

Overcoming Political and Administrative Barriers to Effective Protected Areas Management

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Natural resources are a source of wealth and power; hence competition for jurisdiction and ownership is often intense, both within the public sector and in relations between private enterprise and government. Commentators on land-use planning, such as Boschken (1982) and Cullen (1990) characterise the situation as conflictive, due to the following factors:

- a) There are numerous stakeholders with differing ideological and value perspectives about the relationship of humans and Nature;
 - b) there is data uncertainty about the resource base, given lack of information about ecological characteristics and prospective human impacts;
 - c) although scientists view the biosphere holistically, natural resources management is characterised by hydra-headed planning and bureaucratic fiefdoms;
 - d) all policy decisions involve tradeoffs, and in the political area short-term expediency is more common than inter-generational equity.
- a) There must be explicit recognition of diverse values and motivations and willingness for discourse about such matters;
 - b) participants must be willing to share information and engage in joint fact-finding;
 - c) there must be acceptance of mediation, using some neutral intermediary or final arbiter.

But even if there is collective agreement about the issues to be resolved and desirable objectives, many political and administrative barriers remain to be overcome if effective resource decision-making and protected area management is to occur. In the remainder of this paper an attempt is made to identify useful tactics; no doubt experienced parks administrators will be able to draw upon lessons of their own experience to amplify possibilities.

Advocacy or Passivity?

We live in an era of global strategic and economic change, where there is increased interest in safeguarding the environment,

Other analysts of resources policy are more optimistic about prospects of conservation within development and argue that environmental dispute resolution is feasible, provided certain preconditions are met (Bacow and Wheeler 1984):

but national and international action is required at the very time budgets are shrinking (Fairclough 1991). Protected area managers have a hard choice to make: they can either choose to safeguard existing resources carefully, hoping that the winds of change will pass them by; or they can adopt a more proactive and catalytic role in fostering nature conservation, arguing that without improved ecological practice, the human species is doomed. The latter route may sound a counsel of despair, but in reality protected area managers are optimists, since they believe it feasible to enjoy the benefits of economic development, while transmitting an ecological inheritance to future generations. The general rule, therefore, is for protected area managers to be positive, forward-looking but pragmatic, advocates for the areas they manage and safeguard.

Some Guiding Principles

What are some of the political and administrative barriers that need to be overcome? A brief list might include the following (Davis 1991):

- a) Lack of political commitment to conservation in the face of development or population pressures;
- b) Political instability within regimes or divergences of opinion between central and regional governments;
- c) Lack of effective coordination, control, priority setting, or dispute resolution mechanisms within the bureaucracy;

- d) Inappropriate or inadequate judicial systems to resolve legal quandaries or major complaints;
- e) Lack of appropriate resource data or expertise to facilitate parks planning and administration;
- f) Inadequate financial resources to permit effective management of protected areas; and,
- g) Lack of effective communication with local communities and the broader public.

A useful starting point is to conduct an audit to identify such problems, but they will only be overcome through persistence and carefully devised amelioration campaigns. What are some of the guiding principles protected area managers should adopt, apart from acquiring improved personal skills in advocacy and leadership? Briefly summarised, the central dictums are as follows:

- a) Achieve bipartisan support through ethics and vision;
- b) Secure appropriate jurisdiction;
- c) Achieve command over resources;
- d) Display cooperative pragmatism; and,
- e) Demonstrate accountability with performance.

Achieving support and commitment

No protected area system can survive long unless there is substantial external support at a political and community level. Protected area managers must not only articulate a clear conservation ethic and resist infringement of

fundamental ecological principles, but more positively illustrate social, economic, or cultural gains to be made from nature conservation. This must go beyond visionary plans to include simple, practical case examples of tourism income, educational value, commercialisation prospects for biological materials, or other potential benefits. Sometimes it pays to expose the likely costs of **not** taking action or the implications or allocation resources to development interests. Such arguments need to be dramatic and accurate, but also provide opportunities for politicians or bureaucrats to view themselves as visionaries or achievers by gaining national or international credit for nature conservation decisions. Perhaps the most difficult task for protected area managers is to loyally serve the government of the day, while at the same time engaging in discourse with other interests, so as to secure bipartisan support for protected area systems. Such commitment cannot be achieved other than through a great deal of personal contact and follow-up illustration in the field.

Securing appropriate jurisdiction

Protected areas cannot be effectively managed and conserved unless they have statutory protection and a judicial system permitting prosecution or appeal against unacceptable land-use practices. Litigation should in the main be regarded as a last resort; nonetheless, it is a salutary experience for anti-conservation or criminal elements to know that

public exposure and prosecution can be invoked if need arises. Protected area managers should resist discretionary decision-making by ministers affecting protected areas; however, the invoking of temporary protection is sometimes useful if urgent and unforeseen circumstances arise. Quite often the central problem is to persuade other natural resource agencies, many of which are development-oriented, to forego some territory in favour of nature conservation. This makes it crucial that senior protected area managers serve on interdepartmental committees and government task forces, so that an effective environmental viewpoint can be articulated. In many cases it is best to be proactive and put positive recommendations forward for consideration, rather than await the uncertain deliberations of multi-agency groups. It greatly aids the situation if resource statutes embody a general direction that all government agencies must seek feasible and prudent alternatives to destroying conservation or heritage values, i.e., placing an onus on agencies to conserve areas wherever feasible (for example, see the *Australian Heritage Commission Act* of 1975).

Command over resources

While the rapid expansion of protected area systems may be essential to overcome threats to endangered species or ecosystems or to preserve options for the future, there is little point in declaring an area to be a nature reserve if it cannot be adequately protected

and managed. In the current era of budgetary cutbacks, advocacy of 'user-pays' principles and privatisation, protected area managers must be on their guard against loss of management resources. In general the primary needs are for data, expertise, dollars and appropriate technology; the lack of any one of these elements creates significant problems. Governments are increasingly demanding that chief executives demonstrate cost-saving and performance per dollar expended. This means that aims must be more selective, programs tightly structured and implemented, and performance indicators built in. But all the paper warfare in the world will not convince key decision-makers in central agencies, such as departments of finance or prime minister's offices, unless the conservation ethic and management realities are known and understood. It takes delicate footwork and careful exposition on a face-to-face basis with senior officers to get this message across. Persistence and hard facts are the stock in trade one must rely upon.

Cooperative pragmatism

The day-to-day management problems of protected areas tend to take much of chief executives' time. But protected areas exist in a wider world and much attention needs to be focussed to linking such reserves with broader patterns of land use or economic development. Protected area managers must demonstrate willingness to discuss options and implications with a wide range of other

interests, such as resource managers, private enterprise, non-governmental organisations, international experts, and representatives of local communities. An image of positive helpfulness must be matched by meeting commitments, if the reputation of the parks authority is to grow within the community. There are times when, without sacrificing principle, a pragmatic accommodation can be reached which brings goodwill for the future.

Accountability with performance

Apart from formal accountability to senior ministers and the legislature, there are broader considerations in assessing the overall performance to the general community. Protected areas do not fare well unless local communities are involved in policy-making and receive some tangible benefits from nature conservation; equally there is an obligation to speak out if international obligations, such as are invoked by World Heritage or biosphere reserve status, are not being met. It is highly desirable, therefore, that protected area managers pay considerable attention to program evaluation and performance indicators of a very pragmatic kind, those which are likely to convince politicians and senior bureaucrats that cost-effective and ecologically sound management is being achieved. Accurate assessment of performance is never easy to measure, but there are now standard reference texts available about program evaluation techniques (including peer group review). The

World Conservation Union (IUCN) has also published various papers recording lessons of experience about performance assessment (e.g., Thorsell 1982).

Networking Assistance

Political instability in many parts of the world means that even highly motivated and extremely professional protected area managers can face difficulties and danger in safeguarding and administering areas under their control. Yet even in such extreme circumstances, some network assistance can be invoked. In many nations, protected area managers have been able to informally enlist alliances of scientific expertise, influential individuals, and non-governmental organisations as advocates and guardians of national parks systems.

IUCN itself, although carefully non-partisan in character, pro-

vides a pool of expertise, experience and advice upon which less-well-endowed conservation agencies can draw. Careful (indeed discreet) enlistment of media coverage can bring enormous pressure to bear on politicians and key decision-makers, but only with the proviso that reportage is not inaccurate or biased. In summary, the global environmental movement contains many dedicated and hardworking individuals willing to assist in overcoming political and administrative barriers, but the real leadership must come from the managers themselves. There is an old saying that 'without vision, the people perish.' It could equally be argued that without forceful advocates for nature conservation, protected area systems would vanish. Much has been achieved in environmental management in recent years, but much remains to be done.

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