

Debra Clausen

Protected Areas Networks Coordinate Conservation of Shared Resources

One of the most exciting recent developments in the field of protected areas management is the creation and expansion of protected areas networks. Sooner or later in the course of their duties, most managers realize that the success of their own efforts is tied to actions taken or not taken by others in other locations. Protection of migratory species populations and the conservation of critical portions of large biomes is successful in the long term only if other habitats vital to the species or ecosystem are maintained as well. International agreements such as the designation of Wetlands of International Importance under the Ramsar Convention and the Migratory Bird Treaty Act recognize this fact. Waterfowl refuges established for the protection of spring and fall staging areas require conservation of core winter habitats as well as summer nesting areas if populations are to be maintained.

Protected areas networks share the common concept that the health of migratory species populations and sustainability of large biomes requires a holistic approach to conservation. Networks allow individual protected areas to contribute to a larger whole by providing coordination, communication, and an opportunity to identify critical gaps, thus increasing the effectiveness of each individual protected area.

The excellent articles presented in this issue of THE GEORGE WRIGHT FORUM explain what is happening in five of the world's most active protected areas networks. One of the first to be established (in 1960), and definitely the largest volunteer network

of protected areas managers, is IUCN's World Commission on Protected Areas (WCPA). With over 1,400 members in 160 countries, its mission is to promote the establishment and effective management of a worldwide representative network of terrestrial and marine protected areas. In this role, in addition to its many regional initiatives, WCPA has overseen the creation of the Mountain Protected Areas (MtPA) Network and the Marine Protected Areas (MPA) Network. Both the MtPA and the MPA networks have taken lead roles in addressing protected areas management globally in their respective areas of focus. In the Americas, the Western Hemisphere Shorebird

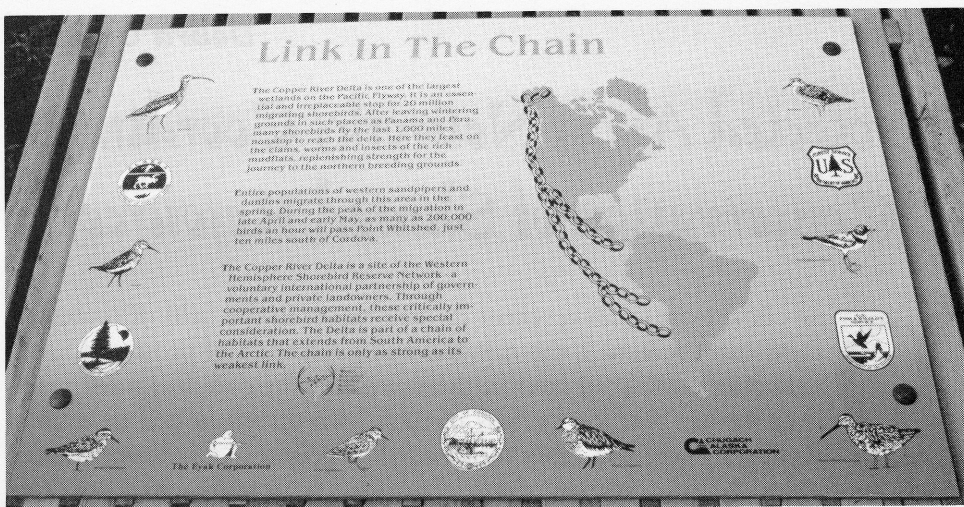


Figure 1. Western hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network sign for Copper River Delta. Alaska Department of Fish & Game file photo by Nancy Tankersley.

Reserve Network (WHSRN) was established in 1985 to address conservation of critical shorebird habitats throughout Pacific, Central, and Atlantic shorebird migration corridors. WHSRN produces a quarterly newsletter, supports local community capacity-building projects and workshops, and continues work on dedication of additional critical shorebird sites. Annual shorebird festivals at many of the dedicated sites and the phenomenally successful Shorebird Sister Schools Program have provided very popular public outreach for network activities. In the Arctic, the Circumpolar Protected Areas Network (CPAN), a task force of the Arctic Council's Conservation of Arctic Flora and Fauna (CAFF), has been collaborating since 1991 on inventory and gap analysis of protected

areas.

In other regions and biomes protected area networks include the East Asian-Australasian Shorebird Reserve Network initiated by Wetlands International, WHSRN's counterpart in the Western Pacific and Indian oceans; the Temperate Grasslands Network now being established under the auspices of WCPA to link professionals interested in temperate grassland protection (considered to be the least protected of the world's 26 biomes); and a Cave and Karst Working Group, also established through WCPA, to link professionals in that specialized field of protected areas management.

In addition to providing a forum for exchange of information and ideas, many protected areas networks produce newsletters, have developed

management guidelines, and are undertaking gap analyses and strategic planning exercises to address critical conservation needs. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are also contributing to protected areas networks. Notable is the support provided to CAFF/CPAN by the World Wildlife Fund's Arctic Programme (WWF-AP) which produces the quarterly newsletter *Arctic Bulletin*, providing a comprehensive source of information regarding conservation efforts in the eight arctic countries. WWF-AP has also developed and distributed the ten principles for arctic tourism and the code of conduct for tour operators and arctic tourists.

Connections among the various protected areas networks are now beginning to form as well. In the North, CPAN efforts to address gaps in marine protected areas in the Arctic complements the MPA Network's identification of critical marine habitats in the same region, while CAFF's recently produced discussion paper on the conservation of migratory arctic breeding birds outside the Arctic and WHSRN's identification of critical shorebird sites along Alaska's coast reinforce the North-South connection.

Future challenges to the successful functioning of protected areas networks include how to establish and keep active essential membership contacts yet limit participation to an effective size. This is especially true

for protected area networks which are large in scope and depend upon the volunteer efforts of its members to organize newsletters, publications, meetings, etc.

Jet travel and electronic communication have made professional networking possible. Fragmented and shrinking habitats combined with accelerated species extinction rates have made effective and efficient conservation efforts imperative. The need for protected areas networks will no doubt be discovered for additional species and other habitats, especially on the regional level. For example, successful conservation of migratory species such as the endangered Columbia River salmon, which migrates through three states and two countries, threatened habitats such as the Meso-American Caribbean coral reef which extends across four countries, and creation of conservation corridors such as the Yellowstone-to-Yukon (Y2Y) Conservation Initiative could be facilitated through improved communication offered by protected area networks.

Ironically, as the focus of nature conservation becomes ever-more holistic, it is also becoming increasingly apparent that the key to sustainability is found at the local level. To be successful, national and regional protection initiatives must work with local interests. For example, dedication of Kachemak Bay, Alaska, as a site of international importance in the Western Hemisphere Shorebird Re-

serve Network was dependent upon local community protection of key intertidal habitats as well as through participation by the state of Alaska and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

The promise of protected areas networks is to reach across govern-

mental jurisdictions to address the organic functions which individual protected areas are dedicated to sustain. Coordination of related protected areas management really can lead to success greater than the sum of individual protected area managers' efforts.

Debra Clausen, Sundberg & Clausen, P.O. Box 1949, Seward, Alaska 99664
USA

