Tourism and Conservation in Protected Areas

~ Putting words into action ~

Pamela A. Wright, Ph.D.
Outdoor Recreation & Tourism Management
University of Northern British Columbia
Chair, BC Protected Area Research Forum
Key questions

• Why tourism and conservation?
• What are some types of tourism-conservation initiatives?
• What is the state of tourism-conservation initiatives?
  – Internationally
  – Canada
• What are the challenges/barriers to tourism-conservation initiatives?
• What are the best methods to encourage tourism operators to contribute to conservation efforts?
Conservation values are at risk

- Global environmental values under threat
- Protected areas facing growing stressors
From enjoyment and appreciation – to action

- Healthy environment premise of sustainability
- Sustainable tourism includes:
  - greening the footprint of tourism businesses footprint
  - encouraging visitors to travel softly
- Clearly tourism businesses promote awareness, appreciation and understanding – a major contributor to conservation initiatives
- Want to examine tourism-conservation link that goes beyond understanding to action
- Where, how, and to what extent do and can tourism can contribute more directly to conservation initiatives?
Why tourism and conservation?

• Healthy ecosystems at core of tourism product
  – “the premise is that ecotourism depends on maintaining attractive natural landscapes and a rich flora and fauna” (Kiss 2004)

• Growing public concern about environment

• Increasingly discerning travelers (conservation travelers)

• Concerned about potential for green-washing

• Part of being a good corporate citizen/corporate responsibility

• May provide a competitive edge
Types of tourism-conservation initiatives

- Corporate Giving
- Tourist Donations
- Tourism Business Volunteerism
- Conservation Lobbying
- Volun-tourism
- Active Conservation Ambassadors
- Conservation Research

Examples:
- Bass Pro Shops
- Kakapo Recovery Programme
- Voluntary Benevolence
- Parc National du Banff
- Rio Tinto Alcan
• Protected areas… but not exclusively
• Sometimes in fact there may be advantages to initiatives outside of protected areas
• Tourism-conservation ‘initiatives’ not necessarily ‘partnerships’
• Looking globally – applying locally
What is the state of tourism-conservation partnerships?

• Internationally
  – Many fall under heading of community-based ecotourism (development work)
  – NGO driven
  – Non-profit tourism companies
  – Organized or encouraged giving (typically limited)
  – Limited number of longer time commitment volun-tourism (most from NGO sector)
State of tourism-conservation partnerships …

- Canadian
  - Very limited but probably many small initiatives that slide under the radar
  - Some corporate giving (e.g., visitor centre)
  - Number of business initiatives but not involving clients
  - Some staff ‘clean-up’ type activities
  - Others ‘greening’ initiatives but really a condition of development permits
  - PA managers noted their interest in finding out what is going on – so they could share/promote

Conclusion shared by many was that “environmental altruism is not alive and not well. Rather: this is a park so its govt’s responsibility”
Voluntourism

~ Those wishing to travel with a purpose

• Join a research or conservation team

• Help initiative that couldn’t happen without volunteers

• A number of major travel websites partner to offer short international trips that combine work and vacationing (Travelocity – “Travel for Good” partnership – CheapTickets.com – United Way)

• Must be realistic about true benefits

• Many projects require real skills and long term time

• Some ‘spend’ all the benefit in accommodating tourist

• Does volunteer labour replace hiring people?
Visitor payback partnership

- Tourism & Conservation Partnership ~ Cumbria, England
- To encourage Corporate Social Responsibility fundraising through tourism businesses (from visitors) to secure improvements to the environment.
- Funded by over 230 businesses - raised over £1 million
- The Partnership promotes Visitor Payback fundraising as an opportunity for visitors to interact with the landscape, and take ownership of conservation work.
Park-industry coalitions

- Partnership between: parks-tourism industry-nonprofit (cooperating assoc)

- Yosemite Fund - habitat restoration, trail repair and access, wildlife management, cultural and historic preservation, and visitor services and education

- Yosemite Concession Services Corp required to put 4.5% of gross revenue to fund
Active ambassadors

- Conscious development of conservation ambassadors
- Arm tourists with inspiration, information and tools for action
- Evaluations however show limited increase in actual action resulting from these programs

We have lectures most evenings at the camp about the importance of respecting the delicate environment.

We try to educate our clients about the environment to which they have come in the hope that they can become Antarctic ambassadors when they return home after a journey into such a fragile place.
Potential barriers...

- Perception that ‘responsibility’ for conservation is governments
- Union concerns
- Research permits/environmental assessments – independent projects difficult
- Data quality issues
- Research objectivity
- Liability insurance/health and safety concerns
- Cost of training short-term volunteers
- Conservation projects often require very technical skills
- Protected area agencies may have onerous regulations
- Declining revenues/price sensitive travelers – hard to divert funds
- Client barriers, price sensitive… limited time to contribute
- Clients may well feel they ‘give’ to conservation outside of their travel time
- Restricted mechanisms to receive funds
How do we encourage operators to contribute to conservation efforts?

• Industry encouragement/initiative
• Encourage coalitions
• ‘Policy’ support

CTC-Parks Canada Accord
• enhance the system of protected areas
• maintain and enhance the EI and CI
• foster sustainable tourism, tourism that is economically viable, environmentally supportable and culturally acceptable
• seek well-informed and creative solutions to manage demand and use in a manner which supports the right experience in the right place, at the right time
• manage and reduce the impact of visitors
• enhance interpretive and educational programs
• provide accurate information and informed opinion on matters of significance to the planning and management of these special places
How do we encourage...

- Conduct specific research on tourism demand/interest in conservation travel
  - what type/what activities would they support/what time donate
- Minimize partnership barriers
  - make partnership process (formal one) easier
  - gov’t side work to reduce barriers in partnering
  - create/promote mechanisms to receive funds/support (e.g., ‘friends of’) that can have quality assured
- Publicize conservation project needs
How do we encourage...

- Profile approaches and models
- Recognize and reward
- Promote idea and opportunities
- Evaluate success

Top accolade for Great Barrier Reef tourism partnership

20 November 2007

An innovative sustainable tourism partnership helping protect the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park scooped another top accolade, announced in Sydney last night (20 November 2007).

The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (GBRMPA) received the Public Sector Mana Award in the 2007 Tourism and Transport Forum (TTF) Corporate Leadership Awards.

The peak body for the tourism, transport and infrastructure sector recognised GBRMPA’s robust sustainable partnership with the tourism industry and Queensland coastal communities.

GBRMPA Tourism and Recreation Director Lisa Mushaney said the award was recognition of the outstanding commitment of the partners in achieving environmental sustainability on the Great Barrier Reef.
Resources

- [www.responsibletravel.com](http://www.responsibletravel.com)
- **Volunteer Vacations: Short-Term Adventures That Will Benefit You and Others** by Bill McMillon, Doug Cutchins, Anne Geissinger, and Ed Asner.
- [www.nps.gov/partnerships](http://www.nps.gov/partnerships)
- [www.ontarioparks.com/english/corporate](http://www.ontarioparks.com/english/corporate)
- [www.green-tourism-awards.org.uk](http://www.green-tourism-awards.org.uk)
- [www.wilderness-tourism.bc.ca/SOP_featured_cos](http://www.wilderness-tourism.bc.ca/SOP_featured_cos)