

## **Comments on Parks and Protected Areas Research with special reference to Tourism**

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Many of the presentations this morning touched on a number of common themes or issues. There is always a risk when asked as a panel member to comment on the nature of the discussions when often so many diverse ideas and concepts are introduced in a forum. Given this concern, I have decided to reflect on one important issue that I see as fundamental to many of our common interests related to research in parks and protected areas. This issue is partnership.

When addressing the issue of partnership we can begin by considering two key questions: "What is the need for partnerships" and "How can we develop partnerships?" Many of us in our work associated with parks and protected areas research in Ontario are actively involved in a wide range of types and formats of partnerships. In fact the meeting that we are all at today is the result of a partnership among organizations with a common interest in parks and protected areas research in Ontario. In terms of thinking about partnerships of the type that would assist in improving research in Ontario parks and protected areas I would like to use my remaining time to focus on three key issues: Science and Research, Ecosystem Planning, and Tourism Opportunities.

### **Science and Research**

As funding and other operational resources for parks and protected areas in the province of Ontario continue to shrink, the potential for wide spread utilization of partnerships is being considered. This is occurring in the context of organizational restructuring in many parks agencies, including Parks Canada and Ontario Parks. I think this provides an opportunity to develop models of linkages among universities, non-government and community organizations, the private sector, First Nations, and parks and protected areas to support, enhance and facilitate research.

The key question that needs to be examined is what does each partner bring to the table? Many parks and protected areas already assist and support research in a number of ways including the provision of in-kind support, staff assistance, sharing of information and existing databases, technical advice, use of equipment, accommodation, and other readily available assistance. Both Parks Canada and Ontario Parks have completed, or are currently developing, research catalogues that summarize ongoing research and current and future research needs. It may also be possible for park management agencies to join academic researchers in the development of research grant funding proposals to federal government programs such as the National Science and Engineering Research Council (NSERC) or private foundations.

With reduced funding available for research, parks and protected areas also need to consider improved community and volunteer involvement in science and

research in parks. There are already good examples including the many friends of parks organizations that assist with programs such as annual bird counts. As parks and protected areas begin to examine broader social science perspectives – for example historical and cultural resources – in the context of ecosystem planning and other initiatives, it will become increasingly important to consider partnerships among local citizens, First Nations and community groups.

### **Ecosystem Planning**

True ecosystem planning requires a new paradigm for park and protected area management. No longer is it possible to simply expand the existing ownership, regulatory and control planning model to include the natural features and processes that define the ecosystem to be managed. As parks and protected areas people begin to consider the need to examine the ecosystem they will be forced to fundamentally change their perspective on the management of resources, land uses, and natural systems that fall outside the park and outside of their direct control. This situation will force parks and protected areas to develop partnerships with landowners, government agencies, municipalities, non-government and community organizations, First Nations, and the private sector in order to effectively and efficiently implement ecosystem planning. The question is what is the best approach to undertake this task? How do the traditional governmental park and protected area organizations adapt their mandates, approaches, institutional philosophies and capacities to move to a more cooperative model for research? This will be a major challenge in itself and also in the context of declining funding for parks and protected areas in Ontario.

### **Tourism Opportunities**

The growing demand for and interest in tourism and visitor use in parks and protected areas in Ontario as outlined by Paul Eagles this morning clearly indicates the potential for tourism opportunities. Ultimately this growth may provide the best long-term chance to develop partnerships. Many parks have already begun to examine or undertake the use of private sector expertise in such park management activities as marketing, user profiles and customer service. However, the concern for park management is how many of these activities can be undertaken directly by park and protected area agencies and at what cost. Providing or supporting these services places increased pressure on limited and reduced operational resources. The need or interest in supporting tourism opportunities may take staff and funding support away from the conservation or protection mandates of many parks and protected areas. The planning and management of tourism provides an excellent opportunity to strengthen partnerships through the involvement of local communities and citizens in a wide range of tourism activities and services. These types of partnerships will also provide an additional benefit in the form of increased public awareness and appreciation of parks and protected areas as well as their values and roles in conservation and natural area protection.

In conclusion, the many changes occurring in the planning and management of Ontario's parks and protected areas provide opportunities and potential to consider a wider range of partnerships to assist and facilitate research. No longer do parks, government agencies, non-government organizations, universities and other interested parties or stakeholders have the resources or

support to undertake basic fundamental and applied research in parks and protected areas on their own. With the need for continued science and research, growing interest in undertaking ecosystem planning, and increasing tourism opportunities, partnerships are a means to more effectively and efficiently plan and manage parks and protected areas in Ontario.