

Latin American Mountain Protected Areas: An Introduction

Background

This collection of papers summarizes the mountain theme discussed at the First Latin American Congress of National Parks and Protected Areas, held in Santa Marta, Colombia, from May 21-28, 1997. The mountain protected areas (MtPAs) workshop was part of Symposium No. 2 ("Saving Natural and Cultural Capital in Protected Areas," chaired by Bernardo Ortiz) and attended by park professionals, researchers, nongovernmental organizations, practitioners, and conservationists of every Andean country.

The mountain workshop was organized at the initiative of Larry Hamilton, vice-chair of Mountain Theme of IUCN's World Commission on Protected Areas (WCPA), and other montologists who wanted to provide exposure to the important issues surrounding the planning and administration of MtPAs, offering a follow-up of their meeting in Canada at the last World Conservation Congress. As the Andean Mountain Association president-elect, charged with planning the IIIrd International Symposium of Sustainable Mountain Development to be held in Quito, Ecuador, in December 1998, I was given the privilege of coordinating selection of papers, designing the mountain workshop, and editing a special issue for THE GEORGE WRIGHT FORUM. Support from the Center for Latin American and Caribbean Studies of the University of Georgia was instrumental for the task. A selected participation of 49 mountain scholars, researchers, administrators, and parks personnel gave a very active flair to workshop discussions.

The Workshop

The program brought case studies, question-and-answer sessions, debates, and consensus-building for a regional program to support MtPAs in Latin America. The development of a network was stressed anew. A roundtable to share experiences in protected areas of mountainous regions led to the development of a database of people and institutional affiliations, with strengths and constraints facing MtPAs' management.

Important reflections on the characteristics of mountains as centers of endemism, and on the importance of bioregional processes occurring in mon-

tane landscapes, were offered by Juan Myer, who called for interdisciplinary studies to understand their hydrology and risks, fragility, climatic diversity, and landscape heterogeneity. Cultural landscapes were noted as evolving scenarios of specific human societies which depend on mountains for the supply of resources, especially water. Also, the importance of mountains as magic places that maintain spirituality as a common ethos of mountain dwellers was presented. Several issues of tourism management and impact amelioration tied with erosion control and usage practices of communal lands were also stressed.

With the coordination of Guillermo Rodríguez, from the Fundación Pro Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, the workshop presentation included contributions on Huascarán (Torres), Tachira park (Rebolledo), Canaima (Sharpe and Rodríguez), páramos of Batallón and La Negra (Sánchez), and the corridor of Serra do Mar (Giardiadis and Campello). Other contributions were not given at the meeting but were considered for publication in the FORUM. Among those are papers about Rio Abiseo (Mendoza), Los Santos reserve (Kappelle and Juárez), Andean lakes of Ecuadorian MtPAs (Steinitz-Kannan), and the Rio Quijos protected landscape initiative (Sarmiento).

The focus of the printed papers has shifted a bit from the mere description of MtPAs to the challenges of MtPA management, experiences in planning, and suggested options of innovative conservation initiatives. The selected papers include an abstract in Spanish and have been edited for consistency of format and style. The contributions to THE GEORGE WRIGHT FORUM, hence, bring a sample of a vibrant group of montologists eager to advance conservation in protected areas to help sustainable development of the bioregions along and across the mountains of Latin American and the Caribbean region.

The Message

The take-home message was the need to exchange experiences and proposals for innovations in MtPAs' management by creating a mechanism to promote research and extension in mountain reserves. Also, workshop participants wanted to find ways to secure strategic alliances to energize their work in progress. Juanita Castaño from IUCN-Suramérica was asked to include a home page on the Internet for the mountain group within IUCN's URL on the Worldwide Web. Guillermo Rodríguez was named coordinator for the diffusion of workshop materials and resolutions, particularly to maintain the newly developed electronic discussion list alive and productive with active networking among members.

The workshop identified the common need of training in conflict resolution and environmental mediation, as well as technical background and training in carbon sequestration, economic valuation of water resources, redistribution of income to warrant park survival, and co-management. Finally, modern ap-

proaches for ecological risk assessment and management of illegal cash crops were called for.

Acknowledgments

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