

# **Striving toward Best Practices: Innovations in International Protected Area Capacity Development**

*Eick von Ruschkowski and Thomas E. Fish, guest editors*

## **Introduction**

*Thomas E. Fish and Eick von Ruschkowski*

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF PROTECTED AREA MANAGEMENT is—amongst other things—dependent on the skills of the managers and the administrators responsible for this task. In many countries, protected area management is not something you are able to take as a degree program, but the qualifications and tools needed for this job are rather acquired by specific training courses or, especially in areas with limited financial and human resources, simply by life experience.

Capacity development does not imply that it is as simple as sending First World experts to some remote area in the Third World, in the sense of the traditional approach of technology transfer. We have learned that local approaches that reflect cultural differences may be more successful in the long run. At the very beginning of a process, capacity development means that, based on a needs assessment, the decision was made that certain capacity needs should be addressed by creating training programs in specific subject fields—governance or leadership capacity, managerial skills, marketing and communications, strategic planning, to name but a few. In protected area management, complex issues such as climate change adaptation and mitigation, the implementation of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), adapting to demographic change and declining financial resources pose many challenges to the managers today and into the future. Hence, capacity development is needed at all different educational and career stages, including those of laymen and experts, from local to global geographical levels, in industrialized as much as in developed countries, in rural and urban settings, and across a number of scientific disciplines and management contexts. Therefore, it is not at all surprising that capacity development will be an primary theme at the 6th IUCN World Parks Congress, “Parks, People, Planet: Inspiring Solutions,” which will be held in Sydney, Australia, in November 2014.

---

*The George Wright Forum*, vol. 30, no. 2, pp. 135–136 (2013).

© 2013 The George Wright Society. All rights reserved.

(No copyright is claimed for previously published material reprinted herein.)

ISSN 0732-4715. Please direct all permissions requests to [info@georgewright.org](mailto:info@georgewright.org).

With a scope as broad as that illustrated above, we are able to provide only a very limited glimpse at capacity development activities in protected area management at the interface of academia and practice worldwide. We are aware that there are a number of people active in the field, so the nucleus for this special issue was a collaborative session at this year's George Wright Society Conference in Denver. Rather than attempting to create something that would be more representative on a North American or even global level, and then fail as it can by no means be all-inclusive, we have tried to bring authors together that cover the many facets of capacity development: topic-related issues such as climate change, capacity building for protected area managers in developing countries, short special training courses geared towards university students or people in local communities, and coordinated efforts to arrive at some level of consistency for necessary competencies, content development, professionalization, and information resource accessibility.

The intention is to give those of you who are interested in the subject some ideas of what is going on where at the moment, hoping to provide some ideas of what others could start elsewhere in the future, too. You will also notice that the content of the papers varies—some are more like technical reports, others present scientific data on needs assessment or the requirements for successful capacity development measures. In some cases, the focus is more explorative as capacity development efforts are still in the early stages.

As the guest editors, we would like to thank the George Wright Society for allowing us to pursue the idea of creating this special issue. Also, we would like to thank the authors for reporting. Of course, we are very interested in your perception of this issue, so we would appreciate and welcome your feedback!

**Thomas E. Fish**, Cooperative Ecosystem Studies Units Network, US Department of the Interior, 1849 C Street NW, Room 2737, Washington DC 20240; tom\_fish@nps.gov

**Eick von Ruschkowski**, Institut für Umweltplanung (Institute for Environmental Planning), Leibniz Universität Hannover, Herrenhäuser Straße 2, 30419 Hannover, Germany; ruschkowski@umwelt.uni-hannover.de