Iriomote island, MOE is conducting intensive extermination of invasive alien species (Green anole, Giant toads, etc.) and also in other areas, in cooperation with some volunteer workers, is controlling invasive alien species. Moreover, the MOE designated nine species including green turtle as the animals to be protected in Special Zones, and is restricting the capture of those designated animals, conserving their natural habitat, monitoring their lives, and so on.

④ Purchase of Private Lands

In Natural Parks, the national government may purchase areas with outstanding value for nature conservation, when these lands are privately owned and strict conservation measures can not be placed. The prefecture formerly purchased such areas with a subsidy from the national government, however, the system was altered and the national government has been directly obtaining lands since FY2005.

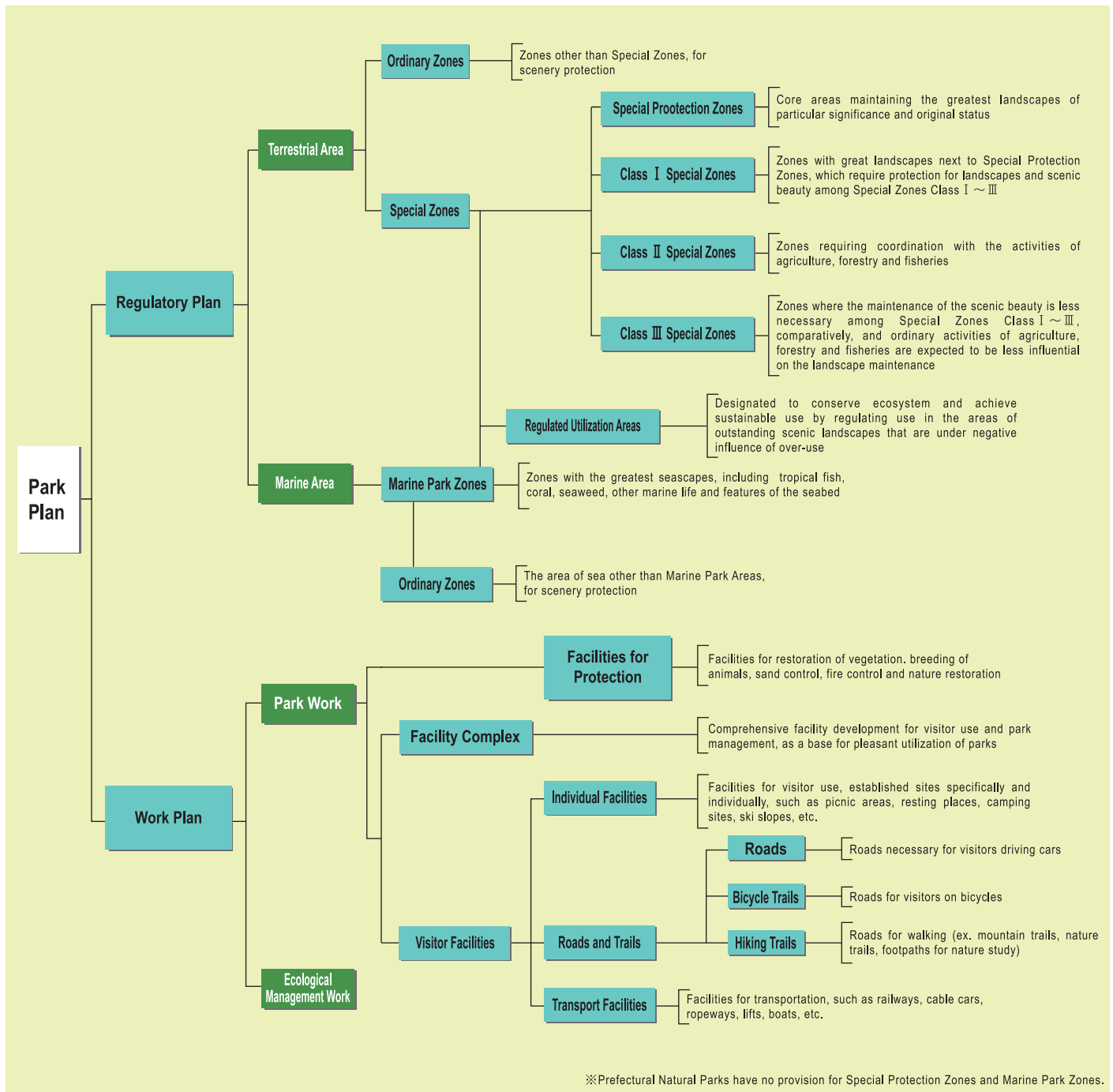
Twenty-two areas (14 in National Parks, 5 in Quasi-National Parks and 3 in National Wildlife Protection Areas), totaling 8,520ha, had been purchased at a cost of 15.19695 billion yen, by the end of March 2007.

⑤ Cooperation with Local Communities

National Parks are managed in cooperation with local communities, including local authorities and local residents. The Ministry of the Environment has been undertaking "Green Worker Program" for better management of parks. Under this program, the Ministry employs local residents knowledgeable about the local nature and social situations to perform various activities including conservation of the fauna and flora, cleaning locations of difficult access and maintenance of facilities. The Ministry implements careful management of National Parks and other protected areas with the local communities through activities such as designation of Park Management Organizations, four groups in a national park and two groups in the quasi-national park to help manage the parks and approval of Scenic Landscape Protection Agreements concluded between landowners and Park Management Organizations to protect areas such as the Satoyama Landscape (rural landscape, community-based woods).



Structure of Park Plan



※Prefectural Natural Parks have no provision for Special Protection Zones and Marine Park Zones.

The Difference between National Parks and Quasi-National Parks

National Parks and Quasi-National Parks are designed for people's enjoyment, while protecting Japan's beautiful nature. National Parks are designated over the natural areas with the most outstanding scenic sites in the country, while Quasi-National Parks are designated over the areas with most beautiful nature in each region that may not be as outstanding as National Parks. National Parks are usually larger in size than Quasi-National Parks. National Parks are managed by the staff of the Ministry of the Environment called "Park Rangers", while Quasi-

National Parks by the staff of prefectural governments. When the Natural Parks system was established, there were only National Parks. As the demands grew nationwide for creation of outdoor recreation sites near urban areas, protection of more local nature, and designation of National Parks for local tourism promotion (the title of National Park connoted a first-class tourism destination), the system was amended to enable creation of Quasi-National Parks.

A Sample of the Park Plan: A Section of Rishiri-Rebun-Sarobetsu National Park

