

UNDERSTANDING MULTI-INTERNATIONALLY DESIGNATED AREAS(MIDAS)

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Keywords: Multi internationally Designated Areas, MIDAs, UNESCO designations, Harmonized Governance, Global Geopark, Jeju

What are Internationally Designated Areas (IDAs)?

Internationally Designated Areas (IDAs) are places formally recognized under global frameworks for their significant natural features, scientific importance, and contributions to conservation, education, and sustainable development. These areas are designated based on international standards to protect globally important ecosystems, landscapes, and geological heritage, while also promoting inclusive human-nature interactions.

Four major international systems currently define IDAs:

- UNESCO Global Geoparks** are territories with geological heritage of international value that are managed to promote conservation, education, and sustainable development, with strong involvement from local communities through a bottom-up approach.
- UNESCO Natural and Mixed World Heritage** properties are inscribed on the World Heritage List for their outstanding universal value. These sites are recognized for their exceptional natural features, biodiversity, scenic beauty, or combined natural and cultural attributes that meet strict international criteria.
- UNESCO Biosphere Reserves** are designated through the Man and the Biosphere Program to achieve sustainable development for obtaining economic benefits through sustainable use of biodiversity, and utilize the benefits for conserving biodiversity.
- Ramsar Sites** are wetlands designated under the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands for their importance to global biodiversity, ecological processes, and the well-being of human communities. They are selected for conservation and wise use of water-related ecosystem.

What are MIDAs?

When two or more of these designations overlap within a single area, they form what are known as Multi-Internationally Designated Areas (MIDAS).

The significance of MIDAs lies not only in the concentration of international values within a given territory but also in their potential to embody a more holistic and interconnected vision of sustainability. MIDAs bring together diverse legal, administrative, and community-based frameworks, creating unique platforms for pursuing shared goals in conservation, education, and sustainable local development.

Their existence enhances international visibility, encourages cross-sectoral dialogue, and fosters new opportunities for innovation and knowledge exchange. Most importantly, MIDAs illustrate how global priorities and local needs can converge within a single landscape.

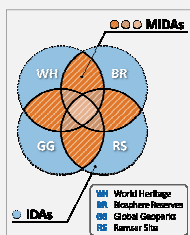


Fig 1. MIDAs diagram

MIDAS Among Korean UNESCO Global Geoparks

In the Republic of Korea, there are currently seven UNESCO Global Geoparks (UGGPs), of which four - Jeju Island, Jeonbuk West Coast, Hantangang River, and Mudeungsan - also qualify as MIDAs. The overlapping of these designations has prompted concerted efforts by local authorities to manage them effectively and leverage their combined strengths.

Hantangang River
Gangneung Eco-Parque, Yeosu-Seonju Inha River

Jeonbuk West Coast
Celvol, Korea Tidal Flats, Chonghae, Gyeongju used River Tidal Flats

Mudeungsan
Pyeonggoksan Wetland

Jeju Island
Jeju Volcanic Island and Lava Tubes, Jeju Island, Jeju Island Wetland, Jeju Island Ramsar Site

Hantangang River region has been designated as a UNESCO Global Geopark and two Biosphere Reserves for its rare volcanic landforms shaped by river erosion, outstanding tectonic features, and the rich biodiversity preserved in its largely untouched river valleys.

Jeju Island has been designated as a UNESCO Global Geopark, World Natural Heritage site, Biosphere Reserve, and 5 Ramsar Wetlands due to its distinctive volcanic landforms, dynamic cultural value, and the rich biodiversity they support.

Jeonbuk West Coast has been designated as a UNESCO Global Geopark, a World Natural Heritage site, a Biosphere Reserve, and a Ramsar Wetland in recognition of its well-preserved volcanic features, extensive tidal flats, and exceptional biodiversity supported by this unique coastal environment.

Mudeungsan has been designated as a UNESCO Global Geopark and Ramsar Wetland in recognition of its volcanic landforms, rare periglacial features, and the ecologically restored Pyeongdume Wetland, which supports a wide range of nationally endangered and climate-sensitive species.

Fig 2. Map of the MIDAs among UNESCO Global Geoparks in Korea

Jeju Island MIDAs Case

- Integrated Governance through the World Heritage Office:** To improve coordination across its UNESCO designations, Jeju established the World Heritage Office in 2010 as a centralized body for managing the Biosphere Reserve, World Natural Heritage site, and Global Geopark. In 2012, Jeju enacted a Municipal Ordinance that laid the foundation for more autonomous and harmonized management of these designations. The office leads cross-sector collaboration and promotes science-based planning and stakeholder engagement.

- Proposal for establishment of UNESCO C2C Centre on MIDAs:** Jeju proposed the establishment of a UNESCO Category 2 Centre dedicated to research, training, and cooperation on MIDAs. This proposal led to the creation of GCIDA, which was formally established in Jeju in 2024.

Designation Timeline



Jeju Island UNESCO Biosphere Reserve(2002, 2019)
Recognized for its rich biodiversity and unique ecological systems centered around Hallasan Mountain, Jeju was designated as a Biosphere Reserve in 2002. The designation was expanded in 2019 to include the entire island and surrounding marine areas, highlighting the importance of integrated conservation across land and sea.

5 Ramsar wetlands in Jeju Island(Since 2026)
Jeju hosts five Ramsar-designated wetlands that are critical habitats for migratory birds, endemic species, and freshwater ecosystems. These wetlands are protected for their ecological importance and are managed to ensure biodiversity and wise use of water resources.
* Ramsar sites: Mulyangori-oreum, Mulyeongari-oreum, Dongbaekdongsan, 1100 Altitude, Sumeunmulbaengduri

Jeju Volcanic Island and Lava Tubes(2027)
Jeju's volcanic features—Hallasan Mountain, the Geomunoreum lava tube system, and Seongsan Ilchulbong—were inscribed on the World Heritage List for their outstanding geological value and exceptional natural beauty. These sites showcase the island's formation history and dynamic volcanic landscape.

Jeju Island Global Geopark(2010)
Jeju was designated as a Global Geopark for its well-preserved volcanic landforms, including over 360 monogenetic volcanoes (oreum), lava coastlines, and tuff cones. The island functions as an open-air geological museum that promotes education, conservation, and sustainable tourism.

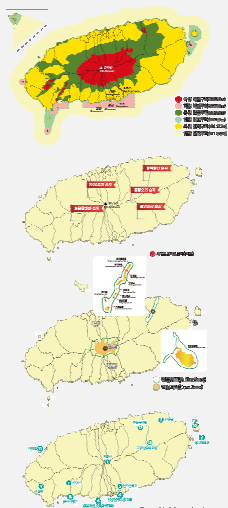


Fig 3. Jeju 4 IDA maps

Introducing GCIDA

- Overview:** GCIDA was newly established in April 2024 and comprises three teams: Planning & Administration, Research & Development, and Training & Communication. The centre currently has 12 staff members, including the Director-General, and plans to expand to 24 members by 2030.

Key initiatives

A Global Hub for Research and Training on IDAs and MIDAs

Core Values

Hub	Harmonization	Innovation
Striving to become a global hub for research and training on IDA and MIDAs through harmonization and innovation.	Promoting harmony between people and nature, across IDA management systems, and within MIDAs through integrated and collaborative approaches.	Creating new initiatives and generating synergies through innovative thinking and forward-looking strategies.

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- MIDAS Information Hub**
GCIDA develops an open-access information web hub, providing classifying system for MIDAs related contents(management status, statistics, case studies, etc.)
- Customized Support Program for IDA/MIDAS**
GCIDA formats consultation advisory group and operates on/offline consultation. Collaborative pilot projects with partners will be conducted in 2026.
- Capacity-Building Programs for IDA/MIDAS**
GCIDA operates annual capacity-building workshop for IDA/MIDAS stakeholders(site manager, local residents, interpreters, youth). It also offers a platform for networking.
- MIDAS Global Expert Network**
GCIDA plans to build a global network of experts on MIDAs, organizes regular international forums for sharing knowledge about integrated and harmonious management of MIDAs.

