

Everyone Calls for Partnerships and Outreach, But It's Never Easy to Pull Off: How to Do It and What Still Needs to Be Done

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THE 2015 GEORGE WRIGHT SOCIETY CONFERENCE, held in Oakland, California, was a great success this year. On April 1, 2015, from 10am to 12pm, concurrent session number 67 informed the audience all about current natural resource management policies. Representatives presented material through contributed papers with the ultimate goal that audience members would leave with a better understanding of the connection between “policy being the guiding force behind every on-the-ground natural resources management decision” (see GWS 2015 Program Guide).

Jeffrey Skibins, Chair and Assistant Professor, Parks Management and Conservation at Kansas State University, presented material in connection with “Natural Resources Policy on the Front-line and The Future of Science in the National Parks” (by Gary E. Machlis). Skibins discussed the newest technology making natural resource management possible today, including new ocean research platforms which we can study endangered sections of the oceans that were not accessible before and CubeSats, which are new technology satellites NASA is sending into space to collect data we’ve never had access to before. Skibins also educated audience members on the next generation of citizen science inspiring ordinary citizens to participate in problem solving, basic interpretations and sensor data collecting. Another amazing new technology presented to the audience is genetically modified corals to help restore the oceans precious ecosystems. Lastly, Skibins talked about the triple helix, which is the important helix between government, university, and industry and how they all work together to forge ahead in science problem solving.

Next up, Karl Brown, Vegetation Inventory Program Manager for the National Park Service and Wildland Fire Management, informed audiences on “Advocating for Natural Resources in the Heat of Incident Management” (Richard Schwab). The Wildland Fire Management teams work towards three main goals: restoration and maintenance, creating fire adapted communities and, most importantly, responding to wildfires. Not all fires are bad; some fires are good because they open up the bottom of the forest floor bringing in light to new forming habitats. Resource advisors are used to advocate for natural resources, in this instance help with wildfires, by addressing conflict with care and providing input of observed data. Using authority of the resource is one of the most effective techniques resource advisors can do. The most resources are protected and saved

Citation: Weber, Samantha, ed. 2016. *Engagement, Education, and Expectations—The Future of Parks and Protected Areas: Proceedings of the 2015 George Wright Society Conference on Parks, Protected Areas, and Cultural Sites*.

Hancock, Michigan: George Wright Society.

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when the resource advisor speaks for the resource, giving it authority and slowing or halting the processes that many outside parties quickly jump to conclusions as the best solution.

The next speaker Andy Hubbard also draws on the authority of the resource while educating the audience about “Management Assessment Points: A Bridge between Science and Management in Southwestern Parks.” When making management assessment points one must first identify the issues, then determine proper measures, and lastly set the points to achieve the measures. Management assessment points are beneficial because they provide focus, context and scalable situations to achieve goals. Specific management assessment points have been determined for parks in many instances, for example grizzly bear protection, which Jeffrey Skibins discussed in the following lecture.

Reflection

The ideas presented to me during the natural resource management session hold significant value for students interested in environmental studies or sustainability projects like myself. Some key points that I took from the conference are that interpretation drives understanding and instills connections in people which ultimately leads to achieving what seemed like unattainable goals. Meaning, if you feel passionately about a resource or problem, make sure to interpret that resource with authority and appeal specifically to positive emotions in everyday people insuring the viewpoint from the resource, not the human. Also, for my fellow environmental studies peers, the new upcoming technologies, such as genetically modified coral and CubeSats, discussed at the George Wright Society Conference gave me hope to know that others are making progress on technologies to combat the many problems the world is going to face from global warming. Overall, The 2015 George Wright Society Conference was such a wonderful learning experience and I am so thankful I got the opportunity to attend.