

The Human Component of Resource Management at Bruce Peninsula National Park

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Abstract

Bruce Peninsula National Park of Canada and Fathom Five National Marine Park of Canada, recognize the importance of working cooperatively with area residents to manage the natural resources of the Bruce Peninsula. The human dimensions program is an ongoing study to collect and share information that will assist ecosystem managers in planning for a range of human interactions with the surrounding environment. During the summer of 2000, the park mailed conservation land use awareness and attitudes surveys to every known business owner within the Municipality of Northern Bruce Peninsula (MNBP). Thirty-six (36%) of the surveys were returned. Key findings include:

- 1. Respondents value natural features the most, but they do not necessarily acknowledge the contribution that protected areas make to these features.*
- 2. The economic foundations of the MNBP are spread across a number of sectors although there appears to be more support for non-extractive activities as opposed to extractive ones.*
- 3. Respondents stated that they desire one centralized source of information regarding protected areas and conservation efforts.*
- 4. There is a feeling among some respondents that there is not much chance to be involved or to contribute to the management of protected areas.*

The true measure of success of the survey will be to implement action items in response to the survey results in order to strengthen park relations and activities.

Introduction

The Municipality of Northern Bruce Peninsula encompasses an area of 1000 km² and consists of 2,753 permanent residents and 7,483 seasonal residents (Municipality of Northern Bruce Peninsula, 2000). The municipality attracts numerous visitors every year who come from near and far to enjoy the historical, cultural, and environmental attractions characteristic of the Great Lakes – St. Lawrence Lowlands natural region.

The Niagara Escarpment came to international attention in 1990 when UNESCO designated it as a World Biosphere Reserve in recognition of regional efforts to reach a sustainable balance between human needs and desires and ecosystem needs. Bruce Peninsula National Park (BPNP) is one of the core areas of the Niagara Escarpment Biosphere Reserve (Parks Canada Agency 2001). BPNP and Fathom Five National Marine Park (FFNMP) protect areas within the Upper Bruce Ecosystem located at the northern tip of the Bruce Peninsula (Figure 1).

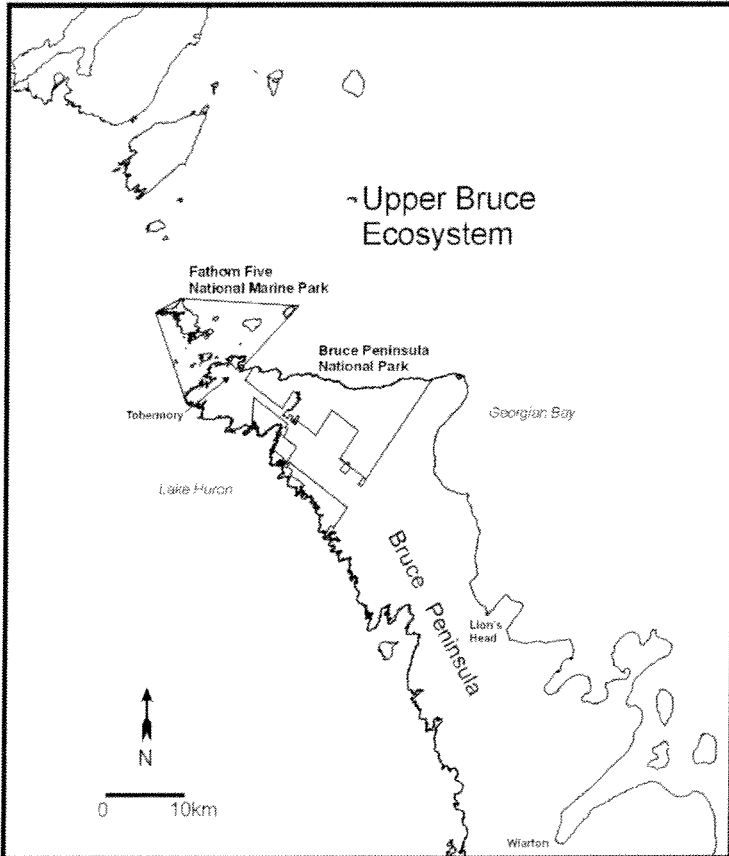


Figure 1. Upper Bruce Ecosystem

The Upper Bruce Ecosystem is feeling the pressures of tourism and development as a result of the area's proximity to the most densely populated region in Canada (approximately ten million people). The Ontario Northland Ferry Service, operating between Tobermory and Manitoulin Island, carries approximately 260,000 passengers annually and Cyprus Lake campground located within BPNP attains over 76,000 camper nights on an annual basis (Parks Canada Agency, 2001). As a result, National parks in southern Ontario are slowly becoming "islands of wild land surrounded by developed lands" (Parks Canada Agency, 2000). Many parks

are experiencing negative effects from the pressures of “forestry and agriculture outside the boundaries to tourism/visitor infrastructure inside and outside the boundaries” (Parks Canada Agency, 2000).

As stated in Bruce/Fathom Five’s Ecosystem Conservation Plan, “without support and a shared vision from landowners within the ‘Greater Park Ecosystem’ (GPE), the species, biodiversity and integrity of all the resources within the ecosystem may be harmed” (Parks Canada Agency, 2001). The GPE for BPNP is the area located north of Wiarton and south of the proposed park boundary at the edge of the former St. Edmunds Township.

Ecological integrity is of utmost importance for all resource managers within the National Parks System. The mandate for Parks Canada states that “on behalf of the people of Canada, we protect and present nationally significant examples of Canada’s natural and cultural heritage and foster public understanding, appreciation and enjoyment in ways that ensure their ecological and commemorative integrity for present and future generations (Parks Canada Agency, 2001).

Cross park boundary or regional scale decision-making is consequently required within the GPE in order to achieve overall conservation goals that concern ecological integrity and biodiversity on the Bruce Peninsula. An ecosystem has ‘integrity,’ as defined by Parks Canada, when it is deemed “characteristic for its natural region and likely to persist, including abiotic components and the composition and abundance of native species and biological communities, rates of change and supporting processes” (Parks Canada Agency, 2000).

Many functioning ecosystems are too large to be contained within the boundaries of a protected area but extend onto the surrounding public and private property. This is characteristic of BPNP as approximately twenty-seven percent (41.1Km²) of the property within the proposed boundary of BPNP is privately owned (Parks Canada Agency, 1999). These properties include farms, businesses, and private residences. As Rick Searle stated in his book *Phantom Parks*, “Ecological integrity must be embraced by the Canadian public because no matter how good Parks Canada becomes, its best can only have a marginal impact on the threats to National Parks” (Searle, 2000). Searle further states that “visitors and residents within the parks must also share in the responsibility of maintaining ecological integrity by adopting an ecological ethic that encourages care and respect for wild species and places” (Searle, 2000).

It is therefore crucial for protected area managers to find ways to influence public attitudes through communication of credible arguments on the value of conserving open space, wilderness and wildlife (Jacobs, 2000). In order to influence public attitudes it is necessary to understand what these attitudes are beforehand.

BPNP and FFNMP recognize this need for public support and are consequently

shifting the way they work with the community. Management strategies used in the 1980's were primarily concerned with issues related to visitor use within the park, rather than events that took place outside the park boundaries. Park managers are moving beyond a reactive approach to resource management, towards a proactive approach that includes building partnerships and improving communications (Parks Canada Agency, 2000).

Parks Canada's vision for the year 2020 is described in Bruce/Fathom Five's Ecosystem Conservation Plan as "a larger network of protected, private, Aboriginal, municipal and provincial lands, creating a 'green' corridor from Manitoulin Island to Niagara Falls." Inherent in this vision is a community based conservation ethic, with the protected areas managed cooperatively by those responsible for land and water use decisions that influence the natural landscape and watershed. This cooperative management will be based on respect, equity, and empowerment; as a result, the local communities support and treasure the two parks (Parks Canada Agency, 2000).

Human Dimensions Research at BPNP

In September 1997, resource management staff at Parks Canada developed the Human Dimensions of Ecosystem Management Program (HD) in order to improve the use of social science-based conservation information in decision-making. This multi-stage endeavor aims to determine and influence societal relationships with the surrounding environment, specifically in National Parks. Program components include:

- Determining visitor impact on the local economy;
- Determining the economic impact of the National Park(s) on the local community;
- Assessing partnership formation;
- Developing awareness of regional demographic change;
- Understanding land usage within the GPE;
- Determining which agencies and stakeholders within the GPE have land use responsibilities;
- Assessing visitor infrastructure impacts and developing a framework to address this issue;
- Understanding GPE conservation land use awareness, values and attitudes;
- Developing surveys and workshops on specific issues of local concern.

In an attempt to foster greater understanding among park management and the residents of the GPE during the summer of 2000, the park implemented the Conservation Land Use Awareness and Attitudes study. The park staff out mail surveys to every known business owner within the MNBP. The information obtained from this survey as well as the other components of this program will assist ecosystem managers in planning for a range of human interactions with the surrounding environments and in assimilating human values into nature conservation pro-

grams. It will also serve as a foundation for a better understanding of community perspectives on protected area conservation. The data from the survey will be one of many tools used to build a good working relationship with all sectors of the local community.

The three main objectives of this survey were:

1. To develop an enhanced appreciation of the varying views towards conservation land use.
2. To acquire a basic familiarity of the environmental knowledge level of local business owners.
3. To identify conservation themes and target groups for outreach initiatives.

This paper provides a brief overview of some of the varying opinions that business owners within the Municipality of the Northern Bruce Peninsula hold concerning the management of protected areas and their values towards conservation in general. This study was undertaken in response to BPNP and FFMNP (Bruce/Fathom Five's) commitment to better understand the views and opinions of those who work and live within the GPE.

Methodology

During the summer of 2000, five hundred 'Values and Attitudes towards Conservation Efforts on the Northern Bruce Peninsula 2000' surveys were mailed to every known business owner within the Municipality of Northern Bruce Peninsula. One hundred and eighty recipients completed and returned the questionnaires to the park (36% return). Data analysis consisted of calculating simple sums and averages for each question, as appropriate.

Parks Canada management and staff undertook the design of the survey in order to address specific information needs of the park. Four main categories of questions were designed to meet these needs:

- *Ecological Values*: These questions were designed to gain an understanding of the values and attitudes the community held concerning the presentation of land in areas legislated as protected.
- *Knowledge*: This group of questions inquired whether or not protected area managing bodies were effectively communicating information messages to local residents and the public pertaining to ecology and sustainable use of resources.
- *Economic*: This category of questions explored what respondents perceived to be the foundations of the local economy. Respondents were also questioned as to whether they wanted economic growth, how they wanted the local economy to grow, and their understanding of the impacts of protected areas to the local economy.
- *Political/Jurisdictional*: These questions were designed to determine how respondents perceived their relationships with jurisdictional bodies such as Parks Canada and other non-governmental land management organizations. Do they

disapprove of or support these organizations? Do they believe that jurisdictional bodies are acting in their best interests?

Key Values

The results of the survey reflected the many needs, wants and desires of those who responded. The emerging themes from each category of the survey results were:

Ecological Values

Survey respondents valued natural features the most, but they did not necessarily acknowledge the contribution of protected areas to these features. The majority of respondents agreed that the National Parks in the Northern Bruce Peninsula (NBP) play an important role in protecting the ecosystems, and that the presence of protected areas in the NBP did not restrict their rights as individuals.

Knowledge

General ecological knowledge was high, although the understanding of the historical context was low. Respondents stated that they desired one centralized source of information regarding protected areas and conservation efforts. They indicated as well that there is a low level of opportunity to be involved, if desired, in the management of protected areas on the NBP.

Economic

The economic foundations of the NBP are spread across a number of sectors; however, there was more support for non-extractive activities than extractive ones. There was strong support for balancing the needs of the community with the need to maintain the ecosystem health of the NBP. There was a consensus that a 'balance' is necessary between visitation, usage, and protection of area resources. Achieving this balance will require a basic understanding of the community development needs and integration of these needs with the requirements of the surrounding GPE for continued ecological health.

Political /Jurisdictional

Respondents stated that environmentally significant areas should be protected through strict enforcement of regulations. Respondents were concerned with infrastructure development within the National Parks boundaries. Some respondents wanted to see the park acquire more facilities while others wanted the park to maintain current facilities with no further development. Respondents also indicated a belief that more than one organization should be active in managing protected areas.

Significance

Every survey recipient received a copy of the numerical results by mail as well as an invitation to help interpret the meaning of the results. An explanation and park directives based on the study were developed in consultation with local residents,

community groups, and governmental organizations. In general, survey respondents stated that the National Parks in the NBP play an important role in protecting the ecosystems, and that the presence of protected areas in the NBP did not restrict their rights as individuals.

BPNP and FFNMP should continue to strengthen efforts to build awareness and understanding among park staff, permanent and seasonal residents, and large land-owners within the municipality of the ongoing conservation efforts within these areas as well as opportunities that exist for community involvement.

According to the survey results, respondents had little understanding of how decisions are made by protected area managers, and how they as a local citizen can become involved in the decision-making process for land use issues. The Park Advisory Committee is presently the main interface between the community and the park. The committee is comprised of a number of local interests, but does not necessarily represent the array of views held by residents of the municipality. Therefore, it is important for park managers to put into place additional venues for community input. Cooperative work with community members to further develop participation in the park decision making process, and to foster local understanding of the policies and mandates, which guide these processes, is of fundamental importance.

Element five of the Bruce/Fathom Five Ecosystem Conservation Plan states that “where possible the park should become pro-active in formally influencing decisions that transcend park boundaries in the GPE. This influence must be open and transparent to all public in particular stakeholders of the GPE. Furthermore it must be grounded in rigorous scientific knowledge, official park policy, legislation and effective public consultation” (Parks Canada Agency, 2001).

Over the next couple of years, Bruce/Fathom Five will be looking to acquire the views and opinions of all adult citizens of the municipality, in addition to those of the business sector, possibly through undertaking a ‘sense of place’ study. This study, along with the other planned human dimension program initiatives, will ultimately be incorporated into park management land use decisions.

As recommended in volume II of the Report of the Panel on the Ecological Integrity of Canada’s National Parks, and in the Bruce/Fathom Five Ecosystem Conservation Plan, Parks Canada should consider staffing a social scientist dedicated to the implementation of these actions, as well as, the other components of the HD program at BPNP.

Conclusion

The Conservation Land Use Awareness and Attitudes survey has enabled BPNP to design a preliminary action plan for improved communication and involvement

with the local community. This plan consists of four main components:

1. Inform the public of park activities
2. Strengthen relations with the public
3. Share information with the public
4. Educate park staff

These actions are of importance in creating stronger linkages with communities in the GPE and will thereby assist in achieving the greater goal of ensuring ecological integrity. Through cooperative measures, a mutual plan of action can be established for understanding where the 'balance' lies in the Northern Bruce Peninsula between protection and sustainable use of resources.

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