



RESEARCH IN PROTECTED AREAS

Papers from a workshop organized by the George Wright Society and IUCN at the 4th World Congress on National Parks and Protected Areas, Caracas, Venezuela, February 1992

INTRODUCTION TO THE WORKSHOP

Effective action must be based on accurate information, and the more widely shared the information, the more likely it is that individuals and institutions will agree on the definition of problems and solutions. Developing and using information is therefore an essential part of conservation at all levels, from the local community to the global community, particularly to prescribe management action and to assess changes over time; biological, economic, social, and managerial parameters all need to be considered. On the international scene, Unesco has been deeply involved in this field, and many biosphere reserves have excellent research facilities.

Yet in most parts of the world, the application of research findings has lagged far behind the capacity of scientists to generate the data. What needs to be done to facilitate the greater application of science to management and by managers? What can researchers do to make their work more accessible to managers, thus promoting the application of their findings? The workshop focused on these two questions. It was attended by some 30 people, representing Latin America, Africa, Asia, Europe, Australia, and North America.

On the first day, after a discussion and revision of the Congress's draft recommendations, eleven presentations of short duration were given. The revised recommendations were submitted to the Congress Secretariat in time for consideration by the its recommendations committee.

On the second day, five short presentations were given. Then the participants divided into two groups, one English-speaking and one Spanish, to discuss the management-research interface. The discussions were keyed to five

areas: (1) Making sure research is a priority in funding; (2) Ensuring that sufficient facilities and information resources are available for research; (3) Making research available to other researchers, managers, and the public—in forms each group can understand and use; (4) Facilitating research exchanges; (5) Recognizing and promoting protected areas as sites for research.

CONCLUSIONS OF THE PARTICIPANTS

1. Well-planned research, combining natural and social science, is a vital part of the management of protected areas. Protected areas are natural laboratories: in some countries, the last such places available to serve as "baselines" for the surrounding landscape. Universities, governments, and other bodies concerned with research need to explicitly recognize (within policies and regulations) the function of protected areas as research sites.
2. Research that is valuable from a purely scientific viewpoint is not necessarily useful to protected area managers. To be truly worthwhile, research needs to be presented in three formats: for peers in science and cultural resource professions, park managers and their agencies, and the general public.
3. Researchers have many needs that are not being met: protected area authorities often have no policies to guide use of their areas as research sites, there is a lack of political support for long-term research, and there is a lack of investment in research, which produces a shortage of facilities, directories, and training opportunities.
4. A special problem related to research in the developing world is the lack of trained nationals to carry out research. Some countries are suffering "brain drains" of their best researchers, leaving a situation in which expatriates control the research in a given country's protected areas. In many countries, basic information about their protected areas is not widely available to local universities, and often is unavailable in the local language(s). We should be working toward a situation where developing-world researchers can receive a PhD in their own regions rather than having to study in developed countries.
5. A related problem is the practice of visiting researchers from developed countries taking with them upon the completion of their work all of the data collected, without supplying copies to the host country. This seems to be a widespread problem even when the lodgement of data and reports before departure is a condition of the entry permit.
6. Facilities are a great attractant to a researcher, but they need not be elaborate: housing, a dry place to work, and so on. There is a high correlation between the presence of such basic facilities and the amount of research that is done in a protected area.
7. Extra efforts must be taken to integrate socioeconomics into protected area research. This is hindered by the widespread view that social sciences are somehow not rigorous fields of enquiry and therefore should not be accorded the same status as natural science. Yet the key factors shaping the ecosystems of protected areas are in many cases socioeconomic.
8. This leads to a corollary conclusion: the co-participation of local people is just as important to the success of protected area research as it is to protected area management. Local people

have little interest in supporting a "natural laboratory" unless the research being done there has some relevance to their lives.

9. Attention needs to be paid within the research community to building alliances with like-minded institutions. If individual research projects can be coordinated and fitted into a network among institutions, the studies will be complementary rather than duplicating each other. In this respect, the Latin American protected areas network (coordinated by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the U.N.) needs to be strengthened, and similar networks formed in other regions. Networks involving individual institutions in the developed and developing worlds should be fostered.

FOLLOW-UP TO THE WORKSHOP

The major product from the workshop will be guidelines on making research useful to and usable by protected area managers. These

guidelines are being prepared under the direction of the George Wright Society, in collaboration with workshop participants, the Science and Management of Protected Areas Association (Canada), the Smithsonian Institution, and IUCN. The guidelines will be published by IUCN in 1993. Other possible products are: a project proposal to IUCN to prepare a list of protected areas that are in need of research, which could then be circulated to academic institutions and other research bodies; a project proposal funnelled through IUCN to establish a program to twin parks in the developed world with those in developing countries for exchanges of information, personnel, and, possibly, financial support; a project proposal to donors to fund the set-up of basic research facilities in protected areas that have none; and a project proposal to fund the development and maintenance of central repositories of park-related information in developing countries.

The first product of the workshop is this double issue of *The George Wright FORUM*, which contains the papers presented in Caracas.

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