43 Taking the pulse of collaborative management in Canada's national parks and national park reserves: voices from the field

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Introduction: voices from the field

The concept of collaborative management is increasingly gaining currency worldwide as a viable alternative for reducing conflicts and achieving more sustainable management of resources within national parks. It has been defined as "institutional arrangements whereby governments and Aboriginal (and sometimes other parties) enter into formal agreements specifying their respective rights, powers and obligations with reference to the management and allocation of resources in a particular area" (RCAP 1996). With over 25 years of experience with collaborative management, many are looking to Canada for lessons learned.

Over the years, a rich literature has emerged on the collaborative management of national parks in Canada. Topics range from parks policy and collaborative management under land claims (e.g., Fenge 1993), to particular case studies (e.g., Sneed 1997), to specific issues such as wildlife management and hunting (e.g., Morgan and Henry 1996; Morgan 1993) and economic opportunities for aboriginal people (e.g., Budke 1999). There have been attempts to provide a comprehensive overview of the many interrelated issues (e.g., Morrison 1993), and there are many allusions to parks issues in larger treatments of collaborative management (e.g., Notzke 1994; Berkes 1994, 96; Bonin 1995; Notzke 1995; RCAP 1996; Campbell 1996). However, there is no recent literature highlighting the voices and experiences of the hands-on experts in collaborative management in national parks: namely, the people working on the boards. How do they feel the process is working? What are some of the major issues they have had to contend with? What are some of the responses they have developed for dealing with these? How do they *do* collaborative management?

Purpose and methodology: taking the pulse

This paper synthesizes the findings of a project (Weitzner 2000) undertaken to fill this literature gap. Specifically, it "takes the pulse" of four experiences of collaborative management in Canada's national parks and national park reserves: Gwaii Haanas Haida Cultural Heritage Site and National Park Reserve (British Columbia), Kluane National Park (Yukon), Tuktut Nogait National Park (Northwest Territories) and Wapusk National Park (Manitoba). These were selected on the basis of their geographical locations and different sociopolitical contexts, and because they involve collaborative management subject to land claim agreements or other legally binding agreements. The paper highlights responses board members—and sometimes entire boards—have developed for dealing with several emerging issues.

The discussion is based on 21 interviews conducted with board members, park superintendents, and senior Parks Canada officials between November 1998 and December 1999. Most were conducted by telephone using an interview guide containing open-ended questions. The criteria for which board members to interview

included speaking with at least one aboriginal member, one Parks Canada representative, one non-aboriginal member (where appropriate), and the park superintendent.

This type of research is particularly important given the policy shift towards collaborative management on behalf of Parks Canada. Spurred by the settlement of land claims, the entrenchment of aboriginal rights in the Canadian Constitution, and the increasing awareness of the importance of public participation in management decisions, there has been a proliferation of collaborative management arrangements in national parks. Currently, of Canada's 39 national parks and national park reserves, 11 are being collaboratively managed, with approximately six at earlier stages of negotiation and planning. Indications are that all future national parks and national park reserves will have some type of collaborative management board in place (D. Yurick, personal communication, 1999). "Taking the pulse" of this new form of management as it evolves is critical, as it provides a point of departure for reflection, learning, and re-thinking.

Discussion of emerging issues

Emerging issues fell into four broad, inter-related categories: fundamental issues, structural issues, process issues, and issues related to outcomes. What pervaded all interviews was the challenge inherent in negotiating and adapting to new relationships and processes that attempt to bridge two very different ways of seeing, knowing, and working.

Fundamental issues: balancing power

Sovereignty, nation-to-nation relations, authority, and control. The largest issues underpinning the collaborative management arrangements were associated with different perspectives on who owns and has jurisdiction over the land, how to balance authority and control between different parties, and who should have the final say in decision-making. The central tension relates to the balance of power and negotiation of relations between the Government of Canada and First Nations, particularly in light of increasing recognition of aboriginal rights to ancestral lands through the court system, and the settlement of far-reaching land claims that recognize a form of indigenous sovereignty. How can collaborative management reconcile the sovereignty and decision-making of indigenous peoples with the current framework of government in Canada? Several different responses to deal with the sovereignty issue emerge from the cases.

- *Response #1: Agree to disagree.* According to a senior Parks Canada official, the arrangement "that has gone the farthest" in terms of achieving "co-management" is Gwaii Haanas. The response here was to enshrine both positions on ownership and jurisdiction in the agreement: in other words, to agree to disagree. A Haida board member attributes the success in negotiating the agreement to the Haida having been in control of their territory when they were approached by Parks Canada to establish a national park: "We were already in charge, and we didn't really need them.... Canada joined us in management." The Haida did not acquiesce to Park's Canada's position that the Minister is ultimately responsible for decision-making, because they had never entered into a treaty with Canada or given up their land. However, even though the agreement recognizes both the Haida and federal positions on jurisdiction, Parks Canada maintains that the Minister has the final responsibility and ultimate decision-making power, and it will adopt this position in the event of a disagreement.
- *Response #2*: *Design a strong board and process.* Other negotiations started from the assumption that the Minister has final decision-making powers, and focused instead on designing as strong a board as possible, building into the agreement a

process allowing the board a second opportunity for responding to a Minister's rejection of a recommendation.

- *Response #3: Ensure equal representation of all parties, with a limited board role for the park superintendent.* In three out of the four cases (Tuktut Nogait, Kluane, and Wapusk), superintendents have no voting powers (although in Wapusk the superintendent votes on interim management guidelines and the management plan).

In the final analysis, however, many board members stressed that although a strong agreement is in place, what collaborative management means, and how it is operationalized, is largely a question of personality, individuals, and willingness to implement the concept in practice. And in the view of several people interviewed, the willingness to embrace boards as part of a new relationship where there is shared responsibility—rather than seeing them simply as "just advisory bodies"—depends to a large extent on the attitude of the park superintendent.

World-views, values, and conservation. Reconciling different world-views, values, and ideas about what conservation means and how it should be carried out, particularly in relation to national parks, was a recurrent theme in the interviews. The very notion of setting aside a piece of "wilderness" and prohibiting human activity is foreign to many aboriginal people's beliefs about the relationship of responsibility between humans and nature, and is increasingly questioned in Western conservation circles as the idea of sustainable use gains currency (e.g., Stevens 1997; Berkes 1999).

According to one board member whose view was echoed by several others: "A park is not a normal concept; we spend a lot of time discussing what a park is when we're negotiating." Another emphasized the cultural component of parks, noting that this is just as important to First Nations as ecological integrity, but is still quite foreign and inadequately addressed by Parks Canada: "Our intention was protecting the land as a means to protect our culture."

- *Response #1: Define "national park" and use interest-based negotiation.* One park negotiation process used interest-based negotiations to come to a shared understanding of what a national park comprises, and included this definition in the agreement, along with local resource use rights.

Structural issues: balancing representation

Who is represented on the board depends on each particular context. For most northern parks, this is not such an issue, because the primary affected parties tend to be the aboriginal peoples who live near or use the park, the territorial government, and the federal government. But in more southern parks (i.e., those that are located within provinces), such as Wapusk and Gwaii Haanas, and in areas where the First Nations represent a minority, such as at Kluane, more interest groups tend to be involved.

- *Response #1: Include both First Nations and other community representatives.* At Wapusk, there is representation not only from the Fox Lake and York Factory First Nations, the provincial and federal government, but also from the town of Churchill. In fact, there are two representatives per stakeholder group, making this one of the largest national park boards in Canada (10 members).
- *Response #2: Include those people who have ownership interests in the land, and, after building a relationship among board members, establish the authority of the board and settle claim issues, include other groups' interests in the process.* After nine years in operation, the Gwaii Haanas board (comprising two Haida and two government representatives) is developing an advisory group of stakeholders, such as representatives from each community and tourism operators. However,

the board will have the power to accept or reject their advice. According to one board member, it is only now, after nine years of developing a relationship, working together, establishing the authority of the board, and dealing with the "big issues," that board members can consider including other interest groups in the process.

Process issues: balancing procedural cultures and knowledge systems

Meetings: differing processes, cultures, and styles. Each board has developed a very different process for undertaking meetings, which is adapted—to a lesser or greater degree—to suit the particular context, cultures, comfort levels and styles of the people involved. For example, early on—and in response to conflicts that took place—board members at Gwaii Haanas rejected the idea of working using a formal structure with agendas and minutes, recognizing that it "simply wouldn't work." Instead, meetings are called on an as-needed basis, and there is flexibility with regard to how many people need to be present to hold a meeting, as long as there is one representative from each stakeholder group. The discussions at meetings tend to be open, without any one person facilitating. Issues to be discussed are presented on a two-page issue form sheet. After an open and frank discussion, a course of action is recommended. The action, timeline and responses are recorded on the issue sheet, and signed off by the Haida and Parks Canada co-chairpersons.

To a large extent, the question of how to appropriately integrate different ways of conducting meetings has to do with the number of times people meet face-to-face per year and how long members have worked with each other, as well as the chairperson's skills. In general, the process is more formal in those boards that meet face-to-face only four times a year (e.g., Wapusk) compared with boards that meet 30-40 times per year, and that have been in operation for a longer time (e.g., Gwaii Haanas).

Other issues that emerged regarding process include:

- *Consensus decision-making.* The one aboriginal contribution to board process adopted by all boards is consensus decision-making.
- *Language and technical jargon.* On all boards English is the working language. The difficulty is that English—and particularly Park's Canada's technical jargon—is often inadequate and unable to reflect First Nation peoples' reality and world, and the clash between the idea of managing the land and living on the land. This was pointed out by an aboriginal board member of Kluane: "If you get a First Nations person from the land and you give them a book on management planning, you have two different worlds.... This isn't my world. Kluane is my world."
- *Working relations, respect, and trust.* Many members agreed that respect and trust are critical elements of good working relations. All members said there was respect among the board members, with one (government) member qualifying his "yes" response by saying there is a healthy disrespect for government. One First Nations member noted "you've got to have [respect], or [collaborative management] wouldn't work."

Traditional knowledge

Incorporating traditional knowledge into decision-making was cited as critical, and all of the collaborative management agreements refer to recognizing and using traditional knowledge in planning. However, the only board that uses it extensively in both cultural and natural resources management decision-making is Gwaii Haanas. According to a Gwaii Haanas board member, "We've done lots of work on archaeology, Haida place names, ethnobotany, genealogy, etc.... A lot of our management plans and back-country plans come from traditional knowledge. When we do decision-making or planning, we always consider traditional knowledge. Some-

times with site plans, we bring in all the hereditary chiefs to discuss traditional knowledge." The Haida have indexed their songs, and these are used in decision-making.

Other boards do not use traditional knowledge as extensively for a variety of reasons, including:

- The perception that traditional knowledge is brought to the table through aboriginal board members, and that it is not necessary to consult beyond this.
- The lack of a solid traditional knowledge base in cases where people either (1) have been prohibited from using resources in the park for an extensive period of time, such as in Kluane; or (2) do not have a long history in the area, as in Tuktut Nogait, where the original users were the Thule and Copper Inuit.
- Lack of knowledge in how to appropriately collect and use traditional knowledge in decision-making.

With regard to wildlife management, however, traditional knowledge is used in decision-making, although most often at the regional rather than the park-board level.

Outcomes: balancing benefits and challenges

Participants agreed there is a mix of social, political, and economic benefits, with less stress on the economic, and more on the political, social, and environmental aspects. They highlighted that for people involved in collaborative management, the process is just as important—and inextricably connected with—the "products." The benefits and challenges related to the fundamental, structural, and procedural issues are discussed in Table 43.1.

Conclusion: crossing boundaries

This synthesis shows that collaborative management provides an important vehicle for crossing boundaries "on the ground, in the mind, and among disciplines." While there is no blueprint approach, some of the necessary conditions that emerge for crossing boundaries through collaborative management include:

- *…in our minds:* There must be: respect among the parties (for differences in values, world-views, cultures); basic trust; and an open and positive attitude towards embarking on new relationships, and seeing boards as a legitimate decision-making body.
- *…in knowledge systems:* Traditional knowledge must be incorporated into decision-making to the fullest extent possible.
- *…with regard to process:* Differing meeting cultures and decision-making processes need to be more balanced for meaningful participation to take place.
- *…on the ground:* There must be protection of aboriginal rights in national parks.
- *…with regard to outcomes:* There must be mutual benefits (social, political, or economical).

As one participant stated, in the final analysis "the challenges [in collaborative management] are all in people's heads."

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Benefits	Challenges
• Direct economic benefits, including: local staff being hired to work in the park; honoraria for participating on the collaborative management board; tourism (mentioned as an important factor only in the case of Gwaii Haanas); cost-sharing between government agencies with regard to research in the park (mentioned by a provincial member of the Wapusk board). • Having a voice in decision-making (pointed out by several aboriginal members and a representative of the Department of Natural Resources on the Wapusk board). • Increasing indigenous political and cultural self-empowerment, self-respect and stewardship, and protection of resource rights. • Better environmental decision-making and increased accountability and transparency. • More efficient operations; better communication and conflict management. • Better working relations; mutual learning and increased cultural understanding. • Increased job gratification and fulfillment, particularly for Parks Canada staff. • Increased profile for Parks Canada as a leader in a new type of management.	• Facing underlying issues and assumptions in adapting to and implementing a new relationship and way of working, including different perspectives on the role, authority and power of the board. This can lead to turf wars and prevent boards from having a long-term view. • Reconciling different ideas about the nature of national parks. • Trying to adapt to the local situation and build in flexibility, regardless of Parks Canada's rules. • Efficiency issues. The good use of time and money, and "finding the level of decision-making and issues where the board's involvement is warranted, so we have less issues to deal with." • Timing/deadlines and trying to bridge the gap between Parks Canada's guidelines and board processes. In cooperative management, decisions take a lot longer. There is also lots of paperwork and red tape related to the various jurisdictions involved. • Clarifying roles and responsibilities, and increasing communication. • Distance and communication. Having board members that are spread out, and trying to find the time to meet. • Zoning and resource-use issues, particularly for people not considered traditional users. • Ensuring equity and fairness in addressing the needs of all board members. • Park's Canada's inflexible hiring procedures, which make it difficult to hire aboriginal people without going through all the in-house procedures first. • Translating language; clarifying jargon and management planning concepts. • The acceptability of collaborative management to First Nations (mentioned in relation to the Gwaii Haanas). A Haida representative noted that some of the greatest difficulties were "amongst our own people—some don't see the value of having a cooperative thing, and think we should do it ourselves."

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