

Reviewing changes in nature conservation

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Abstract

For many years, the conservation movement believed that the idea of protected areas, particularly national parks, originated in 1872 at Yellowstone in the USA. Moreover, the pattern of management, which had evolved at Yellowstone, was seen as a model for the world.

We now recognise that the protected area concept goes back for probably several thousand years and that the so-called “Yellowstone model” as the dominant paradigm for protected areas was very seriously flawed.

Land resource protection and management has undergone immense change in recent years. A diversity of models have evolved in different cultural settings, many of which are producing much more effective outcomes. Bureaucrats (known as park managers or park rangers) are no longer kings of their own little kingdoms. Parks are now much more democratic and serve a diversity of values and interests.

Interestingly, many other countries have changed much more quickly than Australia, although Australians play a major role in international action for conservation. One of my colleagues says that “. . .the World Commission on Protected Areas should be renamed the World Commission for the Protection of Australians because so many of the positions in the international conservation movement are now filled by Australian refugees from the Australian park services”. There is enough truth in this joking comment that it does pose a challenge to our governments.

Introduction

For some years, the conservation movement saw the 1872 establishment of the Yellowstone National Park in the United States as a flagship for the conservation movement. It was widely believed to be the first national park, and it was widely held up as a model for the world.

It may have been the first site to be designated as a “national park”, although if we translated all the names assigned to protected areas throughout the world, others may have preceded it. What is certain is that there were certainly many areas

with an equivalent status and character established long before the 19th century, and many of these exist to this day. The Buskett Gardens of Malta are probably the first such site. The associated archaeological evidence suggests that this wonderful place was a major gathering place back to some 7,000 years ago (Trump 1972: 118-121; Rudgley 2000: 11-39).

Havalu Forest in Niue is particularly interesting; The Niue people claim that when the first people arrived about 1,000 years ago and settled on the island, they decided that the forest was so beautiful that it would not be utilised or inhabited but kept intact for all time. But the phenomenon of the Sacred Grove is widespread. Examples include Kozmin in the Russian Tundra, Mawsmal in India, the Nyangkpe of Cameroon, Ouadi Qadisha of Lebanon, Garajonay of Spain, many sites associated with Lake Baikal in Siberia and Wirikuta in Mexico (Harmon & Putney 2003). Similarly, mountains have often been dedicated as sacred places throughout a very long history – we need look no further than Tongariro, which has survived the transition from sacred place to national park (Potton 1987). There are a remarkable number of public gardens throughout the world that can be tracked far back in history (Thatcher 1985). Of course, many of the great painted caves and other caves or karst springs were certainly sacred sites long before the onset of speleology (Rudgley 2000: 119-147). Finally, Australia had many sacred sites, and even the early white-fella parks such as Wombeyan and Jenolan were established before Yellowstone.

Turning to the US National Parks as a model for management of public places reveals even greater problems. Interestingly, the US Army managed Yellowstone until 1916, when the National Park Service was established under the leadership of Stephen Mather (Albright & Cahn 1985). Although it was his disgust with the quality of management that drove Mather to accept the leadership of the new service, the very establishment of the Service was inextricably linked with the rise of the tourism industry and partnership with the growing railway system (Runte 1979, 1984, 1987). The first set of publications to be produced by the Service to

inform the people about the parks (Yard 1917) was unashamedly based in tourism promotion.

Many people soon realised that such a whole-hearted gift to the tourism industry was not in the best interests of the claimed mandate for conservation. Amongst others, the Sierra Club that had fought for the initial establishment eventually became a major lobby group for change. The other problem that arose from the process of establishment is that the Park Ranger training program that developed at the Albright Training Academy inherited the military philosophy. Rangers were trained to be authoritarian, to focus on law enforcement and to always carry handguns.

The first major, comprehensive and clearly enunciated attack on the park service as a whole came from a long-standing friend of the parks, Alston Chase (1986). His book was entitled *Playing God in Yellowstone: The Destruction of America's First National Park*. In particular, it attacked the lack of competence and appalling track record in conservation management. It attracted widespread attention, and provoked a somewhat frantic defensiveness from the park service. One of those who supported Chase as a leading public advocate for change was the well-known Bill Austin of Mammoth Onyx Cave (and Buffalo farm). Bill targeted not only the failure of conservation, particularly in relation to his beloved Buffalos, but the continuing authoritarianism of the rangers and the short tenure of ambitious park superintendents. In brief, he argued that the parks were "being managed by a batch of temporary cops".

Karl Jacoby (2001) has attacked another major theme of Park Service policy in his *Crimes Against Nature: Squatters, Poachers, Thieves and the hidden history of American Conservation*. He deals with the exclusion from the parks of the former residents, often Indians or poor white farmers, and the systematic criminalisation of their subsistence level hunting and even grazing. This was based in the simplistic assumption that their continuing hunting and other activities would seriously threaten conservation. Nothing was done to provide for continuing and genuine involvement in the responsibility for the park. This has regrettably influenced park management thinking throughout the world, and indigenous people (often from ethnic minorities) have been forcibly removed from protected areas and from

their own continuing subsistence. One often hears the charge that conservation serves mainly to disenfranchise and starve minority peoples rather than to ensure their continuing good management. I am involved in one such battle at this very moment in a park where the management has systematically destroyed far more of the environment in the last five years than the many centuries of indigenous occupancy – and yet are arguing that the inhabitants must be re-located!

So, although most Park Service officers in the United States were extremely conscientious and well-intentioned individuals (and I am not criticising them!), they were embedded in a mass of wrong-headed assumptions, inappropriate training, totally inadequate policies and poor leadership. Let me turn now to the positive changes we are now seeing.

The movement for change

Land resource protection and management has undergone immense change in recent years. A diversity of models have evolved in different cultural settings, many of which are producing much more effective outcomes. Bureaucrats (known as park managers or park rangers) are no longer kings of their own little kingdoms. Parks are now much more democratic and serve a diversity of values and interests.

The change has been a slow and very complex one, occurring in stages. The 2003 World Parks Congress, held in Durban appears to have brought together a great number of these changes and provided a focal point for assessment and further change (IUCN Durban Accord and Action Plan 2003).

Adrian Phillips of IUCN did us all a great service by providing a greatly condensed summary in a paper prepared as background to the Durban Congress. He contrasted typical characteristics of protected areas as they were, say 30 years ago, and what they are becoming today (Phillips 2003). His summary table is attached as an annex to this paper, and provides a very useful overview but here I will deal with each major characteristic in turn adding some comments.

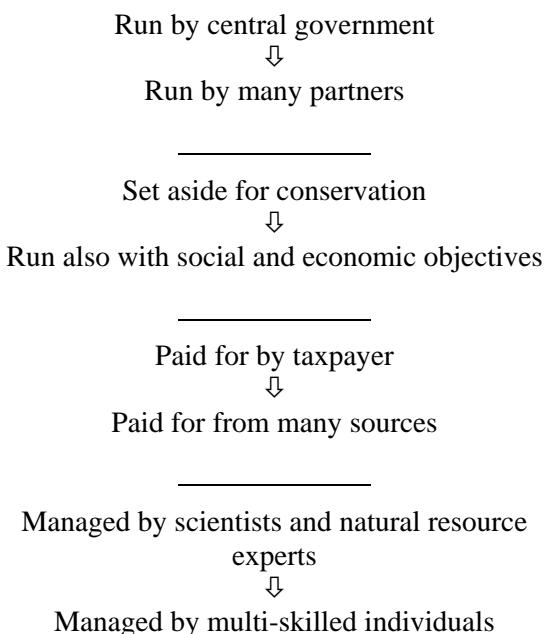
Planned and managed against people



Run with, for, and in some cases by local people

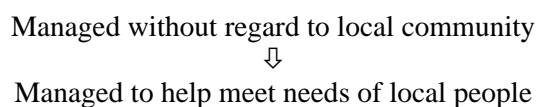
As already described, Jacoby's book focussed upon many aspects of the planning and management against people. The move towards recognising the rights of local residents to be involved is best portrayed in the now extensive literature on Collaborative Management (e.g., Borrini-Feyerabend et al. 2004). Certainly, it brings much greater expertise to bear upon management than ever before; some of my finest experiences in Asian countries have been while walking in the parks under the guidance of long-standing residents.

Interestingly, a somewhat surprising report by the international NGO, Forest Trends, systematically reviewed and analysed evidence on the protective management of the World's forested areas. They discovered that the residents of forest areas spend more and achieve more than overseas aid and national governments together (Molnar et al. 2004).

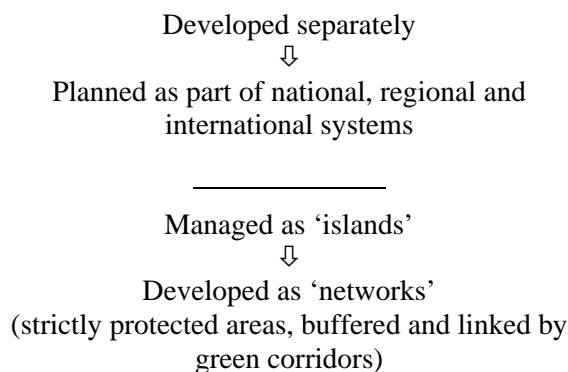


In general, this does not quite go far enough. In most countries the scientists came predominantly from the biological sciences, and particularly botany or forestry. This went hand-in-hand with a 3F view of conservation priorities: flowers, fur and feathers. The earth sciences received scant regard – people do not need earth scientists to tell them whether a landscape is beautiful or not. The result was that regrettably, landscapes were often degraded, simply because the appropriate science was not considered.

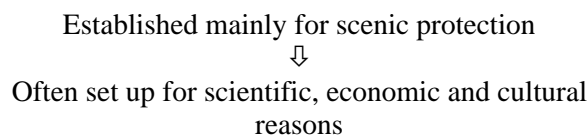
I have a personal concern about the notion of multi-skilled individuals. At one time I had the pleasure of working with Eugen Pusic, a policy analyst and key advisor to the late Marshal Tito. He argued that although the education system was focussed on producing specialists, that specialism was becoming increasingly difficult to utilise effectively, and that we must also develop people who could work with and integrate a diversity of specialist perspectives. I believe he was absolutely right – we should not be looking for multi-specialised individuals, but rather ways of building more effective multi-specialised but well-integrated teams.



This is a key shift in objectives.



Think of the challenge that this presents to all of the people concerned. Under the old 'island' system, one could simply say, "Sorry, but it's not in my patch". At least in Australia, this is one of the things that many managers are clinging to with a strange sort of desperation.



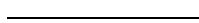
Again, the simplicity of managing a scenic spot has gone forever. There are now a diversity of values to respect and manage. We are now seeing

a further very important shift in that the former division between cultural and natural heritage is being broken down – we are coming to realise that all lands have cultural values of one kind or another. But this is harder to implement: at all levels from the World Heritage Council down to municipal government, we have different legal provisions and different bureaucracies for each of the two streams of heritage recognition – and such things are very difficult to shift.

Managed mainly for visitors and tourists



Managed with local people more in mind



Managed reactively within short timescale



Managed adaptively in long term perspective

The dominance of tourism remains in many countries, and threatens to become a central objective. This has two major problems. One is that in catering for tourism, many managers (N.B., not the visitors!) are guilty of creating serious environmental impacts and degradation. The second is that the tourist wants to move the maximum number of people in the shortest possible time and road engineers are only too happy to oblige. This may cause significant environmental damage (e.g., a lake-edge highway which has extinguished the whole of the riparian community) and may also greatly lessen the quality of visitor experience – after all, one motorway is very like another.

About protection



Also about restoration and rehabilitation

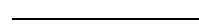
This has been perhaps one of the more effective and creative strategies, permeating many aspects of park management practice. We have learned a great deal about the technology of restoration, and effective restoration often far exceeds anything that might have been done even only 10 years ago (see Kendle & Forbes 1997). One of the more remarkable efforts in action at this moment is the re-afforestation and associated restoration of the Gunung Sewu karst of Java. But one can also

point to the Ida Bay Quarry in Tasmania and the restoration following an awful road construction which occurred in Phong Nha / Ke Bang WHA of Vietnam. Although these examples are very sound, we have all too often failed to properly consider the more profound question of what it is that we are trying to achieve, or more specifically, to what stage of its history are we restoring the landscape concerned (Higgs 2003).

Viewed primarily as a national asset



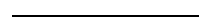
Viewed also as a community asset



Viewed only as a national concern



Viewed also as an international concern



Managed in a technocratic way



Managed with political considerations

Another key document that arose out of the Durban Congress examined the options that face any protected area system in establishing effective patterns of governance (Graham, Amos and Plumtre 2003). Note, although we often use the term governance as if it were synonymous with government, it is not. Governance is the process of determining the best way to shape the structure and processes that can best provide government. Australia can be distinguished by the extent to which it has excessive government but very little governance!

Another potentially powerful strategy that has emerged strongly since the Durban Congress is the Precautionary Principle (Cooney 2004). Although not novel in planning and design circles, it has all too rarely been applied to management of natural resources.

Conclusion

Of course, countries where protected areas have only developed in recent years have not had to shift the past aside, but have been able in many cases to commence setting their own directions. It is more difficult for countries like the USA and

Australia to shift away from the so-called "Yellowstone model". Interestingly, Australians play a major role in international action for conservation. One of my colleagues says that ". . .the World Commission on Protected Areas should be renamed the World Commission for the Protection of Australians, because so many of the positions in the international conservation movement are now filled by refugees from the Australian park services". There is enough truth in this joking comment that it does pose a genuine challenge to our governments, senior managers and often National Park advocacy groups.

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Annex 1

Contrasting Paradigms for Protected Areas

From Phillips, Adrian. 2003. Turning Ideas on Their Head: The new paradigm for protected areas. Background Paper for the World Parks Congress, Durban, September 2003

As it was: protected areas were ...	As it is becoming: protected areas are ...
Planned and managed against people	Run with, for, and in some cases by local people
Run by central government	Run by many partners
Set aside for conservation	Run also with social and economic objectives
Paid for by taxpayer	Paid for from many sources
Managed by scientists and natural resource experts	Managed by multi-skilled individuals
Managed without regard to local community	Managed to help meet needs of local people
Developed separately	Planned as part of national, regional and international systems
Managed as 'islands'	Developed as 'networks' (strictly protected areas, buffered and linked by green corridors)
Established mainly for scenic protection	Often set up for scientific, economic and cultural reasons
Managed mainly for visitors and tourists	Managed with local people more in mind
Managed reactively within short timescale	Managed adaptively in long term perspective
About protection	Also about restoration and rehabilitation
Viewed primarily as a national asset	Viewed also as a community asset
Viewed only as a national concern	Viewed also as an international concern
Managed in a technocratic way	Managed with political considerations