

# Voices from Durban:

## Reflections on the 2003 World Parks Congress

*[Ed. note: Quite a few GWS members attended the Fifth World Parks Congress (WPC) in Durban, South Africa, which was hosted by IUCN–The World Conservation Union in September 2003. This is the world’s largest conference on protected areas, and is held once every ten years. The theme of this Congress, “Benefits Beyond Boundaries,” emphasized IUCN’s interest in highlighting the contributions protected areas can make to people’s well-being in everyday life, not just when they are visiting parks. The WPC had an ambitious schedule of meetings, press events, festival activities, and field trips. The four main products were: (1) the Durban Accord, a consensus statement on the values and principles undergirding protected areas; (2) a set of recommendations, which, in many countries, are regarded as guidelines for protected area policy; (3) a ten-point action plan, with targeted outcomes from the international to the local level; and (4) a communiqué to the next meeting of the signatories to the Convention on Biological Diversity, which is emerging as the major international treaty affecting protected natural areas. For a summary of the Congress, go to [www.iucn.org/themes/wcpa/wpc2003/](http://www.iucn.org/themes/wcpa/wpc2003/).*

*Here, we present a compilation of brief personal observations from GWS members who were there. We hope you’ll take a few minutes to listen to these “Voices from Durban.”]*



### **“I Feel Roots Here”**

**Jessica Brown**  
*QLF/Atlantic Center for the Environment*

A particularly exciting aspect of the Congress was that broad recognition—and a good deal of discussion time—was given to the important role of communities in creating and managing protected areas. While this subject has been explored in past Congresses, in Durban it was on the agenda as never before, integrated into the workshop streams and addressed in many plenary discussions and in Congress products such as the recommendations and Durban Accord.

Rather than a side topic, the role of indigenous and local communities has become part of the mainstream debate on protected areas and their future. This is a significant development.

Of course, this integration came about largely by design, thanks to the vision of the WPC steering committee and the efforts of several working groups. “Communities and Equity” was a cross-cutting theme of the Congress, and the theme drew on experience from all over the world. For well over a year members of the core group of TILCEPA (the Theme on Indigenous and Local Communities, Equity, and Protected Areas, an IUCN working group) had worked together to ensure that the theme would be well integrated into the Congress plenary program and seven workshop streams. I served as a liaison with Stream 1,

“Linkages in the Landscape and Seascape,” where sessions addressing the cross-cutting theme included a panel on “The Role of Communities in Sustaining Linkages in the Landscape,” and multi-session workshops on “Human-Wildlife Coexistence” and “Protecting Landscapes and Seascapes.”

The participation of so many community leaders greatly enriched the Congress as a whole and our discussions. For me the workshops were the heart of the Congress, and I was fortunate to be involved in several sessions that drew on the experience of indigenous and local leaders. Our panel on the first day featured several case-studies by mobile peoples from diverse regions, describing how they practice conservation in the landscapes they inhabit. This is a fresh perspective for many of us, requiring a new way of

looking at communities and conservation. Disappointingly, a group of women we had invited from a community group in Kosi Bay, South Africa, to share their story of co-managing marine and coastal resources in a protected area could not participate in the panel because they lacked the photo IDs necessary for entry into the Convention Center. They had planned to follow their case study presentation with singing in traditional style. But we heard stories from other community leaders, including representatives of the Huaorani Nation in Amazonian Ecuador, and pastoralist communities in western India. There were many nomadic and pastoralist community leaders at the Congress, giving the term “mobile peoples” a new meaning as they traveled from remote communities to the Congress site! Favorite images include



Members of the “Mussel Monitoring Team” at St. Lucia Wetlands Park explain their activities to a field trip group. The team monitors the local mussel harvest, working with people in the community to manage the harvest and reseed the mussel beds. *Photo courtesy of Nora Mitchell, University of Vermont.*

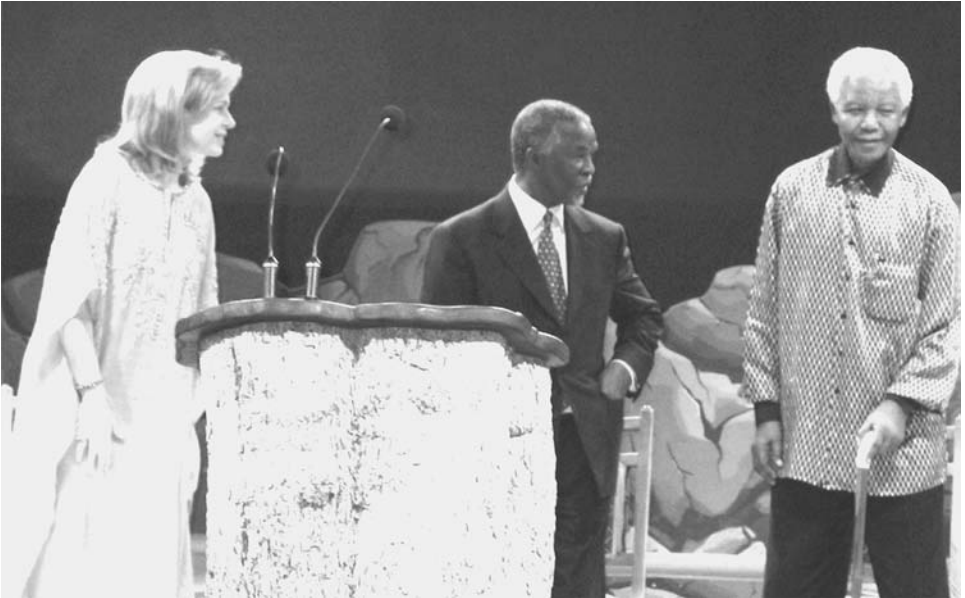
the stately Masai in traditional dress (who I frequently saw talking on his mobile phone—yet another twist on that term), and “Uncle Sayyad” Soltani, representing the Qashqai Turkic Nomadic Confederation of Tribes (Iran), who spoke none of the three official languages of the Congress but always greeted one most eloquently, touching his hand to his heart and offering a beautiful smile.

A surprising part of my experience at the Congress was the sense of community I felt there, this despite the large number of people participating, and the cavernous feel of the Convention Center! One reason was that many of us had spent time together in preparation for our contributions to the Congress. Advance meetings, like the ones held by the Protected Landscapes Task Force (PLTF) in the U.K. in late 2001, and by the TILCEPA core group in India earlier this year, helped us to work together more effectively across the distance of geography and culture. Once in Durban, there was a good deal of space for many different communities of interest to come together, whether through formalized task forces and working groups, or *ad hoc* meetings being held in places like the Community Park, or countless side meetings. I was delighted to see the PLTF energized by Durban, and to watch new working groups emerge from the Congress, focusing on topics such as Human–Wildlife Coexistence and Islands and Coastal Areas, all drawing on members with diverse experience from many different countries.

An anecdote from our workshop on Protecting Landscapes and Seascapes captures this sense of community, illustrating how people from diverse backgrounds can quickly learn how to solve problems together—at least small ones. The workshop,

which I co-chaired with Nora Mitchell of the United States and Bob Wishitemi of Kenya, stretched over two days, and had a core of some 30 or 40 participants who came to all three sessions, joined by others who came for one of the sessions. Due to poor acoustics in the workshop rooms, we had been asked not to applaud after presentations. The participants spontaneously devised a novel way of expressing their appreciation, throwing their hands up in and giving a fluttering sort of wave (with variations including an emphatic thumbs up gesture favored by a delegate from Ireland). Everyone beamed as they looked around the room to “hear” the applause. Apparently other workshop groups independently had arrived at the same solution. When I returned home I learned that American Sign Language (ASL) uses this wave gesture to indicate applause.

Finally, a particularly exciting aspect of the Congress for my husband, Brent Mitchell, and me was the active participation of some 20 alumni of QLF’s international fellowship programs, many of whom we had nominated to participate in the Congress. Taking advantage of this rare opportunity to bring together so many of our international alumni and partners, QLF hosted an alumni reunion dinner during the WPC, which brought together past Fellows from Latin America, the Caribbean, and Central Europe. The atmosphere was convivial, as past Fellows reconnected with each other after many years, while meeting colleagues from other regions for the first time. There were animated conversations along the length of the table, some toasts at the end, and a good deal of laughter. Even in the short evening together people started to connect in the way we see at our longer workshops. As an alumnus from Belize said, “I feel roots here.”



Queen Noor of Jordan, current South African President Thabo Mbeki, and former South African President Nelson Mandela opened the Congress. *Photo courtesy of Gary Tabor, Wilburforce Foundation.*

## **Parks, Poverty, and the Conservation of Biodiversity**

**Tom Cobb**

*Minnewaska State Park Preserve &  
Palisades Interstate Park*

While park managers in the United States and other industrialized nations are variously coping with acid rain and smog, encroachment of second-home developments, an array of motorized recreational vehicles, and a host of other environmental stresses of affluence on the scenic and ecological integrity of our state and national parks, our counterparts in less-developed countries of the world are being called upon to help confront a vastly different, yet difficult and immediate set of social and economic conditions that arise from poverty. These entail people with a low standard of living

who are generally characterized as residents of destitute rural villages seeking security and equity in the distribution and use of timber, water, land, and wildlife resources from parks or other types of protected areas in close proximity to their homes.

In the course of identifying this issue at the opening ceremony of the World Parks Congress in Durban, South African President Thabo Mbeki emphasized that people living near parks must be able to see how they benefit from protection policies for conservation campaigns to work. "Mere exhortations to poor people to value and respect national parks will not succeed," he said. "It is critically important that alternative means of livelihood be found for the poor of the world, so when driven by hunger and underdevelopment, they are not forced to act in a manner that undermines the global effort to protect these ecosystems."

The notion that protected areas can

and should contribute to poverty reduction and sustainable development was addressed at the Congress by a working group concerned with building broader support for conservation. Under the lead of IUCN's Chief Scientist, Jeff McNeely, this group came up with recommendations that would facilitate effective involvement of the poor in planning and decision-making processes, and called upon governmental and non-governmental organizations alike to adopt several principles for advancing conservation and sustainable development in impoverished areas. The requirement that "no net loss" of biodiversity must be balanced with "no net impact" on the livelihoods of the poor was the first of these principles. Another was that "Biodiversity must be recognized and managed to support local livelihoods as well as a global public good."

The example of the Makuleke people in South Africa was seen as a model for site-level design and management, as well as for enhancing job opportunities and empowerment of the poor. Driven from their ancestral lands in Kruger National Park by the former apartheid regime in 1969, ownership of 100 square miles was reinstated in 1998 after negotiations with South Africa's new government. Instead of returning, however, the 15,000 Makuleke opted to remain in their villages outside the national park, and to establish leaseholds in the form of safari lodges to be built and largely staffed by the Makuleke. They would also receive a share of the profits of this ecotourism venture, and in 30 years gain complete ownership.

Although this is but one example, and a brief outline of an initiative to help alleviate poverty and promote sustainable development affecting one of South Africa's premier tourist destinations, as well as one of Africa's

greatest wildlife preserves, it serves to demonstrate the type of linkages between parks, poverty, and biodiversity conservation that resource managers and conservation biologists throughout the world should become more adept at making. It also suggests another rationale for nature conservation and resource management agencies to extend their capacity to undertake socially responsible conservation onto the scale of the larger landscape of which our parklands are not separate from, but very much a part.

## Place-based Ocean Conservation Has Arrived

Gary E. Davis  
*Ocean Programs,  
U.S. National Park Service*

Marine issues emerged throughout the World Park Congress program. That's the good news. The bad news was that conservation in the ocean lags a hundred years behind land conservation.

Remoteness and apparent isolation no longer protect ocean parks. Recent advances in marine transportation technology have dramatically accelerated public access to once remote ocean conservation sites. New "ground effect" vehicles now provide day-use access to the entire 2,000-km-long Great Barrier Reef Marine Park (Australia). When it was established in 1975, the speed (8-10 knot) and capacity of vessels limited day use to small groups near major ports. Today, ultra-fast (100-200 knot) ground-effect vehicles departing from the same ports provide large groups daily access to 95% of the park. While providing wonderful opportunities to connect people to coral reef environ-

ments, this new technology requires that stewardship strategies explicitly protect resources. Traditional reliance on remoteness for passive “protection” no longer works.

The newly human-dominated Earth is changing faster and in ways never seen before. Consequently, park managers must plan strategically, while maintaining daily operations. The environment, people, and institutions need new and greater capacities to cope with these changes or they will lose touch with their heritage and greatly diminish options of future generations. In that light, the concept of “ecological integrity” needs to be added to “biodiversity” and “species of concern” as a goal of stewardship. Ecosystem resilience is an emergent property of systems with high ecological integrity. It is a symptom of healthy ecosystems and a characteristic, or an outcome, of successful conservation management.

Ocean conservation is in crisis. Triage requires treating symptoms of environmental stress, such as coral bleaching, and acting to prevent extirpation and extinction as a tactical matter. People must also simultaneously increase understanding of ecosystems to deal strategically with underlying causes of such stress and subsequent changes recognized as “unhealthy,” such as loss of integrity and resilience. Since so many environmental stresses operate at global scales, the resolution of these stresses requires a global network or system of protected areas to resolve the issues. It is the only way to learn how these systems work and how they will respond to future environmental stresses.

Parks provide societies with common ground that can help to resolve differences generated by “us and them” perceptions of environmental issues. At the Congress, we heard how transfrontier parks in Africa have

helped defuse border disputes and bring nations together by overcoming objections of military, agricultural, immigration, and health concerns. *The Full Value of Parks*, a Rowman & Littlefield book launched at the Congress, explores these intangible values of parks. Presentations and discussions at the Congress showed a remarkable commonality of issues among highly diverse parks, park systems, and cultures, as reflected by the program streams (Management Effectiveness, Capacity, Finance, and Network / System Design). Paradoxically, the Congress also revealed a wide range of different cultural and political perceptions of national park values among nations. An apparent divide, driven by social and economic factors such as poverty, seems to separate heritage and legacy values from values of parks as local economic engines. In some places, parks that do not generate net income (profit) may be judged unworthy of preservation and receive inadequate resources to assure protection of heritage and legacy values. To assure that all park values are protected, adequacy of protected area budgets needs to be grounded in measures of performance, such as trends in biodiversity, visitor satisfaction, and ecosystem integrity, and scaled to local (national) standards as established by professional third parties to assure objectivity and to engender trust.

While an inherently inefficient medium of exchange, the Congress may be the best way to share observations, experiences, and analyses of common issues and concerns. It surely invigorated participants with a passion for caring for special places by seeing and hearing how many others are similarly engaged for the common good.

## Listening to Africa

David Harmon

*George Wright Society*

As several others in this compilation of reflections on the Congress mention, there were something like 3,000 voices to be heard in Durban—voices from every corner of the world, representing almost every conceivable viewpoint on parks and protected areas. I spent much of my time in South Africa just listening. Here is a little of what I heard.

I heard Nelson Mandela open the Congress with what was, to my mind, a standard political speech. But that didn't matter. His voice was magnificent—deep and with a touch of gravel,

the vowels sonorous and rounded—and his presence electrifying. He is a person of immense moral authority, and it added depth to all the subsequent deliberations just by his having been at the opening ceremony.

I heard one of Mandela's fellow citizens, a Zulu woman living near the Hluhluwe–Imfolozi Park, tell us how selling crafts at a specially designed sales center in the game reserve made a big difference to the income of her family—an excellent example of a protected area contributing to “community upliftment,” as our hosts at the Ezemvelo KwaZulu Wildlife agency put it.

I heard Ian Player, a legendary figure in African conservation and the founder of the wilderness movement in South Africa, after walking slowly to the podium with the aid of a cane, turn



San Rock art depicting an eland hunt at Game Pass Shelter, uKhahlamba–Drakensberg World Heritage Site. The San (also known as Bushmen) are the aboriginal inhabitants of southern Africa. Photo courtesy of Mervyn Gans, *The Mountain Club of South Africa*.

to us and say, “We must dispel the nonsense that wilderness is against people. Wilderness does not lock people out. It unlocks the human spirit.”

In contrast, I heard a professor from the social sciences declare, provocatively, that “National park agencies are too often predatory on local communities of people.”

In a major plenary session, I heard the CEO of one of the largest mining companies in the world say—and he was claiming this as a significant achievement—that many of the world’s biggest mining companies are going to demonstrate their commitment to parks and the environment by voluntarily refraining from mining inside of World Heritage Sites. Then I heard the person next to me mutter, “Pathetic, absolutely pathetic.” She was right.

In the halls or in small-group meetings or out in the city I heard people speaking Russian, Catalan, Xhosa, French, Mandarin Chinese, Dene, Swedish, San, German, Afrikaans, Spanish, Swahili ... and many more languages I couldn’t even begin to recognize.

I heard numerous indigenous people embrace protected areas *if* they respect their culture and concerns. I also heard several others, speaking with complete conviction, predict an impending downfall for Western culture and an end to 500 years of domination by Europeans and North Americans—an apocalyptic payback from the Earth for hubris and willful ignorance—and a resurgence of indigenous power.

On three occasions, I heard beautiful community singing by (materially) poor rural Africans who came out to greet us as honored visitors during field trips. I heard them ask us to please help them find more money for their local community conservation projects. I heard several of them tell

us, matter-of-factly, about the HIV/AIDS epidemic that threatened their communities’ existence.

Last but not least, I heard the eerie call of wild helmeted guineafowl as day broke across the lodge we were staying at in Hluhluwe—a reminder of an even more primal set of voices, voices that still can be heard, against all odds, in the Africa of the 21st century.

## Joining Hands in New Partnerships

Nora Mitchell  
Adjunct Faculty,  
University of Vermont

*“Only through partnerships can protected areas be made relevant to society and part of a sustainable future.... We must ensure that national parks are transformed—we need to break with traditional thinking, catalyze a new vision, and to join hands in new partnerships.”* — Nelson Mandela

With these words, Nelson Mandela opened the Congress, challenging us to craft a new conservation, responsive to our current challenges with an inspiring vision for the future. The deliberations at the conference answered this challenge and the “Durban Accord” describes a new paradigm for protected areas—one that is inclusive of all stakeholders, links protected areas in a broader landscape, and integrates conservation with sustainable development in an equitable way.

South Africa provided a perfect venue for these deliberations. Here in the decade after Mandela’s election, parks have become a cornerstone for reconciliation and a public symbol of access and the re-integration of socie-



ty. The vision of South African National Parks is “To be the pride and joy of all South Africans” and the mission statement for Cape Peninsula National Park is simply and eloquently, “A park for all, forever.” The natural and cultural resources of their park system are truly outstanding. We visited the fynbos on Table Mountain and the Cape Peninsula, one of the world’s most diverse ecosystems, and were astonished by close encounters with penguins, giraffes, hippos, wildebeests, springboks, waterbucks, and rhinos in Greater St. Lucia Wetland Park, a World Heritage Site, and at Imfolozi Reserve. On the conference tours, we were introduced to people in the local communities who are working with the park on restoration of forest ecosystems and sustainable economic initiatives such as traditional crafts, mussel harvesting, and small-scale ecotourism. This demonstrated on the ground a comment in the opening plenary by South Africa’s President, Thabo Mbeki: “[W]e need to protect natural ecosystems and ensure sustainable livelihoods ... it’s key to combine environmental and social goals.” While in Cape Town, Greg Moore (executive director of Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy) and I visited several of the townships with Xola Mkefe, a conservationist and educator who grew up there and has dedicated his career to bringing conservation home. We visited a wetland area that had been restored by the township communities through his leadership and now serves as a park and educational resource for the surrounding neighborhoods.

This was the most diverse conference I have ever attended—over 2,700 people from 154 countries—coming from major urban centers and small villages, and every environment in between. I co-chaired a series of workshops on protected landscapes and

seascapes (IUCN Category V) with colleagues Jessica Brown (QLF/Atlantic Center for the Environment, USA) and Bob Wishitemi (Moi University, Kenya), designed to explore linkages with the larger landscape and with neighboring communities. In these sessions and others at the conference, I was inspired to see the commitment, the innovation and quality of work, as well as the progress being made by so many people in so many parts of the world, many in very difficult circumstances. Many speakers reminded us that over half the world’s population now lives in urban areas. So it was appropriate that, for the first time, the World Parks Congress included a series of workshops on urban parks. This track generated a great deal of enthusiasm and participants from San Francisco, Cape Town, Sydney, Rio, and other cities with national parks agreed to form a network to share experience in ways to effectively reach the increasing numbers of urban dwellers and engage them in conservation. Her Majesty Queen Noor of Jordan reminded us of our fragile, war-torn world and the contribution that protected areas and collaborative conservation can make: “[T]here is an important role for transboundary protected areas in promoting peace and security ... and I therefore urge increased international cooperation.” Youth delegates from Africa provided hope for the future through their comments: “Protected areas are sacred places important for life on earth” and “African youth lack not interest, but opportunities to be involved [with protected areas].” Participating in this Congress reconnected me to a vision of an international community working together for a sustainable world—and I was privileged to be part of it.

## Looking Beyond Our Own Lifetimes

Peter Newman  
*Colorado State University*

As a kid, I grew up hearing stories of Africa and living in a house filled with African masks—constant reminders of my father's Peace Corps experience in West Africa in 1963. My experience at the World Parks Congress in South Africa forty years later brought together my father's legacy in an adventure of my own.

The World Parks Congress gathered over 2,500 people from 154 countries with a single mission of working toward something better. I mingled with people in all forms of cultural dress, speaking languages I had never heard, and tasted indigenous African food. These interactions emphasize the importance of cross-cultural exchanges of ideas, understanding, and friendships, in a world where these concepts seem foreign in daily news bulletins.

Outside the protective walls of the Congress lay a harsh reality. South Africa is a country barely a decade removed from apartheid, ravaged by HIV/AIDS, yet is rich in human spirit. I felt the racial tensions among the diverse indigenous, Indian, and Afrikaner populations. The statistics on HIV/AIDS are staggering. In the region we visited, there is a 40% infection rate. We were told that in KwaZulu-Natal Province, natural resource leaders are training twice as many students in protected areas management due to the high HIV mortality rate. Protected area managers must even deal with people poaching timber to build coffins.

The people of South Africa are

some of the most beautiful I have met. Music and dance are an integral part of life. People such as Hugh Masekela graced the Congress and played tunes of hope and empowerment. His music infuses incredible passion and African rhythms with remnants of American jazz.

But like Masekela's music, the American park idea has been infused into the context and landscape of South Africa, and it has morphed, in many cases, to deal with external pressures such as population growth, cultural strife, and equity issues. Many of my students from Colorado asked, "How do we even talk about the development of protected areas in the context of disease, inequality, poverty?" This question was a part of most conversations at the Congress. What I truly believe is that protected areas are a necessity in any context. Basic conservation biology teaches the need for core areas to protect our wild fabric. We must also look beyond our own lifetime and believe that we can restore and re-wild areas stressed by current conditions. In establishing protected areas, we create reservoirs of core ecological values as well as core social values that help sustain the cultural and ecological landscapes that heal, teach, and provide nourishment for the human spirit.

## Personal Connections and Politics in Durban

David Ostergren  
*Center for Environmental  
Sciences and Education,  
Northern Arizona University*

The Vth World Parks Congress (WPC) was an incredible opportunity to participate in and (from political scientist's perspective) watch politics

set a protected area agenda. My primary responsibility was to organize a three-day workshop titled "Building Political Support." This workshop was designed to identify particular strategies to build the political support for protected areas. As I sat in my sub-session and watched the ebb and flow of audience participation, several speakers started to repeat an observation: "Why aren't there more people in this session?" And I thought to myself, "Why didn't many of the speakers stay for more than 2-3 sessions?" In many cases it was because rather than devising strategies for creating political support, they were out creating political support.

The WPC was an extraordinary example of multiple agendas being promoted simultaneously. The overall intention of the Congress was to forward the cause of protected areas throughout the world, but, as any observer would agree, that means very different things to such a wonderfully diverse gathering. For example, humans are only welcome as visitors in the wilderness areas of many countries, while wilderness (i.e., a wild or natural area) is "home" and a source of sustenance in many other countries. Preserving the biodiversity of a park may include very specific measures to protect a species, while forwarding global biodiversity may require influencing governments. These issues and many more emerged and re-emerged as forty-plus sub-streams held three days of talks refining recommendations to the Durban Accord.

I am low on the food chain of people who influence international policy (any policy for that matter) so I listened for a *big*, take-home message. I believe the big message is that indigenous and mobile peoples are a permanent part of the political landscape and will be part of many, if not all, protected area policies and decisions in

the future. In addition, all protected area neighbors will be part and parcel to many more plans and practices in the coming years. As plenary speaker Nelson Mandela indicated, restricting economic activity or the distribution of protected area benefits to a few people will not serve South Africa (nor any nation) in the long run. At first such rhetoric may be disquieting to those who place a premium on biodiversity values or wilderness characteristics (e.g., pristine and untrammelled landscapes, solitude). However, as an optimist, I foresee a opportunity. Regardless of how any culture *eventually* changes and adopts the practices of the global socioeconomic forces, indigenous and mobile peoples resist the *imposition* of an "outside" culture upon their own. That is, they resist the forces of global/Western/capitalist cultural change washing over those values and traditions deemed central to their identity. Similarly, protected areas resist the imposition of monoculture crops, development, exotics, and the myriad threats that challenge ecological integrity. In the face of larger encroaching forces, both humans and nature stand to lose that which makes them unique.

My impression is that indigenous and mobile peoples are not an emerging entity on the political landscape, but an emerged entity. The many entities that constitute IUCN will incorporate the humans who most intimately live with the consequences of protected area decisions. I also believe that the indigenous and mobile peoples of the world will find advocates and allies among the many interests that support protected natural areas for nonhuman species. Similarly, those who are advocates of preserving biodiversity and feel that biodiversity must be saved *from* human demands will find that the two political entities share much in common.



Table Mountain and other sections of Cape Peninsula National Park. *Photo courtesy of Nora Mitchell, University of Vermont.*

Participants at the WPC were doing politics. Politics is about power and who gets to share in the decision-making process. The face of protected area leadership is changing. When the director general of IUCN awarded the Youth Conservation Award he stated (and I paraphrase) that the future of protected areas stands before you (he spoke to us the audience). The two youths before us were young black women from Africa. The majority at many head tables were not young black women from Africa (or young people from South Asia, Southeast Asia, South America, or non-Western nations). The future looks different. Regardless of their origin, the people who will be directing future protected area policy will have very different worldviews than the decision-makers of the 20th century. As we devise new political strategies (as we do politics),

the challenges will demand high levels of dedication and energy for several more decades. The WPC was an excellent opportunity to witness and participate in the continuing struggle to maintain and preserve the remaining biodiverse areas and unique cultures throughout the world.

### **Balancing Sustainable Development and Ecological Values**

**David J. Parsons**

*Aldo Leopold*

*Wilderness Research Institute /*

*George Wright Society*

*Board Member*

I found the Vth World Parks Congress in Durban, South Africa, to

be a vivid reminder of the differences in conservation programs and priorities between the United States and the rest of the world. I have the strong feeling that most U.S. land managers are simply unaware of much of what goes on outside of our boundaries. I was humbled by the magnitude of the issues faced and the interest, sincerity, and dedication of nongovernmental organization (NGO) and government scientists and conservationists I met from such diverse places as Bhutan, Ecuador, Nepal, Pakistan, Trinidad and Tobago, and Uganda. From the importance placed on the definitions of IUCN protected area categories (virtually unrecognized by the U.S. land management agencies), to the emphasis on local community involvement in park management, to the struggles to make resource protection meaningful in the face of threats posed by extractive industries and even war, I found the international conservation movement to be largely disconnected from the issues that drive national park and forest managers in the U.S.

The dominant themes I heard at the Congress focused on the interface between science, resources management, and politics. There was abundant discussion about the number and size of protected areas around the world (generally attributed to now be as much as 10–12% of the Earth's surface), and the Congress included announcements of major new park designations in Brazil, Gabon, and Madagascar. But there was generally too little discussion of the distribution and effectiveness of existing protected areas. Elaborate studies of the importance and challenges of preserving biodiversity, including establishment of transfrontier protected areas and transnational corridors (e.g., the Meso-American biological corridor in Central America), were balanced by abundant discussion of sustainable

development and community involvement. These discussions were often heated, with ecologists claiming that the emphasis on sustainable development (often explained as essential to attract the funds necessary to support large conservation projects) has compromised some of the world's most valued natural resources (e.g., there was passionate debate over the negative impacts of large mining operations on the edges of tiger reserves in India). In addition, numerous sessions focused on issues related to cultural values and local community involvement, including the needs and rights of indigenous populations. Unfortunately, I found the lack of awareness (or sympathy) of some indigenous representatives to the biodiversity values that are critical to so many protected areas posed significant obstacles to the discussions needed to bring these diverse interests together.

Many in the United States are unaware of the extent to which international conservation efforts are dominated by NGOs, including Conservation International, the Wildlife Conservation Society, the World Wildlife Fund, Plant Conservation International, The Nature Conservancy, and the Global Environment Facility. In Durban, the conservation interests of these organizations were often pitted against the reality of needing to attract the funding necessary to provide even minimal protection for established protected areas. This, no doubt, helps to explain the visible, although controversial, role at the Congress accorded to multinational extractive industries (e.g., Shell International, British Petroleum, and the International Council on Metals and Minerals were featured in a full plenary session).

Based on what I heard in Durban, it is my distinct impression that *the* major international conservation

issues of the coming decade will focus around the inevitable conflicts and compromises needed to balance (1) biodiversity needs with sustainable development interests, and (2) cultural values and the needs of local communities with ecological preservation. There was clearly a concern among many delegates that the growing influence of sustainable development and local uses threatens to over-ride the more traditional ecological values associated with many protected areas.

Given my special interest in wilderness (IUCN category 1b), I was particularly pleased to see the acceptance of a new IUCN Wilderness Task Force (WTF) under the auspices of the World Commission on Protected Areas. The WTF (<http://wtf.wild.org>) sponsored several organizational meetings as well as selected presentations during the Congress. Since wilderness has often been perceived as a largely Western construct, IUCN's acceptance of the wilderness concept is significant. It was also encouraging to hear commitments were made from representatives from the U.S. National Park Service, the U.S. Forest Service, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to support WTF's efforts to organize the 8th World Wilderness Congress, scheduled for September 2005, in Anchorage, Alaska.

The serious opportunities for information exchange and deliberations on the challenges and trade-offs facing the future of protected areas that dominated the Congress were gratefully broken by a series of cultural events (music, dance, food, and crafts) as well as opportunities to escape the confining atmosphere of Durban (a city of 2.5 million that was unsafe to wander about) on a variety of field trips. These provided valuable opportunities to visit the magnificent parks of KwaZulu-Natal as well as meet and mix with colleagues from

around the world (154 countries were represented among the over 3,000 participants). Despite its social challenges, South Africa provides a great role model for the world's efforts to protect its natural heritage.

## A Human Ecosystem of Caring

**John Reynolds**  
*George Wright Society*  
*Board Member*

How to describe the World Parks Congress in Durban?

Optimism. There cannot help but be a pervasive feeling of optimism left after such a gathering. Park and protected area people from all over the world absolutely dedicated to preserving, protecting, and sharing the places and ecosystems that are so dear to them. One of the greatest things about the conference was meeting these people in settings of all kinds, and connecting their love of these places to my love, now not just of the places that I know but to their places as well. Forming a human ecosystem of caring, understanding, awe and commitment that entwines with that of nature.

As an example, I met a Saudi Arabian wildlife biologist. I was in Saudi Arabia in 1982. He did not know of the park we had proposed ... and I was awed to know that there is now a corps of wildlife biologists there that did not exist then! Optimism. Positive steps forward. An increasing cadre of professionals dedicated to protected areas and professionalism in the name of conservation, growing worldwide.

Relationships. More than partnerships. Intellectual relationships formed magically every day and evening of the conference. The educa-

tional sessions spewed out thoughtful, exciting things being done here, there, everywhere. People, quietly but appropriately proud of their achievements, shared them ... and shared their quest for the next step, the next evolutionary mutation of ideas to apply to accomplish the goals of conservation, most often in concert with others. Relationships. Begun and nurtured also in the hallways in electric conversations and exchanges of business cards. Eyebrows raising and inflections changing as realization that a new connection has just been made ... intellectually, politically, educationally ... just by listening and questing. New relationships, all in the spirit of saving and sharing our natural birthright in this world.

Intellect. What a pleasure to be surrounded by intellect that pours into you! From around the world, intellect

brought together to share, to quest for new beginnings and new approaches. Learning and teaching, all taking place virtually spontaneously, both in sessions and out. Science, politics, educational outreach, sacredness, culture, a kind of nearly automatic consilience trying to take place. A wholeness working to form from the variety of specific examples available.

Youth. A pervading theme was for conservation to constantly and seriously include youth, both educationally and as they grow in our professions. It is they who will carry on. The trust that they not only can, but will, with passion and distinction, was deeply apparent Durban.

Oneness. Bobbie (my wife) left with a feeling of oneness with the others in this world who care enough to devote their lives, their passion, their minds, their souls to this most pre-



Congress workshop on "Indigenous Mobile People." Photo courtesy of Nora Mitchell, University of Vermont.

cious place in whose ecosystems we live.

## Protecting and Respecting the Protectors

**Rick Smith**

*International Ranger Federation /  
George Wright Society Board  
Member*

Prior to my trip to Durban, South Africa, to attend the Fifth World Parks Congress, a meeting held every ten years, as a representative of the International Ranger Federation (IRF), I was concerned about three issues about which the rangers of the world were worried. The first of these is personal safety and security. The incidence of rangers and their families threatened, attacked, or killed in the world's protected areas is alarming. The conservation community must find a way to protect the protectors. The second is that of training and professional development. In many countries, the rangers are at the absolute bottom of the food chain when it comes to training. This is curious as these are the employees who are the ears and eyes of park management. They are important links in the inventory and monitoring programs. They have the most intimate contacts with people living in and near our protected areas. They are our ambassadors to the visiting public and our first responders to emergencies and other special incidents. Yet, they have been virtually ignored in many parts of the world. Finally, I was concerned about the conditions under which many protected area agencies ask their rangers to live and work—poor housing, unsanitary conditions, little or no

equipment, minimal salaries, and little public support.

What particularly troubled me is that not one of these issues was addressed in the draft recommendations posted on IUCN's website prior to the Congress. I knew that if the IRF were to ask the delegates to modify the recommendations to address our concerns, it would have to be done during the Congress itself. As many George Wright Society members know from our own conference, an individual's opportunity to shape the outcome of a conference is rather small. Imagine a conference the size of the Fifth World Parks Congress—2,500 delegates, three times the size of our last meeting in San Diego. Then, add three official languages and who knows how many other regional or local languages, and you have some idea of the complexity of IRF's task.

Luckily, 39 ranger/delegates were able to attend the Congress in support of IRF goals and objectives. These people worked night and day, lobbying delegates, staffing the IRF booth in the exhibition hall, and presenting papers during workshop and plenary sessions. The response of our fellow delegates was heartwarming. They listened, and more importantly, they acted. As one small example of what they did, I would like to cite a part of recommendation 5.2 from the Congress: The delegates recommend that those charged with managing protected areas *"provide all protected areas staff (in particular rangers, wardens and forest guards, who face hardships and threats in carrying out their jobs) with adequate living, working, health and safety and security conditions by providing management support, appropriate equipment and training...."*

GWS members ought to be happy with this outcome. In much of the world, rangers provide the logistical



and staffing support for on-going research projects in protected areas. If they are better trained and equipped, they will be able to support researchers more effectively and efficiently. Moreover, since rangers have almost daily contact with the resources we preserve and protect, they can be valuable allies in our monitoring programs. They will be the first to detect changes in resources or in visitor or local community behavior. Researchers and resources managers need well-trained rangers. If agency managers implement the recommendations of the Fifth World Parks Congress, the science and research community will soon have them.

## From Denali to Durban

Mike Tranel

*Denali National Park and Preserve*

Durban, South Africa, is about halfway around the world from Denali National Park and Preserve, Alaska. It would be difficult to find a more distant point in the inhabited world. But when it came to discussions about managing protected areas, I was struck by the similarities as much as by the differences. A few examples: the importance of involving local and indigenous peoples in protected area planning and management, the need to strengthen partnerships, and the challenges in protecting ecological integrity in a rapidly changing world.

I found the World Parks Congress to be fascinating and the best conference I've ever attended. I participated in the workshop stream on "Building Broader Support for Protected Areas" and presented a session on resolving conflicts involving competing values

in parks and protected areas. Equally educational, if not more so, were the conversations I had with South African park managers in particular and the opportunity to see some of the country's best protected areas, such as the uKhahlamba-Drakensberg Park, a World Heritage Site. The field trip to Hluhluwe-Imfolozi Park gave us the opportunity to experience the richness of the Zulu culture. After these field trips and more travel after the conference, my major impressions of South Africa were the diversity of the country, the incredible disparity in wealth, and the richness of its culture.

These characteristics are inextricably linked with South Africa's turbulent history. Yet despite serious and immediate problems, the outlook now is one of hope. This emerged many times, such as at the end of the special ceremony on the sacred dimension of protected areas at the Congress, and at the event called "Africa Night."

A couple of the other delegates and I were checking with some of the local employees at the Congress about what was in store for "Africa Night." They informed us that Hugh Masekela would be playing, which for them meant an event not to be missed. I didn't immediately confess to my lack of knowledge of Hugh Masekela's music, but my new South African friends were happy to fill me in that evening on the "story behind the music."

When "Bro' Hugh" and his band took the stage that evening, we were given a demonstration of some of South Africa's contributions to the music world in the past few decades. I wondered how many others in the audience knew who he was and of his background: traveling outside his native country, because of apartheid, to further his musical career, essentially being a "musician in exile."

Similarly, on the other side of the world in Denali National Park and

Preserve, the context and the “story behind the scenery” is what truly gives it meaning. While we have our share of challenging issues, we don’t have to worry about removing a military fence, as park managers do in Kruger National Park in South Africa. In fact, we don’t have fences at all, as do the African protected areas, and we don’t need them to protect the integrity of a natural ecosystem.

It is equally gratifying to see hope for Africa’s best—but also most threatened—protected areas as to know that our American national park sites stand out among the best in the world.

**Benefits Beyond  
Boundaries:  
Thoughts from the WPC**

**George N. Wallace**  
*Center for Protected Area  
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Among the unforgettable images of Africa and the World Parks Congress (WPC) was our field trip to the savannah woodlands of Hluhluwe–Imfolozi Park and nearby villages. The park is managed by Ezemvelo KwaZulu Wildlife (whose acronym, KZN, refers to its being the nature conservation service of KwaZulu–Natal province) and has an impressive array of “charismatic megafauna.” We saw giraffes gliding gracefully above the bush, impalas, nyalalas, kudus, wildebeest, and zebras herded up on the grasslands. Then, we came on a pride of lions—with bellies full of the aforementioned herbivores—basking lazily on a river sandbar. One had to smile at their indolent top-of-the-food-chain posture. We also saw more than our share of black and white rhinos (the

park is Africa’s most important source for the reintroduction of both into other conservation areas and private game parks), Cape buffalo, and a huge bull elephant. Meanwhile, warthogs, hyenas, baboons, and other supporting actors added to species richness and the number of pictures snapped through half-clean bus windows. We traveled mostly on paved roads that reminded me of an over-grazed BLM allotment, arriving at one of several “camps” by late afternoon. Each had comfortable lodges (total overnight visitor capacity = 324), electricity, hot water, good food, and entertainment. We were attended to by hospitable KZN officials.

Even though humans are prey in Imfolozi, and not often allowed to get out of their vehicles or leave camp unless accompanied by armed rangers, and even though one-third of the park is managed as roadless wilderness, I never felt like I was in the wild or that it awaited me there. The reason: Imfolozi has a 10-foot-high electrified fence around its entire perimeter, and just across that fence is rural sprawl as far as the eye can see in all directions (albeit mostly traditional Zulu homes). The combination had jaundiced my view. The reasons for the fence and adjacent settlement patterns is a complex story for another day, but the current reality is that the park has become a large island of biodiversity—functional for now—but surrounded with an abrupt ecological gradient that will eventually challenge its integrity. There is no buffering from multiple-use lands or community conservation areas, no place to put a corridor that might connect to other protected areas or allow flora and fauna a chance to flow out into portions of an agricultural landscape for use by locals. Culling takes place within the park instead. Hundreds of animals are

now rounded up and sold to generate revenue for the park.

Cut to the local school where Zulu children read poetry and sang to us (a cappella) with incredibly strong, beautiful voices. They danced with tremendous energy and athleticism, portraying the well-established prowess of Zulu hunters and warriors. They wore the skins of animals that their fathers and grandfathers had traditionally taken from the Imfolozi savannahs and forests. Later, grim reality broke the spell when one of their teachers asked me, candidly, what should *we* do about the fact that 40% of them are HIV-positive. I marveled at their spirit in the face of such odds. I wondered how long that spirit could survive, now cut off from any real interaction with the landscape that gave it much of its substance for so many millennia. Although, at the urging of Ian Player and others, some school children visit the park and their mothers can sell handicrafts to (mostly white) visitors there, I wondered why the Zulu could not be allowed part of the annual culling, a pilot traditional management area, or at the very least, the ability to continue their ceremonial hunts during the year where the next generation of young people might be included. As I pondered this with my colleague Peter Newman, it occurred to us that wilderness is also in the heart and the option to experience it must be present if it is to engender our long-term support and protection.

Fortunately, our conversations with KZN managers proved that the challenges of providing “Benefits Beyond Boundaries,” maintaining genetic diversity, and landscape-scale process are on their minds as well as ours. We thank them for sharing their parks with us and wish them all success as their strategies evolve. We thank the Zulu people for opening their communities to us and openly sharing their

continuing struggle for a sustainable life. The experience was indelible.

## A Time to Celebrate, a Time to Despair

Stephen Woodley  
*Parks Canada /  
George Wright Society  
Board Member*

It was Africa Night at the Parks Congress. Three thousand delegates from every corner of the world were taking a break from a frantic run of plenary sessions, workshop streams, side events, and book launches. The host government of South Africa had provided a great venue for the delegates to relax with some of the hottest bands in the country. Like protected areas, the music had a universal appeal and the whole crowd was moved to dance. Arabs danced with Melanesians and Native Americans with Kurds. It was the whole world dancing, and like the whole World Parks Congress, it was powerful in both symbol and content.

The Congress was a time to celebrate. Over 11% of the planet's land area now has some kind of protected status. The protected areas movement is stronger, more science-based, and more pluralistic than ever before. Heady announcements for more protected areas, as well as landscape connections, were made at the Congress by both government and nongovernmental organizations. In fact, the nongovernmental organizations brought much of the innovation to the Congress, perhaps best embodied by Conservation International's announcement to raise 1 billion dollars to support their “biodiversity hot spot” initiative.

The Congress was also a time to despair. Despite the achievement of 11% of lands in protected areas, there was the strong evidence that much of the gain is on paper only. Many protected areas are designated, but not effectively managed or, in fact, protected at all. The estimated global shortfall to effectively manage existing protected areas over the next five years is 25 billion dollars. The Congress had much to say on management effectiveness and conservation finance, but the path ahead will be arduous.

Globally, while we have made advances on land, we have failed in protecting the oceans and large freshwater ecosystems. Only 1% of the oceans is protected and all of that in coastal areas. High seas protection, especially in critical biodiversity areas such as seamounts, is almost completely lacking.

Perhaps the greatest stir at the Congress was the spirited debate over the equitable sharing of benefits from protected areas, one perspective on the Congress theme of "Benefits Beyond Boundaries." In the gover-

nance stream, there were hours of discussion on the role of protected areas in poverty alleviation, gender equity, and social justice to local, aboriginal, and mobile peoples. To me, this debate illustrates how much protected areas have emerged into the mainstream. They have grown from being the passion of a few into the vital interest of many. For conservation this must be a good thing.

The Congress set a huge agenda for the future, embodied in the formal conference outputs of the Durban Accord, the Durban Action Plan, and workshop stream recommendations. Perhaps the most immediately relevant Congress output is the Message to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). At the 7th meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the convention (to be held February 2004 in Malaysia), the role of protected areas in conserving biodiversity will be a key part of the agenda. In the message to the CBD, the voices from Durban will be heard, and, I predict, will make a difference.



Men from communities near St. Lucia Wetlands Park greet field trip arrivals. They hold traditional Zulu shields. *Photo courtesy of Nora Mitchell, University of Vermont.*

