

Lessons Learned: Can consensus-based public involvement help in the establishment of wildlife corridors?

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Abstract

Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) have become common in many countries as an instrument to protect sensitive marine resources. Canada has only recently begun to establish multi-use MPAs at a federal level. The process to establish Race Rocks MPA by Fisheries and Oceans Canada (FOC) has been centered on community participation with a consensus-based approach. This approach has worked well internationally both in the establishment of MPAs as well as terrestrial protected areas. Parks Canada, an advisor and observer in the consultations for Race Rocks, could learn valuable lessons from consensus-based approaches. Community participation, with a consensus-based approach could prove an essential tool in the planning and establishment of terrestrial corridors and buffer zones.

Introduction

The concept of MPAs originated in the 1960s and was further developed in the 1970s and 1980s (Alder, 1996). By 1995, over 1000 MPAs had been established internationally (Ticco, 1995). MPAs have been defined in many ways and serve many purposes; they can range from small, highly protected reserves to large multi-use areas (Ticco, 1995). They can be used to protect and maintain biodiversity, exploited resources, coastal processes, or manage conflicting resources (Alder, 1996). This paper will only look at consensus-based approaches in the management of multi-use MPAs.

One common aspect of MPAs is the use of community participation and stakeholder involvement (Brown, 2001). In fact, many reports indicate that community involvement and consensus building are essential to the success of MPAs (Ticco, 1995; Alder, 1996; Brown et al, 2001; Elliot et al, 2001; White et al, 2002). Brown et al (2001) notes that the complex ecologic and social patterns of coastal and marine resources demand a holistic approach. Conservation Biology also uses a holistic approach and is the primary tool used in the Yellowstone to Yukon (Y2Y) Initiative (Jessen and Lerch, 2000).

The Y2Y Initiative proposes a system of wildlife corridors linking core protected reserves with buffer zones acting to further protect the system from industrial and urban development (Y2Y Conservation Initiative, n.d.). These wildlife corridors and buffer zones can be crucial in maintaining biodiversity (Jessen and Lerch, 2000) however, while conservation biology is an essential scientific tool for determining areas, species and entire ecosystems in need of protection, community involvement is also essential in implementing protection strategies.

Marine Protected Areas in Canada

While MPAs have existed in Canada for a number of years, these areas have generally been either reserves that focus on wildlife conservation and education or recreational areas – essentially single-use. Today, two federal institutions have a mandate to create MPAs that provide both for conservation and other human uses. These institutions are Fisheries and Oceans Canada, under the Oceans Act, and Parks Canada under the soon to be passed Marine Conservation Areas Act. The Saguenay—St. Lawrence Marine Park, a National Marine Conservation Area (NMCA), is the only park to date established in legislation by Parks Canada however, two other NMCAs have agreements signed with the provincial government and one, Fathom Five National Marine Park, is in operation (Parks

Canada, 2002). The FOC has proposed four MPAs in the Pacific Ocean to test its strategy. One MPA named Race Rocks has essentially been completed using a consensus-based approach to public consultation (FOC, 2002).

Parks Canada and FOC do not share the same objectives and strategies for MPAs. Parks Canada's goal is to protect areas for both conservation and public enjoyment that represent different marine ecosystems (Parks Canada, 1994) while FOC has much broader goals of protecting biodiversity, while encouraging sustainable economic activities (FOC, 1998). Because it incorporates more activities into its MPAs, FOC places public involvement as its first principle in establishment, Parks Canada conversely, places it further down its list of priorities (Parks Canada, 1994). In effect, Parks Canada's priority is to first find an area that meets its criteria as a NMCA and then would seek public support in that area. FOC's position is that it will encourage the public itself to identify and seek to establish MPAs (FOC, 1998).

Effectiveness of Marine Protected Areas

Although new in Canada, multi-use MPAs have existed internationally since the 1960s (Tico, 1995). While many MPAs have the goal of protecting biodiversity in marine life, their effectiveness has often been questioned (Ticco, 1995). Knowledgeable staff, proper scientific baseline information, and good monitoring practices have been shown to be important factors in successful MPAs (Alder, 1996). The most important ingredient however, has been consensus-based community participation which has been shown to be essential in implementing a MPA (Alder, 1996; Brown et al, 2001; Elliot et al, 2001). Consensus-based approaches are defined as those in which stakeholders develop solutions that "satisfy their own need while at the same time satisfying the needs of others [stakeholders]" (Morin, 2001). The Consensus-based approach has been adapted in many countries. The Philippines has an

extensive system of MPAs. Many of which have been created directly through community involvement and have “contribute[d] significantly to the sustainability of the country’s coastal ecosystems” (White et al., 2002). The United States introduced community participation into its National Marine Sanctuary Act, and found it useful in creating management plans (Morin, 2001). These studies show the appropriateness of Parks Canada and FOC placing community participation within their policies.

Community participation in terrestrial protected areas

Not only do MPAs benefit from community participation, many terrestrial protected areas (PAs) have incorporated it into their management plans. This has been particularly true in buffer zones. Although, not officially used by Parks Canada, buffer zones have been used in other countries such as India and Costa Rica. The purpose of these zones is to provide a buffer between a core PA and industrial, or other non-sustainable activities. Badola (1999) reports that in India, buffer zones have traditionally been managed in a coercive manner which has led to hostility between local people and protected area managers. In the early 1990s community involvement became part of the management policy which has decreased hostility (Badola, 1999). Stoll-Kleemann and O’Riordan (2002) show that in both Germany and South Africa, public participation in the management of PAs, while difficult to implement, has allowed PAs to maintain a greater degree biodiversity. In Costa Rica, Hunt (1996) shows that buffer zones consisting of “sustainable and ecologically sound agriculture” practices work best at protecting many core PAs, and that encouraging the local communities to use these practices has improved ecological integrity within the PAs.

Consensus-based approaches do not always lead to increased conservation. The Upper Colorado River has lost many native fish through large scale developments. Brower et al. (2001) report that a consensus-based approach to recover native fish has failed – fish

numbers have declined since the project was implemented. The report blamed the failure on control of the process by special interest groups and having bureaucratic goals outweighing conservation goals (Browser et al., 2000). Problems are also identified by Mahanty and Russell (2002); where large numbers of stakeholders share in the management of an area consensus can be difficult to reach. Sometimes consensus is achieved while community participation is not when facilitators chose stakeholders that are not truly representative of a community (Mahanty and Russell, 2002). However both authors present solutions to these problems.

Community participation is increasing in other land use issues across Canada. British Columbia has been a leader by incorporating public participation into land-use policy first by the establishment of the Commission on Resources and the Environment (CORE) and then the Negotiation based Land and Resource Management Planning (LRMP) processes (Robinson et al., 2001). CORE was shown by Robinson et al. (2001) to have suffered because of the forest industry blocking consensus, however, the LRMP processes were seen by participants as being generally successful. Strong leadership by government, independent facilitation, and a focus on interests rather than positions accounted for much of the success (Robinson et al., 2001).

As Brower et al. (2001) point out, the success of consensus-based approaches to conservation is often judged on a political and social context. This could be true because of the positive role it plays, not only in resolving conflicts, but in personal transformation. Participants in consensus-based processes have been shown to learn from each other, and often transform their way of thinking in substantial ways (Poncelet, 2001). “Though seemingly small, these personal transformations may well serve as a foundation for future large-scale improvements in the domain of environmental management.” (Poncelet, 2001).

Community participation in wildlife corridors and buffer zones in Canada

The topic of wildlife corridors has received more attention in Canada lately primarily because of the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society (CPAWS). Two major systems of wildlife corridors and buffer zones (also known as compatible use areas) have been proposed by CPAWS, one in Eastern Canada – the Adirondack to Algonquin (A2A), and one in Western Canada – the Yellowstone to Yukon (Y2Y). A chapter director for CPAWS stated the purpose of the A2A initiative is “in finding creative solutions, and finding ways for people to make their living in this landscape while allowing other, wilder creatures to do the same” (Canadian Press Newswire, 1999). This statement shows how similar the purpose of wildlife corridors and multi-use MPAs are to each other. It is not surprising then that both have received similar responses. While MPAs on the Pacific Ocean have prompted residents to fear their traditional fishing grounds will be taken away, residents living in the A2A initiative’s proposed area worry their property rights will diminish causing land prices to drop (Parker, 1999).

Although in interviews, CPAWS representatives talk about involving the public in the creation and management of wildlife corridors (Canadian Press Newswire, 1999; Parker, 1999), the process really involves garnishing support from the public. While the Y2Y Conservation Initiative is a network of over 140 organizations, institutions, and foundations (Jessenand and Lerch, 2000), it is not representative of all stakeholders. Indeed, it is not in the interest of the project to invite opponents into the process however, gaining support of opponents will be vital in implementing any conservation strategy.

Much of the wildlife corridor initiatives are based on conservation biology (Jessen and Lerch, 2000). The strategy of the Y2Y Conservation Initiative is to use conservation science to determine conservation requirements for the protection of biodiversity, improving access to data and research, and improve the ability of decision makers to make better

choices (Y2Y Conservation Initiative, n.d.). More parallels can be drawn with MPAs – the success of both MPAs and wildlife corridors depends on good scientific baseline data. Without it, policy makers, including the public, do not have the basis on which to make decisions. With PAs having so many requirements for success, it is clear the establishment of corridors and buffer zones in Canada cannot be undertaken by only conservation groups. Proper public involvement with a consensus-based approach is needed and cannot be provided by conservation groups. Firstly, conservation groups do not have the authority to regulate, and secondly, having a major stakeholder as a facilitator could lead to further division (Mahanty and Russell, 2002). As well, legislation that restricts activity within a wildlife corridor system that resulted from lobbying by conservation groups could increase resentment against those groups by those who are affected. Clearly, for effective wildlife corridors to be realized, powerful leadership is required.

Conclusion

Parks Canada only stands to benefit from the establishment of wildlife corridors and buffer zones. These concepts have become crucial in maintaining biodiversity and wildness in PAs (Jessen and Lerch, 2000). However, their success depends on public participation. Legislation enacted to enforce restrictions on the neighbors of PAs can lead to further conflicts (Badola, 1999) and can actually cause a loss of ecological integrity (Hunt, 1996). Parks Canada has become more involved in public participation by way of establishing NMCAs and taking part in the consensus-based public consultation of Race Rocks where it sat as an advisor and observer. In the interest of ecologic integrity, Parks Canada should use the lessons it has learned in the establishment of MPAs and take an active role in building consensus around wildlife corridors. This role could be played as a facilitator, or proponent

that lobbied federal and provincial governments to act in that regard. By expressing its desire to do what it takes to maintain ecologic integrity in its national parks, Parks Canada could show a leadership that the majority of Canadians would appreciate.

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