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ECOPOTENTIAL Storylines: a whole system approach to Protected Area ecosystems

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The EU H2020 ECOPOTENTIAL project was devoted to make best use of Earth observations to improve ecosystem benefits and support conservation strategies. The project followed a whole-ecosystem approach, with special attention to geosphere-biosphere interactions. The project, started in 2015 and ended in 2019, focused its activities on a set of more than 20 protected areas of international relevance in Europe and beyond, many of which are also eLTER and ILTER sites, covering a wide array of biogeographic regions and ecosystems (www.ecopotential-project.eu). The site/sites – specific research activities have been developed within a comprehensive framework (called the project's "Storylines") where real-life issues of broad conservation relevance for Protected Areas are linked with research questions. The Storylines specify the needs for remote sensing and in-situ data for ecosystem modelling, ecosystem service assessment, cross-scale interaction estimates, demands for future protections, policy and capacity building. Each storyline has been focused within at least one protected area and has sets the basis for further operational work in the field, adding specifics, defining a work plan and assigning tasks. Storylines have been conceived as iterative processes whose flow of activity and practical implementation evolved with the increase of knowledge and the demands by the users of the scientific findings. After a general introduction to the Storyline approach, here we focus on the case of the Gran Paradiso National Park, considering population dynamics of wild ungulates, biodiversity assessments and Critical Zone exploration. The Storyline concept is now left as a legacy of the ECOPOTENTIAL project to eLTER RI and to the GEO ECO community activities.