Parks as Battlegrounds: Managing Conflicting Values

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Management decisions in protected areas are often choices among very different, and often conflicting, values. The role of the protected area manager is to advocate the full range of values for which the area was established and to make the critical decisions in favor of those values.

Discussion of impairment and intangible values has been central to management decisions such as protecting air quality in Shenandoah National Park, preserving dark night skies in Arches National Park, and closing one-third of Denali National Park and Preserve to all snowmobile use. Preservation of opportunities for solitude, natural soundscapes, and the dark night sky are now common discussions in general management planning for U.S. national parks (Manning, Valliere, and Minteer 1996; Power 1998; Sovick 2001). Values such as solitude, natural quiet, challenge, a sense of freedom, opportunities for introspection and self-discovery, restoration, and personal growth are now critical components in the decision-making process. In waiving entrance fees for Veteran's Day 2001, Secretary of the Interior Gale Norton highlighted the value of parks and public lands in the U.S. as places that "are an inspiration to the freedoms all Americans cherish" and stated that families have visited natural and historic areas "to gain hope and strength" (*Salt Lake Tribune* 2001).

Conflicts Over the Values of Parks and Protected Areas

In the U.S. National Park System, the importance of protecting a wide range of values has emerged during the past century of park management and is supported by judicial decisions, legislation, and public opinion. However, this does not reduce the potential for conflict over different values, and in fact may result in more intense and more polarized debates. The potential for conflict has also increased along with the growing numbers and types of uses of protected areas.

Understanding why values-based conflicts occur is essential to making decisions about which values take precedence (Manning 1999). According to Lewis (1993), "Conflict erupts mainly when people with competing interests and different values interact."

Management decisions in protected areas become controversial because people care a great deal about different values of protected places. In particular, intangible values of an area trigger an emotional response to management decisions. People care about tangible values like wildlife and scenery, but also about knowing a place is protected for future visits, their children, or simply because it seems like the right thing to do (Manning, Valliere, and Minteer 1996).

Connection to place is an essential part of an emotional response to management decisions and motivates individuals to get involved in planning and management issues affecting parks and protected areas. Connection to place often involves intangible values and can evolve through experiences during a visit to the place or even from just knowing about it, believing it is special, and feeling it is important to have it protected. Connection to place can often result in a much stronger response from individuals than can be accomplished through scientific information or legal or political arguments (Bushell 2001).

Environmental ethicists find aesthetic, artistic, educational, recreational, humanitarian, intellectual, mystical, scientific, and spiritual value in wilderness (Rolston 1988; Minteer and Manning 1999; Fausold and Lilieholm 1996; Morton 1999; Parker and Avant 2000). These intangible values defy measurement but are equally, and in some

cases, more important than tangible values. But because they are difficult to define and quantify, there has been a tendency toward ignoring them or weighting them less than values that are more easily quantified. In recognizing this reality, protected area managers should not underestimate the importance of intangible values surrounding how connections to place develop, such as how it feels to be there, spiritual significance, and symbolism.

While intangible values are seldom in conflict with one another (Rolston 1988), they often compete with economic and "use" values in park management. Conflicts are quick to arise when uses in a park or protected area are not compatible with the purposes for which the area was established.

Making Decisions Among Competing Values

In resolving conflicts among competing values, it is the land manager's responsibility to prioritize values and decide which values take precedence in which areas. These decisions are often made within a highly charged political arena and under close public scrutiny. The following examples illustrate how some recent conflicts among competing values in very different national park units have been resolved.

Snowmobile use in Denali National Park and Preserve. Mount McKinley National Park was the first national park unit established (1917) after passage of the National Park Service Act in 1916. It was intended as a "game refuge" and included North America's highest peak. The Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act of 1980 expanded it from approximately two million to over six million acres and renamed it Denali National Park and Preserve. This raised some ambiguity over whether motorized use, permitted under certain conditions by the new law, would be allowed in the former Mount McKinley portion of the park, most of which was now designated wilderness.

Because of rapidly increasing snowmobile use in the park additions and the growing number of incursions into the designated wilderness or "old park" area, the Park Service permanently closed this part of the park to all snowmobile use effective in 2000. This action was very controversial, especially within Alaska, since it called for removing a current use and restricting it in the future, at least to the 1980 park additions. Prevailing against potential litigation and legislation to reverse the closure, the Park Service successfully argued that managing the "old park" area for non-motorized recreation was critical to protecting resource and other values such as opportunities for solitude, natural sounds, and the integrity of the winter landscape (NPS 1999a). Public opinion strongly supported this position, with about 96% of over 6,000 comments in favor of the closure.

In this example, the values of access to public lands versus protection of natural sounds and opportunities for solitude were in direct conflict. Snowmobile users questioned the value of setting aside a large protected area if access was to be very difficult. Supporters of the closure argued that snowmobile use was still allowed in the park additions and on adjacent lands, and that the former Mount McKinley National Park had been managed for non-motorized recreation since 1917.

Protecting the historic scene of Civil War battlefields in the United States. Controversy over competing values has been recently resolved in two historical parks in the eastern United States, Gettysburg National Military Park and Manassas National Battlefield Park. By contrast with Denali National Park, these areas were established primarily to protect cultural resources, and specifically to commemorate battles fought during the American Civil War, 1861–1865. During the early 1970s, a 300-foot-tall observation tower was constructed on a site just outside the Gettysburg park boundary, despite substantial opposition. The tower became a popular destination for visitors to Gettysburg, and since it was outside the park boundary, the Park Service could not take any action. A 1982 general management plan for the park did not address the issue. However, a new boundary study in 1988 and a land pro-

tection plan in 1993 addressed the potential for land acquisition, including the tower site. Once the Park Service had successfully acquired the site, the tower was slated for demolition, which was carried out with considerable ceremony and public support on 3 July 2000 (Latschar 2001). The Park Service had succeeded in protecting the historic scene as a value above the economic interest in the tower as a tourist attraction.

Protecting the historic scene at Manassas National Battlefield Park in Virginia has been equally challenging because of expanding urban growth in northern Virginia. In the late 1980s, there were 542 acres of historic land adjacent to the battlefield subject to immediate development. The developer had local political support, while advocates of battlefield preservation had generated public support on a national level. The U.S. Congress eventually authorized federal condemnation of the land with compensation to the landowners, adding the acreage to the national battlefield. While the national public support for protecting the site was a pleasant surprise to preservationists, an ultimate concern is that future reactive federal efforts to protect land are much too costly to be viable in the future (Gossett 1998).

Air tours in Grand Canyon National Park. Air tours over Grand Canyon National Park have expanded significantly over the past two decades. Beginning in 1988, the Park Service began to work actively work to reduce the frequency of flights over the canyon. A protracted conflict culminated in a U.S. Court of Appeals (District of Columbia Circuit) decision in 1998, determining that aesthetic resources such as natural quiet are an essential part of overall resource values (Grand Canyon Air Tour Coalition v. FAA 1998). Air tours are now restricted to above the canyon rim, protecting natural sounds in the inner canyon.

These above examples illustrate how cultural practices and values can directly conflict with established purposes of protected areas. A common factor in each case was widespread public support for the Park Service position, based on the fundamental purposes of the respective protected area. While learning some hard lessons at times about how to avoid past mistakes, the agency has successfully recognized the importance of working with a citizenry that demands involvement at a more sophisticated level than ever before. The lessons learned lead to some common principles for making legally and publicly supportable decisions in parks and protected areas where very different values are in competition.

Principles for Supportable Decisions Involving Competing Values

Based on our review of the literature and analysis of cases such as those presented hereabove, we have identified seven principles that should help in making decisions about which values should take precedence when conflicts arise.

Managers must acquire accurate and thorough resource information, but must also recognize the limits of scientific information.

There are recurring reminders in the literature about the importance of accurate and current scientific information to decision—making in protected areas. However, management goals are ultimately based on societal values, and managers cannot avoid making choices between competing values. Rolston (1988) statesd that "[e]nvironmental decisions are not a data-driven process; rather, the data are caged by a value-driven theory. The data seldom change anyone's mind, but they are gathered and selected to justify positions already held...."

Application of scientific knowledge to management decisions becomes even more complex when intangible values are involved since such values often defy measurement. For example, existence value is hard to measure or evaluate, as is a protected area's intrinsic worth. With respect to wilderness areas in particular, Kaye (2000) concludesd:, "[W]e have a few objective criteria, and no standard metric with which to quantify or evaluate actions that enhance or detract from the character of our nation's natural sacred places. This is the unique challenge of wilderness management, preserving what is unseen and unmeasurable."

It is critical that park and protected area managers involve the public at all levels of planning and decision-making.

In reviewing why conflicts arise in parks and protected areas, Lewis (1993) concludes that in many cases conflicts relate to (1) people in nearby communities having substantive needs that have come into direct opposition to the needs of the park, and (2) not enough attention being paid to the process of involving local people in decision-making and park management. However, managers must recognize the full constituency for a protected area. This includes not only local residents who are directly affected, but also those who may be distant but still have an affinity for the place. A common factor in all cases is connection to the place, which can happen on many different levels.

Intangible values such as natural sounds, opportunities for solitude, and even existence value are more appreciated and better understood than ever before. Advocates of these values and of others that directly conflict, such as motorized access and motorized recreation, are becoming more organized and involved in park planning and management decision-making. These interest groups and the public will expect this trend to continue.

Clarify the purposes of the park or protected area to the public and manage to provide for and protect these purposes.

Managing according to the fundamental purposes for which a protected area was established may be self-explanatory, but there is a continuing need to find new ways to communicate with the public about these purposes. In the Denali example above, snowmobile use expanded in area and numbers until there was an expectation, at least on the part of this user group, to continue the activity. Preventing this issue from becoming a management problem in the 1990s would have required immediate action after passage of the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act in 1980 to clarify the conditions under which snowmobile use was allowed. Because the Park Service did not have either the legal or political ability to take such action at the time, the expectation for continuing motorized access, one type of value, developed in conflict with other values such as natural sounds and opportunities for solitude.

While conflicts develop when people with competing interests and different values interact (Lewis 1993), these competing interests are often rooted in very different understandings of the purposes of the park or protected area. Managers can do a great deal to shape these expectations through information about the site. These educational efforts may take several years to accomplish, but are no less critical than the management action itself.

Plan proactively and consider how decisions today will affect the area well into the future.

Proactive planning can prevent greater problems in the future, and taking a long-term view of protected areas is critical. Proactive management actions by the Park Service not only appear to have been the best actions among the options available; they have also been upheld in court. Based on U.S. Circuit Court decisions, the Park Service, in meeting its responsibilities under its organic act, need not wait for actual damage to occur before taking protective action to prevent degradation to wildlife and other natural resources (*Wilkins v. Department of the Interior*, 995 F.2d 850, 853 [(8th Cir. 1993)]; *New Mexico State Game Commission v. Udall*, 410 F.2d 1197 [(10th Cir. 1969]).

Recognize that all parks cannot provide for all opportunities; look at park planning and management in a regional context.

Often, managers make decisions that are good for the local area for which they are responsible but may be poor decisions for protected areas on a larger scale. Failure to plan and make decisions looking at protected areas in a regional context creates problems in adjacent areas, leads to a homogenization of experiences, and decreases recreation values (McCool and Cole 2001).

Management planning often presents a good opportunity to clarify how a park or protected area fits into its regional context. A question that should be addressed is whether the area will be managed similarly to surrounding lands or adjacent sites, or whether it

provides unique opportunities. The answer should relate directly to the fundamental purposes of the site; this is an appropriate context for articulating why the place has protected status, what its most important values are, and why it is different from other places.

Effective use of standardized decision-making processes can lead to a more defensible decision.

Much has been written on tools for decision—making (e.g., Bader 1990). In looking specifically at conflict among values, carrying capacity or visitor capacity analysis can be an effective methodology for articulating which values are to be protected in which areas.

Management zoning that is generally done as part of capacity analyses is essentially decision-making about which values to provide for in which places or in what context. For example, some places may be managed to allow for convenient motorized access, while others are managed to maximize opportunities for solitude. This allocation concept makes it possible to include a variety of uses and manage an area for groups with different values while preventing conflict, which will become increasingly important in parks and protected areas (Rothman 2001).

Allocation among conflicting uses has been effectively used by land management agencies for many years, and the Park Service has been upheld in court in this type of decision-making, such as in *Bicycle Trails Council of Marin v. Babbitt,* 82 F.3d 1445 at 1452 (9th Cir. 1996; Bader 1999). Management zoning or allocation of uses makes it possible to accommodate a range of values in a protected area—but not all in the same place at the same time.

Sometimes decisions can be delayed in the interest of conservation. One could simply state that the best course of management action is to always make the right decision. Outside of this ideal world, managers are presented with any number of options, and only in hindsight can be certain of which course of action is best. There are times when deferring a decision may be the best decision, especially in cases where additional impacts to resources and other values of the protected area are unlikely. If there are no immediate threats, deferring a decision may result in increased values being placed on a protected area, especially if those values are uncommon elsewhere.

Rolston (1988) recommends against making "decisions by default. Sometimes doing nothing is the cheapest thing to do and also protects values already in place." Some basic rules that apply are that it is far more costly to undo development than to do it right the first timee, and that when we have deferred decisions in the past, we have almost always been grateful to have the opportunity to take another look at the values of a protected area in a new context.

Conclusion

Decision-making in parks and protected areas is becoming increasingly more complex and politicized. The role of park planners and managers as "arbiters of value" is to make sure all values are included in the discussion, defining park values broadly to reach more than one interest group. All protected areas, regardless of size and fundamental purposes, tend to have intangible values, the protection of which is essential to the long-term viability of the area.

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