

# Italian Park and Protected Areas

## Experience and Twinning

**T**he national parks of the USA are looked upon as an ideal in Italy. Alessandro Russi, who directs the flora and fauna division of the Italian National Conservation Service, told me that “Yellowstone is Mecca” for the Italian park professional.

Despite this connection between Italy and the USA, it would appear that there is little in the way of shared park and protected area experience. Italian parks have relatively little wilderness or wild land as we Americans know it. They are characterized by a richness of historic and cultural heritage. And they are inhabited parks, as exemplified by Abruzzo, Italy’s oldest and premier national park, which owns only 1% of its primary 40,000 acres.

Yet, when I recently spent six months in Italy as a Rome Prize Fellow of the American Academy in Rome, I did not have to dig too deep to realize that our respective park experiences are increasingly intersecting and that we are facing similar challenges and opportunities.

This is particularly the case with regard to the northeastern USA, with its six-million-acre Adirondack Park, which has 130,000 inhabitants and has been in the painful process of becoming a park for 106 years; regional greenways, such as Hudson River Valley Greenway; and heritage areas. Even though the public-estate park is still the predominant model in the USA, the cultural landscape as a park

or protected area, where the park encompasses an entire setting, is a growing and increasingly important trend.

The intersections are also there with regard to our traditional state and national parks, which can no longer exist as islands separate and apart from their larger ecosystem and human communities. Yellowstone, in fact, is a good example. Paul Schullery, in *Searching for Yellowstone*, points out that

the National Park Service is routinely involved in regional planning. The park’s connection to the rest of GYE [Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem], made clear by the wanderings of grizzly bears, the migrations of elk and bison, and geothermal aquifers that cross park boundaries in many directions, are now seen as giving

Yellowstone superintendents a strong mandate to speak out on issues affecting the GYE. Management of the park, for so many decades a fairly contained assignment, now involves paying attention to a minimum of 20 million acres of land, 90 percent of which is beyond the boundaries.

While the USA is blessed with a vast area of land, we cannot escape the challenges of integrated regional management of natural and cultural resources that the Italians are aggressively addressing.

Italy is a particularly interesting place at this time to consider matters of integrated nature and cultural conservation and sustainable development in the park and protected area context. Responding to standards relating to protected areas of the European Community, and a growing groundswell of attention to park expansion, such as "The Challenge of 10%" campaign of the World Wildlife Fund-Italy and the Italian National Park Committee to protect at least one tenth of Italy's land mass by the end of the century, Italy has tripled its number of national parks and has increased its protected land mass from 1% to 7% in the last decade.

In 1991 a major, comprehensive park frame law was enacted to guide and advance park-making and management activity. It charts the course towards protecting the highest conservation values, including the protection of wildlife and biodiversity, while recognizing that Italian parks and protected areas depend upon

achieving sustainable development to support park economies. This law-making and park-making is taking place at a time of political transition, devolution of national authority to Italy's regional governments, and fiscal constraints required for Italy to be eligible for the new European monetary system.

In February 1997 I organized a roundtable at the American Academy in Rome on the intersecting Italian and USA park and protected area experience which gave birth to a park-to-park, people-to-people twinning initiative that continues to evolve and grow.

The five matches that have been identified so far are Abruzzo National Park with Adirondack Park, Po Regional Nature Park with Hudson River Valley Greenway, Pisa Regional Parks with Long Island Pine Barren, Parco Val d'Orcia in Tuscany with Mohawk Valley Heritage Corridor, and Parco Litorale Romano and Hudson Mohawk Urban Cultural Park (Riverspark).

The similarities in experiences between these parks, protected areas, greenways, and heritage areas are striking. For example, both the Abruzzo and Adirondack parks have villages within their borders, are located not far from major metropolitan areas, faced major development pressure in the 1970s, and developed park zoning system to manage parkland. An endangered wolf population has been restored to a healthy level in

Abruzzo, while the much vaster Adirondack Park is just beginning to address the social and biological feasibility of wolf restoration. There is much to talk about between the professionals from the two parks as well as between local municipal officials and respective park advocates.

The twinning (*gemellaggio* in Italian, or "partnering," as some prefer to call it) has proceeded on many fronts and at varying speeds. Some have referred to the effort by comparing it with the sister city initiative, but it is perhaps much more complex as it grows on a park-to-park, academic consortium-to-academic consortium, NGO-to-NGO, and people-to-people basis.

A highlight was the visit in September 1997 of Abruzzo Park Director Franco Tassi to Adirondack Park to participate in a wilderness roundtable sponsored by the Association for the Protection of the Adirondacks. Tassi's visit, which included meetings with state officials, led to a memorandum of agreement to develop exchanges between Tassi and Commissioner John Cahill of the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, which manages the public land of Adirondack Park.

Academic consortia made up of the State University of New York (SUNY) College of Environmental Sciences and Forestry at Syracuse, Albany Law School, SUNY at Albany Department of Geography and

Planning, Bard College, and Pennsylvania State University Department of Landscape Architecture in the USA, and the Politecnica of Torino, University of Florence Economics Faculty, and University of Brussels in Europe, are being organized to facilitate study and research of the twinned parks, greenways, and protected areas which can serve as conservation laboratories of international relevance.

A number of Italian publications, such as *Sherwood*, a forestry journal, and *Gazzetta ambiente*, published jointly by the Ministry of the Environment and Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato, have published articles relating to the twinning, and I will be the USA correspondent for *Parchi*, a thoughtful Italian parks journal.

The Glynwood Center, which has sponsored stewardship exchanges for ten years, primarily between the USA and Great Britain, is taking a close look at the connections developing with Italy for the purposes of expanding their program internationally.

Also strengthening the ties is the increasing attention being given to environmental restoration projects and the historic role of George Perkins Marsh. Marsh holds the record for being the longest-serving U.S. ambassador for his service in Italy during the 1860s and 1870s. During this period he penned the book *Man and Nature*, which helped lay the foundation for the creation of Adirondack Park. The former Marsh

property in Vermont is now a national historic site with a focus on land stewardship.

This special section of THE GEORGE WRIGHT FORUM offers a good introduction to the connections between the Italian and USA conservation experience, the uniqueness and relevance of the Italian conservation tradition, and current developments in the twinning project.

In "Ideas from Overseas," Marcus Hall introduces us to the basis for what Italians and Americans can learn from each other about the complexities of preserving and restoring both wild and cultural nature. Jamie Sievert, who has written a soon-to-be-published history of Italian conservation, points out in "Italy's Leap Forward in Nature Protection Legislation" that "Italy is once again in the forefront of environmental legislation and protection." Italy's pre-eminent park planner, Professor Roberto Gambino, calls attention to the increasing interrelation of park planning with territorial or regional planning in "Parks and Protected Areas in Italy: An Overview."

Gambino also notes that there is increasing recognition of the "rele-

vance of networks connecting parks and protected areas for the enrichment and enlargement of public enjoyment." Franco Tassi goes on to describe the trend towards networks in "From the National Park to Regional Systems of Linked National Parks and Protected Areas," which describes in part the effort to create the South European Park, with Abruzzo National Park at its heart. Finally, Professor Vieri Quilici writes about the development and intentions of five neighboring towns that have organized themselves as a regional park "to protect and sustain their unique qualities of place."

The growing intersections between Italian and American park, greenway, protected area, and heritage area experience has created a fertile opportunity for discourse and learning about new approaches for integrated natural and cultural resources protection and management. Both the Italian and American societies are creative and dynamic, and as we both continue to discover more about the other's conservation tradition and current challenges, the more we all shall surely benefit.

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